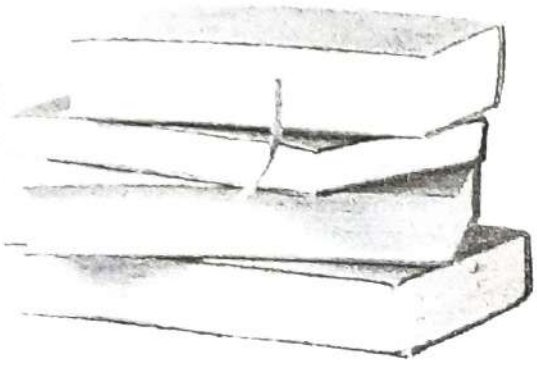
udies in Indian Place Names (SIPN)
with ISSN 2394-3114



An International Registered & Refereed Monthly Research Journal

Studies in Indian Place Names

UGC Approved Journal

UGC Care Journal

The Place Names Society of India

TPNS India

Title of Content

Studies in Indian Place Names
(UGC Care Journal)

ISSN: 2394 - 3114
Vol.40 Issue.86 March.2020

Teak and Forest Conservation Policy in India

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Abstract

Teak termed as the green gold was the main pillar that sustained the British Empire. The forest conservation policy through scientific forestry was mainly introduced to protect the teak forest of India rejecting all assertions that scientific forestry claims.

The main objective of forest conservancy in India was the protection and preservation of the timber wealth of the country especially of Teak. Teak the king of timbers was the most valued by the British from 18th c onwards. Teak was the main pillar that sustained the Empire. This was used to meet the voracious demands of the British admiralty for building boats and ships in the 19th c and construction of railways and military garrisons in the 20th c. With the depletion of Oak forests in England the British searched out for a timber that holds the quality of Oak which they ultimately found in teak. They found out the quality of teak with the help of their botanical science and their itinerant science helped them to find its quantity. With the help of their itinerant science they found that teak in the forest of Burma and India was ideally suited to cater to their needs. From then onwards the Empires attention turned towards the Indian forests. This paper seeks to explain the various means used by the Empire to explore the teak forest and the introduction of forest conservation policies in the country.

The first and the foremost means used to find out teak timbers was their itinerant science. They send enquiry commissions all over the world, consisting of natural scientists, surgeons, military officials, suveyors etc. (Lekha Pillai 2017) As a result a large number of travelogues and survey reports were published which provided them a plethora of information regarding the timber forests especially teakof India and Burma along with the its geography and other faunal and floral resources. Examples of such reports were Dr. Falconer's report on 'the teak forest of the Tenasserim Province', Brandis report on the teak forests of Pegu, Sir Olphant John hope's report on the teak forest on the Malabar Coast, Ward and Conners survey report on Travancore and Cochin State, Bourdillion's report on the forets of Travancore etc. All thses reports aimed at seeking the availability of teak timber in the respective regions and also the protection and conservation of the particular forests.

Commending on the report of Dr. Wallisch's on the forest of Salween Falconer says, " he ascended the river as far as the island of Koa-lung, about 40 miles distant from Moulmein, and within that range met with four Teak forests, two on the Burmese side of the river and two on its eastern bank. The first considerable forest he found near Miyang, which contained about 200 trees with boles having an average girth of 7 feet 11 inches, estimated upon a mean of 11 distinct measurements. A few miles higher up he came upon another forest on the island of Koa-lung, consisting almost entirely of Teak trees, which he estimated would yield 300 good logs. An average of 16 measurements gave a girth of about 7 feet 7 inches, and his people considered that the forest contained at least 2,000 trees of all ages."(Falconer,1852

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(95) Wallich also recommended that all teak forest should be reserved for public use.(Falconer,1852 p. 6)

"Dr. Herfer, in his reports dated the 10th September 1837 and the 23rd July 1838, refers briefly to the condition of the Salween and Attaran Teak forests. Without entering into details, he stated his opinion that the continuance of the existing system " would lead in a short time to the extermination of all the available Teak forests and he recommended the establishment of Teak plantations on an extensive scale" (Falconer,1852 ,p.7)

