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COMMERCIALISATION OF FOREST RESOURCES: AN EMERGING ISSUE IN ARUNACHAL PRADESH

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ABSTRACT

Arunachal Pradesh is one of the economically backward states in India. It is situated in the eastern most part of the country. It is a tribal dominated state and the tribal people largely depend on forest resources for their livelihood and survival. Nature has bestowed the state with abundance of natural resources including forest. The state is rich in natural assets like barren land, thick forest, abundance of water, flora and fauna, etc. The tribal community uses forest resources not only for agriculture but also to meet their domestic and ritualistic consumptions. However, the agricultural practice or for that matter, the consumption of the forest resources by the indigenous tribal people in the state is minimum and restricted to subsistence level only. They used mostly the forest resources for their survival rather than for commercial purposes. However, during the last two decades, the consumption or use of different forest or natural resources shifted from subsistence level to commercial level due to the intervention of state sponsored developmental activities and penetration of market system in the tribal society. In the process the various forest resources that were preserved and kept unnoticed comes to limelight and became commercially important and a source of income for many indigenous people. Hence, there is growing commercial interest in these natural or forest assets among the tribal people that have significant impact on their economic condition. Under the above background the present paper attempts to examine the availability of forest resources, nature and extend of interventions in exploiting the forest resources in terms of commercial use and consumption and its economic impact on the lives of indigenous people of the state.

KEYWORDS

commercial use, development activity, economic value, forest resources, intervention, indigenous people, Tribes.

INTRODUCTION

Forest resources are the source of survival of human being from the time immemorial. Since the early dawn of human civilisation, human being has been depending upon forest resources mostly for their physical consumption. Forest provides timber & foods for humans, food & shelter for flora and fauna and helps in maintaining proper nutrient cycle and ecosystem. Infact, the forest resources helps in sustaining lives or promoting welfares of human civilization. Arunachal Pradesh is one of the economically backward states in India. Nature has bestowed the state with abundance of natural resources including forest, water, flora and fauna, sunlight, variety of stones etc. The diversity of topographical and climatic condition has favoured the growth of luxuriant forests, which are home to myriad plant and animal forms, adding beauty to the landscape. Living in this incredible cradle of nature are the colourful and vibrant tribes of Arunachal Pradesh for whom the forests and wildlife are of special significance. Livelihoods of local people have been closely linked and heavily dependent on forest resources since time immemorial. Forest resources plays a vital role as large sections of tribal population of the state totally depends on it for their livelihood and survival. The tribal community of this state has been using forest resources not only for agriculture but also to meet their domestic and ritualistic requirements. Earlier, the local populace of Arunachal Pradesh used forest resources and its products only to meet their subsistence needs. However, with increasing population, development activities, large number of wood-based industries and unsustainable land use practices like jhuming, the pressure on forest resources is consistently increasing leading to their degradation affecting regeneration and productivity. Moreover, the last two decades witnessed phenomenal rises in the intervention of state sponsored developmental activities and penetration of market system in the tribal society that leads to the massive commercialisation of these forest resources by the local people. There is a colossal shift in uses of forest resources from subsistence to commercialization during this period. In the process, the various forest resources that were preserved and kept unnoticed comes to limelight and became commercially important and a perennial source of income for many indigenous people across the state.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The main objective of the present study is:

1. To highlight the status of forest resources in Arunachal Pradesh.
2. To examine the nature and extend of commercial use of forest resources in the state.
3. To study the impact of commercial use of forest resources in the lives of indigenous people.

STATUS OF FOREST RESOURCES AND ITS USES IN ARUNACHAL PRADESH

As already pointed out, Arunachal Pradesh is a gifted garden of biodiversity famous not only in India but also around the globe. The State Forest Report of Forest Survey of India estimated that about 82% of total geographical area of 83,740 sq. km is under forest cover. The important forests types found in the state are Tropical evergreen, semi evergreen, deciduous, Pine, Temperate, Alpine and grassland etc. These forests and its resources are the mainstay for the tribal people of the state and is the richest bio-geographical province in eastern Himalayan zone. The State has 20 percent species of country's fauna, 4500 species of flowering plants, 400 species of pteridophytes, 23 species of conifers, 35 species of bamboos, 20 species of canes, 52 Rhododendron species & more than 500 species of orchids and around 450 medicinal plants. Moreover, it is considered as one of the 12th mega diversity "Hot Spots" in the world. The forest resources and its various products has been presented in Table-A.

