



Time to view forest as a heritage

17 October 2022

India is not only famous for its **diverse architectural marvels and culture**, but also for its dense and vast **forest heritage**. According to the [State of India Forest Report 2021](#), the total forest cover of the country is **21.71% of the geographical area**.

But the rising demand for forest-based products and resultant **climate change, deforestation and encroachment** has caused severe loss to this valuable asset. According to NITI Aayog, around **13 million hectares of forests** are being lost every year.

Therefore, it is the need of the hour to understand that **forest sustainability is not an option but imperative**.

What is the Significance of Forests?

- **One-third of the land on Earth** is covered by forests, which play a vital role in maintaining the **hydrological cycle, regulating climate, and preserving biodiversity**.
- Forests are also important for **poverty alleviation**. Forests provide more than **86 million green jobs**. Everyone on the planet has had some form of contact with forests.
- They are also the **homes of India's submerged humanity—the tribals**. They are ecologically and economically a **part and parcel of the forest environment**.
- Forests provide **raw materials for a number of industries**, viz. **silk worm rearing**, toy making, leaf plate making, plywood, paper and pulp etc.
- They also provide **major and minor forest produce**:
 - Major such as **timber, round wood, pulp-wood, charcoal** and fire-wood
 - Minor produce like **bamboo, spices, edible fruits and vegetables**.

What are the Constitutional Provisions Regarding Forest?

- **Forests** are included in the **Concurrent List in the (Seventh Schedule)** of the **Constitution of India**.
 - Through the [42nd Amendment Act, 1976](#) forests and protection of Wild Animals and Birds **were transferred from State to Concurrent List**.
- **Article 51 A (g)** of the Constitution states that it shall be the **fundamental duty** of every citizen to **protect and improve the natural environment** including **forests** and Wildlife.
- **Article 48 A** in the [Directive Principles of State Policy](#), mandates that the State shall endeavour to protect and improve the environment and to **safeguard the forests and wildlife** of the country

What are the Government Initiatives for Forest Conservation?

- [Forest Conservation Act, 1980](#)
- **National Afforestation Programme**
- [Environment Protection Act of 1986](#)

- [Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers \(Recognition of Forest Rights\) Act, 2006](#)

What are the Challenges Related to Forest Management in India?

- **Inadequate Forest Cover:** According to **National Forest Policy of India**, the ideal percentage of total geographical area under forest **should be at least 33%** to maintain ecological stability.
 - But currently it covers only **21.71% of the country's geographical area** and is dwindling day by day.
- **Unregulated Grazing:** India possesses a [livestock](#) population of over **412 million of which 270 million are bovine animals**, about **one-tenth of which graze in the forests**.
 - Due to **lack of strict grazing regulatory framework**, overgrazing in many parts of India is observed **causing serious damage to forests**.
- **Menace of Climate Change:** Climate change alters the **frequency and intensity of forest disturbances** such as **insect outbreaks, invasive species, [wildfires](#), and storms**. These disturbances **reduce forest productivity and change the distribution of tree species**.
 - By **2030, 45-64% of forests in India will experience the effects of climate change** and rising temperatures.
 - **Many forest species in Himalayan region are already migrating to higher altitudes** and some species are **even facing extinction**.
 - The [Bramble Cay melomys](#) is the first mammal reported to have gone **extinct** as a direct result of climate change.
- **Low Productivity:** The **gap between consumption and production of timber and wood-based products in India** is rapidly increasing. Against the global average productivity of **2.1 m³/hectare/ year**, the productivity of **Indian Forest** is only **0.7 m³/hectare/ year**.
 - **Loopholes in regulation of Forest Development Corporations** is a major factor of low productivity as well as there is a considerable section of **north eastern forest in India which remain unexplored and can be potential medicinal hubs**.
- **Injustice with Tribes:** The **tribal communities, the hallmark of Indian civilization, are based on forest areas for their survival**. Although they live in isolation in forest areas, they are having harmonious relationships with forests and species.
 - But the **continuous deforestation, development of national parks and wildlife sanctuaries and eco-parks** are negatively impacting their habitat and displace their living **leaving them with mental health issues**.
 - In 2014, around **450 families from indigenous Baiga and [Gond](#) communities** were evicted to protect tigers in the [Kanha Tiger Reserve](#).
 - In 2017, in Assam, **more than 1,000 people from Bodo, Rabha and Mishing tribal communities** were **forcefully evicted** from the [Orang National Park](#).

What Should be the Way Forward?

- **Dedicated Forest Corridor:** **Dedicated Forest corridors** can be maintained for **safe intrastate and interstate passage of wild animals** and protecting their habitat from any external influence, giving a message of **peaceful-co existence**.

- **Resource Mapping and Forest Optimisation:** Potential resource mapping can be done in unexplored forest areas, and they can be brought under **scientific management and sustainable resource extraction** maintaining density and forest health.
- **Viewing Tribals as Forest Entrepreneurs:** There is a need to revitalise **Forest Development Corporations (FDCS)** to **structure commercialization of forests and engage tribal communities** as “Forest Entrepreneurs” In exploration, extraction, and enhancement of forest-based products.
- **Forest Waste to Forest Wealth: Technology** can be utilised for **reduction and recycling of waste**. Large quantities of inferior wood that is dumped in forests as a waste can be put to better use through seasoning and preservation treatment.
 - Also, **standards and codes can be promoted for wood products.**
- **Comprehensive Forest Management:** Forest conservation should include all components of protection and sustainable management of forests such as, **forest fire control measures, timely survey, tribal-dedicated policies, reducing man-animal conflicts** and sustainable wildlife health measures.
- **Towards Nature Based Solutions:** Nature-based solutions such as blue-green infrastructure, (green roofs, rain gardens, or constructed wetlands) can minimise the impacts of climate change by capturing CO₂ from the air and sequestering it in plants, soils, and sediments.
 - It can also allow forests to regrow and restore wetlands.

Source: <https://www.drishtiias.com/daily-updates/daily-news-editorials/time-to-view-forest-as-a-heritage>