In June 1886 that Bourdillion was asked to prepare a report on the forests of the state, to mark and define the tracts that should be reserved in future and also to prepare a report on its resources very particularly the extent of the teak forests.According to him 50% of the total land area of Travancore was forest.The total area of Travancore was 7000 sq miles among which 3500 sq miles were forest.In 1802 Olephant John Hope, who later became the Commissioner of Cochin, was ordered to enquire into the availability of teak and other hardwood timber procurable on the Malabar Coast for the Bombay dockyard. (Olephant ,1802)He was directed to specify the tracts of those countries on the coast where timber and planks suitable for ship-building could be abundantly procured. His report read like this: "teak timber and planks fit for shipbuilding is most abundantly to be procured from the hills of Travancore and Cochin Countries."(Lekha Pillai,2017)

Teak and other timbers was used for ship building and other purposes from time immemorial.The earliest evidence of ships built with teak timbers in India was evident from the Indus Valley culture where pictures of boats were engraved on on seals, sealings, clay models and pottery. During the Harappan period, teak was exported to the Persian Gulf countries and the Mesopotamian texts set a high value for teak. (Tripathi,et.al,2016,p1262)Jane McIntosh in her book Ancient Indus Valley: New Perspectives, gives a description of Harappan ships and the wood used for its construction.(Mcintosh,2008,p.157)Although the model gives no indication of the materials from which such vessels would have been built, teak a preferred timber for shipbuilding, grows in Gujarat, where the Harappan seagoing ships would have been constructed, as does Thespesia Populnea (country teak) a wood used particularly for the keels of ship. It is likely that Harappan ships would have been built of those timbers, which were also among the Harappan exports to Mesopotamia where they were also destined for ship building. (Lekha Pillai,2017)

The first industry established by the British in the Indian Shores was the ship building industry. (Rodrigue,2012, p. 931.)The pioneer among the ship builders in India during the colonial period was the Wadia Master Builders of the Bombay Dockyard . They had built several hundred hulls of ships from 1736 onwards.(Walker,2010,p.38)They found Malabar teak to be the best for ship building which was evident from the statement of Sir Robert Stepping who noted that Malabar Teak was the most durable of ship buiding timbers. (Walker,2010,p.39) "One among the many treatises published in 18th and 19th centuries on the qualities of oak and teak wasthe 'Observations on the Expediency of Shipbuilding at Bombay', published by W. T. Money in 1811. Money has described that oak contains lignic

ISSN: 2394 – 3114
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acid, and when it comes in contact with iron, the rate of corrosion and decay of iron occurs faster and reduces the endurance of the ship. Iron was used extensively in construction of vessels because of cost effectiveness and easy availability. In case of teak, it abounds in oleaginous particles, which protect iron from corrosion by the actionof the acid. It is to be noted that Malabar teak is about one quarter less in weight than oak, neither splits, nor is dangerous like oak or with iron". (Tripati et.al, 2016, p 1266)

The supremacy of the British on the seas at that time depended largely on the number of ships they possessed and the accolade went to teak as a the primary ship building timber. It was understood that ships made with teak lasted long, up to 100 years or more, due to the presence of a resinous substance 'Technoquine', which repels marine borers and other insects. At the time when the EIC was in the country, the Britishers were not managing their forests scientifically at their home. The EIC too as such did not have a forest policy.(Sekhar,2015)During the early time of EIC, forests in the Madras Presidency were under the control of Revenue department, where as in the Malabar, they were owned, protected and managed by the Rajahs and temple devaswams. As Malabar teak teak was preferred for ship building. EIC acquired about 130 sq.km of forest area on lease in and around Nilambur from Tricaloor devaswam on a mortgage for Rs.8,000. From the Zamorin, the Rajah's extensive forest land was also rented. (Subbarayulu, 2014, p292)