TABLE A: FOREST RESOURCES OF ARUNACHAL PRADESH

FLORA					FAUNA			LAND
Vegetable	Vegetation	Medicinal plants	Fruits	Roots	Animals	Birds	Fish	
Oyik	Tree	Mishmi Teeta	Buri	Ingin	Bear	Dove	Different type of fish	Land, Soil, Sand, Sand gravels, Boulders
Rare	Bamboo	Panax	Boglok		Monkey	Wild cock		
Papuk	Cane	Revoultic	Jackfruit		Dear	Pigeon		
Osik oyik	Wild banana		Hichir		Mongoose			
Onyor	Thatch				Squirrel\			
Taka	Leaves plate							
Akshap	Tase							
Oiik	Flower Broom							
Mushroom	Orchids							

Source: Compiled from field observation

Indeed, Arunachal Pradesh is very rich in forest resources in the form of flora, fauna and land. In terms of flora, it has wide ranges of vegetation, vegetables, medicinal plants (Mishmi Teeta), fruits, roots etc. Bamboo, cane, wild banana, thatch, leaves plate, *Tase*, mushroom, flower broom, orchids, wide ranges of vegetables like *Oyik*, *Rare*, *Papuk*, *Osik*, *Oyik*, *Onyor*, *Taka*, *Akshap*, *Oiik*, wide range of fruits like *Buri*, *Boglok*, Jackfruit, *Hichir* and *Ingin* (roots) are some of the floral species and its products (Table-A). The state is rich in faunal resources like varieties of animals, birds and fishes. Animal comprises of bear, monkey, deer, mongoose, squirrel, dove, wild cock & pigeon, fish includes *Ngopi*, *Ngobi*, *Tingir*, *Take* and other aquatic animals etc. Moreover, there are ample of other forest resources available throughout the state like variety of soil, grassland, sand, gravels & pebbles and boulders etc (Table-A). Undoubtedly, Arunachal Pradesh is storehouse of many precious and rare forest resources- flora, fauna and land respectively. These resources are used for domestic consumption fulfilling physical, ritualistic, cultural and agricultural requirements of the indigenous population of the state from time immemorial. Every activity of the tribal people is associated with the forest and its products. May it be a cultivation of field, construction of dwelling house, cultural activities like festival, rituals, marriages and organising public feast, etc. Hence, forest and its resources have universal application and utility in the lives of tribal people or a society.

TRANSITION IN THE USAGE OF FOREST RESOURCES FROM SUBSISTENCE TO COMMERCIAL

Recently, a great transition has been observed in the use and ownership of forest resources in the tribal society of the state. There has been colossal shift from subsistence level of consumption to commercial use of these resources. The various natural gifts or resources in the form of land, water, forest, flora and fauna, etc has been exploited, used or consumed in a commercial way due to the intervention of developmental activities of state and central government. Different publicity, awareness program and propagandas under aegis of NGOs and private sector are also responsible for the growing commercial interests among tribal population in forest resources and thereby, initiates paradigm shift in usages of forest resources from domestic to commercial. Moreover, commercialization of these resources is also because of growing awareness of market economy and its system among local tribes of the state. The price system of the monetary economy has reached to the doorsteps of the tribal village. The value of the various forest resources are measured in terms of money. Because of the urbanisation and rapid rises in urban population along with sharp market demands, vegetables which were used for domestic consumption like *Oyik*, *Rare*, *Papuk*, *Osik oyik*, *Onyor*, *Taka*, *Akshap*, and *Oiik* are sold in local markets with various ranges of prices in accordance with size and its quality as presented in Table B, C and D respectively. With the growing and widening of market system, the varieties of woods, bamboo & its products, cane & its products, thatch, leaves plate, *tase*, wild mushrooms, flower broom and spectacular orchids have high demand in local as well as markets of nearby states like Assam in recent times. In addition, variety of medicinal plants that constituted traditional therapeutical system of tribesman of the state has assumed commercial importance of which *Mishmi Teeta* is very much popular. As a result, the state has been experiencing growing commercial interests on forest resources among indigenous population.

TABLE B: ECONOMIC VALUE OF FOREST RESOURCES (FLORA)

Category	Resources	Value (in Rs)
1. Vegetable	Oyik, Rare, Papuk, Osik oyik, Onyor, Taka, Akshap, Oiik, Ogiik, Oyin, Bamboo shoot, Tase, etc. Mushroom	Rs. 10/- Per bundle Rs. 200/- per kg.
2. Vegetation	a. Tree b. Bamboo c. Cane d. Taek e. Leaves plate (oko) f. Flower Broom	Rs. 350 per cft. Rs. 30/- per piece ¹ Rs. 20 per piece Rs. 20 per piece Rs. 2 per piece Rs. 15 per kg ²
3. Fruits	a. Buri b. Boglok c. Jackfruit d. Hichir	Rs. 20 per kg Rs. 20 per kg Rs. 20 per fruit Rs. 50 per kg
4. Root	a. yam (Ingin) b. Arum	Rs. 50 per kg Rs. 50 per kg

Source: Local market Doimukh/ Nirjuli, Papum Pare district, AP.

Local fruits and plant roots which have been indelibly attached with taste buds of various communities of this state which were consumed at domestic level happened to be sold at various local markets due to penetration of market system. *Buri*, *Boglok*, *Jackfruit*, *Hichir* and *yam (Ingin)* and *arum (enyi)* are some of the popular local fruits and plant roots which have started flooding local markets in the state and become highly demanded products. Hunting and fishing are very common among various tribes of the state. It is done for either domestic consumption or for social or cultural practices like community hunting on the eve of or during festivals. However, in recent times hunting of bear, monkey, deer, mongoose, squirrel, dove, wild cock, pigeon and fishing of varieties of fishes are more often done for commercial reasons than domestic purposes. Hunted wild animals and birds are of intense demand in the local market of the state. The cultural symbol of the various tribes of the state, the Mithun (*Bos frontalis*), a semi-wild animal becomes the most favoured animal for commercial consumption (Table-C). The growing urbanisation and market economy may be attributed to the present state of affairs. In some cases, some high profile people like politicians, top bureaucrats and businessmen gives away a gun to hunter in consideration of a whole deer. However, due to government interventions in the form of various Acts and mandates, hunting and fishing activities are restricted to considerable level.

TABLE C: ECONOMIC VALUE OF FOREST RESOURCES (FAUNA)

Category	Resources	Average Value (in Rs)
1. Animals	a. Mithun b. Bear c. Monkey d. Deer e. Mongoose f. Squirrel g. Porcupine	Rs. 250 per kg or Rs. 40,000 per mithun. Rs. 200 per kg or Rs. 5000 per bear. Rs. 200 per kg or Rs. 2000 per monkey. Rs. 400 per kg or Rs. 5000 per deer Rs. 100 per head Rs. 100 per head Rs. 2000 per head
2. Birds	a. Dove b. Wild cock c. Pigeon d. Pirik	Rs. 50 per head Rs. 150 per kg Rs. 80 per head Rs. 150 per kg.
3. Fish	Tingir, Ngopi, Yircho, Ngobi, Orpe, etc	Rs. 250 per kg.

Source: Local market Doimukh/ Nirjuli, Papum Pare district, AP.

Fascinatingly, on realising the abundance of forest resources and rising market economy in the state, local people have even ventured out to sell soils, sand, sand gravels & pebbles and boulders to needy people in and outside the state. Few years back there was no system of selling these resources due to the fact that the community ownership prevails in the tribal society. It was considered an offence if any individual found selling the community property. However, the penetration of market system and growing importance of monetary economy intensified the commercialisation of these resources among the tribal people. Moreover, the state interventions in the form of developmental activities like construction of road, bridges, railways, big dams, industrial parks, urbanisation and other infrastructures, etc have ushered market economy and monetary system in the tribal society and thereby increased commercialisation of these forest

resources (Table-D). The high profile trading and commercialisation of water resources in the form of hydro-electric power project also cannot be overruled in this respect.

TABLE D: ECONOMIC VALUE OF FOREST RESOURCES (LAND)

Category	Measures	Average Value (in Rs)
1. Land	Bigha or Metre sq.	Rs. 80,000 per bigha in rural areas or Rs. 1200 per sq metres in urban centres ³ .
2. Sand	Per truck	Rs. 800/-
3. Stone chips 10 mm	Per truck	Rs. 2400/-
4. Sand gravels	Per truck	Rs. 200/-
5. Boulders	Per truck	Rs. 900/-
6. stone chips (processed)	Per truck	Rs. 8000/-

Source: Local market Doimukh/ Nirjuli, Papum Pare district, AP.

It is reflected from the Table B, C and D that there is handsome price for the various forest resources that leads to the commercial interest on these resources among the people in the state. The state is one of the store houses of hydropower resources in India. It is estimated that the state has a capacity to produce around 70,000 MW hydropower by its water resources. So far, the state government has signed a contract for around 40,000 MW to different companies at the price as shown in Table-E.

TABLE E: ECONOMIC VALUE OF FOREST RESOURCES (WATER)

Category	Measures	Average Value (in Rs)
1. Upto 215	MW	Rs. 1,00,000/- per MW
2. 216 and above	MW	Rs. 5,00,00/- per MW

Source: Liaison Officer, private power developer, Naharlagun, AP.

CAUSES OF TRANSITION

There are numerous reasons for the transition in the use of forest resources and its product from subsistence to commercial level. The Developmental policies drastically altered the relationship of tribal people with natural environment and its resources. Following are the prominent causes that lead to increase commercial interest on forest resources in Arunachal Pradesh.