Though teak was used from time immemmorial it was during the colonial times the wanton extraction of teak for various puposes started . It was the presteige of the British to sustain their Empire from the continental attacks and for that pupose they had to have strong navy. This would be fruitful only with the extraction of teak timber. After finding out the teak forests in India they started artificial regeneration of teak through plantations and to protect these plantations they started reservation and conservation of forests .In the words of RibbonTrop, "the main spring of the early forest conservation movement in India was the maintanance of certain species of timber especially teak and not the physical advantages derivable from forest conservancy". (Ribbentrop,1900, P.63)

The first attempt at forest conservancy was initiated by the order isuued by the Bombay Bengal joint Commission . to make regulation prohibiting the felling of teak below 21 inches of girth. This was followed by the appointment of a forest commission appointed by the Bombay government to make an enquiry into the availability teak forest in Malabar in the wake of acute shortage of ship building timber at the Bombay dockyard. (Ribbentrop, 1900, P.64) It also enquired the proprietary rights existing inthem. This enquiry led to the proclamation that royalty rights claimed by all former governments should now be vested with the company and all unauthgorised felling of teak by private individuals were prohibitted .The committee also stated that if protection is given these valuable forests can be built up.Thussteps was started for the initiation of forest policies in the country.(Stebbing,1922, p. 64)

The first step inthis direction happened in 1806when the teak forests of Malabar was reserved. (Guha,1893, P 1883)In the same year of captain Watson was appointment as the first consevator of the forests to ensure the supply of teak to the royal navy remained uninterrupted.(Patel, 2002,p.146) He was appointed jointly for the forests of Malabar and Travancore. Soon he succeeded in establishing a timber monopoly through out Travancore

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and Malabar. (Stebbing,1922, p. 64)In the words of T. Sekhar the first systematic attempt in exploting the timber, mainly teak from the forests of Madras Presidency was initiated with the appointment of Watson as the Conservator.The forest exploitation continued for half a century thereafter without a formal administrative arrangement.(Sekhar,2015, p.178) He cut down and appropriated to the use of the Company, not only the trees of the private forests, but even those growing on cultivated lands, paying revenue to Government, while the proprietor himself, unless expressly permitted by the Conservator, was prevented from cutting a piece of wood on his own property.The trade in timber was almost annihilated.(Sekhar,2015.p.178) This soon evoked discontent from timber merchants and due to their protest the conservator ship was abolished in 1823. (Stebbing,1922, p.65)

After the abolition of the conservatorship private proprietors again took over the control and timber exploitation of another magnitute happened. The alrming clearance of forests and its wanton destruction was brought to notice of the Bombay government by the Raja of Nilambur . The government referred it to the Navy board who strongly recommended the revival of conservatorship . The board transferred the matter to the Madras governmnet who inturn transferred it to their revenue board. But the revenue board took no action till they received a report from the resident of Travancore on the miserable condition of forests of that state. (Ribbentrop,1900, P.66) Travancore resident who acted as a representative of theBritish, detailing the existence of a good system of management for the preservation and perpetuation of teak forests belonging to the Rajah of Travancore, which suggested that, when ten trees were to be felled, two were left to seed and for each tree to be felled, 10 were to be planted.(Sekhar,2015) Similar reports destruction of forests were received from the state of Canara, Rajamundry etc. In the meanwhile Conolly the collector of Malabar had successfully established the teak plantation in Nilambur in 1842. (Ribbentrop,1900, P.66)After this in 1847 Dr. Gibbson was appointed as the conservator of forest. Then onwards series of measures were taken by the British government to protect and conserve the forests. The crucial watershed in the history of Indian Forestry was defenitely the construction of railways. (Guha, 1893,p.1883)The initial phase of the railway expansion witnessed large scale stabbing on Indian forests. The forets in the sub Himalayan region and in the North Westrn Provinces were depleted on a large scale for the pupose. Slowly the British realised that fact that Indian forests were not inexhaustible. This made them to think of briging the forest under systematic frame of administration which led to the creation of Forest Department in 1864.Later for its effective functioninhg legislations were enacted to curtail the rights of early users . Thus the First Forest Act was enacted in 1865 by which the state asserted the monololy right over the forests. Through the Second Forest Act of 1878 certain forest tracts were demarcated as reserved forests to meet the railway needs.(Guha, 1893,p. 1884)

In the following year the question of conservancy was raised in Madras Presidency. Captain F.C. Cotton, Civil Engineer of the 7th battalion pressed the need for taking steps towards conservancy of forests in Madras . In 1847, he asked for Lieut. Micheal as his assistant to explore the Anamalais and assess the availability of teak there. (Accounts and Papers of the House of Commons,1874,p.90)Cotton also reported the availability of large number of trees viz., 1,07,000 trees in the Cochin disputed territory, 28,000 trees in the Kollengode and

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about 61,700 trees in the Government territory. After an exploration, Michael reported the teak bearing possibility of the area and the details of operations to be carried out for felling and conversion of teak, formation of road, need for demarcation of the boundary between the forests under the Revenue department and the adjoining Kollengode private forests. Report also contained the number of teak trees available in Anamalais. (Sekhar,2015 p.25)Later in 1882 the Madras Forest Act was passed . According to the act the best quality forests were classified as reserved forest. These forests contained the most valuable timber and were deemed to be amenable to sustained exploitation by the colonial state. Reserved forests was totally under state control with no access to any one including the native people. (Kjosavik,et.al,2015 ,p.47)

After the forest act the forests in Madras Presidency like those of Anaimalai, Mudumallay, Seegur, Collegal and Bowvani sandal forests, Wynaad, Hunsur, Denkenikottah, Cumbum valley, portion of South Canara, Nelambur, Gumsur sal forest, Chenat Nair forest near Palghautete were leased to the Railway company all belonged to first class forests and were worked by the Forest Department itself ..(Sekhar,2015 p.32).The principal object of forest management in those years was to ensure a regular supply of fuel and sleepers to the South Indian Railway. For this purpose, several small plantations were raised in suitable localities that included the teak plantations of Mudumalai, Mount Stuart of Anamalai, and the Velacombai of Madura etc. (Sekhar,2015 p.57). Similar was the case with Travancore Forests.The First Forest Act in Travancore was declared in 1887.(Lekha Pillai,2017) All the forests resrved according to this act were all teak forests, eg. Konni, Malayatoor, Veli, Aryankavu, etc. Inside all these forests teak plantations were also established. Similarly numerous teak plantations were established in the forests of different parts of the country. For more efficient management of forest conseravancy in India, efficient officers with a scientific forestry became necessary. These officers should also be men of strong constitution, active habits and aptitude for work. For this the system of preparing candidates for forest service was started in 1867. Forest schools were established in every state for giving training to foresters for preparation for planting, formation of nurseries, opening pits for sowing teak, and other forest processes. (Accounts and Papers of the House of Commons, 1874, pp.97-99)Forest Exhibitons were conducted to popularise different species of timbers and other forest product in Europe. Sepearte working plans were raised for teak plantations. Special officers were appointed and special rules were also proclaimed to protect these plantations.From the above fact it is explicit that teak form the basis of forest legislations in India . When they realised the fact that teak forests of the country would be soon exhaust they turn to artificial rgeneration of teak. For getting an uninterrupted supply of teak timber, plantations were opened all over India , which inturn led the British to introduce forestry service in the name of scientific forestry.Scientific forestry with all its agency worked to get maximum timber from the forests for sustaning the world market. The scientific temperament which was backed up by Economic Botany and Forestry Sciences, comfortably labelled all their interventions as modernistic for making progress in the hills. But ultimately forest policies in India went in tune with market demand for timber, rejecting all assertions that scientific foresrtry claims.

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