1. DEVELOPMENTAL ACTIVITIES

It is utmost requirement of any nation or a state to take forward the developmental activities for its citizen. It has been observed that the central and state government have launched different developmental activities in Arunachal Pradesh during the last ten years or so to bring the tribal people to societal mainstream. The expansion of administrative centres like creation of new district, divisions, circles and construction of road, bridges, infrastructures, in remote areas of the state has brought the rural society and its resources to the limelight of the outsiders. The implementation of centrally sponsored schemes for rural development, the construction of dams, railway line, highways, etc. have enhanced the exploitation of forest resources thereby altering the tribal life. As a result the pattern and method of ownership and usage of the forest resources have changed and these resources become saleable private property.

2. PENETRATION OF MARKET ECONOMY

The traditional barter system has been replaced by modern market economy in the tribal society. The developmental activities brought every activities of the market economy in the value based or traditional based economy of the tribal society. It is the fact that every resource is measured in terms of money in market economy. The value system and social ownership of forest resources in the tribal society have been diluted by monetary economy. The forest resources that were considered as gift of nature and under the community ownership become the saleable property and a source of income for few individuals. It has also been observed that the market economy has changed not only the economic system but also the social system of the tribal society. The feeling of community or collective responsibility and system of exchange in social activities has been slowly disappearing in some way or other in tribal society. The bondage of relationship through social attitude and value system has greatly been affected by the market system through demand and supply. The various cultural practices of the indigenous tribal people like festivals, ornaments, sports, dance, etc become the saleable products and a source of income through the so called 'tourism'.

3. INCREASING MIDDLE CLASS PEOPLE

The developmental activities have also brought many employment opportunities in the government or private sectors thereby increasing the earning capacity of the people. The monetary economy has reached to the door step of the remote tribal society. It has been observed that one family out of every three tribal family has a person who is employed in government sector and earning handsome income. There is also rise in business opportunities in the rural areas due to the developmental activities. Moreover, the private sectors have also brought many employment opportunities and thereby increase the number of earning population. As a result there is constant flow of monetary resources in the tribal society thereby increasing the purchasing power of the people.

4. CHANGE OF LIFESTYLE

Many changes have been observed in the life style of the tribal people in Arunachal Pradesh in recent time. These changes may be attributed due to the impact of the developmental activities, penetration of monetary system and the practices of the people of mainstream economy. The consumption pattern, standard of living and other way of life have changed due to the advancement of science and technology and modernity. The people are more interested in purchasing the items from market than to cultivate or collect them. The changes have been observed in socio-economic and political life of the tribal people. There is a shift from socio-cultural value system to economic and market system in which economic value is given more importance than social value of an activities. As a result the relationship of the tribal people with their forest resources has also been altered.

5. INCREASING FLOW OF MONETARY RESOURCES

There has been substantial increase in the flow of monetary resources in the tribal society. The flow of monetary resources may be due to government job, developmental activities, business activity, local politics and windfall gains like compensation, etc. The developmental activities and the market system have brought classification in the tribal society into rich and poor or haves and have not. The feature of capitalist economy is observed in the state recently. The rich people who can manipulate resources become richer and richer and the poor people remain as poorer. However, these rich people become the source of income and livelihood for poor people in term of purchase of their commodity and services.

IMPACT ON ECONOMIC STATUS OF LOCAL PEOPLE IN THE STATE

Owing to intensive commercialization of myriad of forest resources, economic standings of many indigenous tribal families are on rise in the state. The commercialisation of wide ranges of floral resources in the form of vegetables, trees, medicinal plants, fruits, roots, etc at flourishing prices (Table-B) and faunal resources like animals, birds and fishes (Table-D) has immensely help the economic condition of the people. These resources are found to have sold at a very profitable price in the local market of various district, circles and sub-divisional headquarters. Moreover, the economic status of local merchants dealing sand, gravels & pebbles and boulders etc are exceedingly sound as their market extend to outside of the state with central organisation like BRO, Gammon, etc with high prices (Table-D). Most of them have *Pucca* residence to live in, motor vehicles of their own to drive, children pursuing studies at private schools or off the state, good accumulated saving at banks and better recognition in society. Of course, they are in receipt of even better medical facilities and amenities of life. The impact of the commercialisation of forest resources on the socio-economic lives of indigenous people are discussed in the following pages.

1. ECONOMIC LIFE

There is noticeable impact of commercialisation of forest resources on the economic life of the tribal people in the state. There is increased avenues for earning and self employment especially among the women folk and thereby enhanced the income of the household. The penetration of the market economy has brought changes in the ownership system of the resources and paved way for marketability of these resources. As such many tribal household attained self

sufficiency in their economic life. Many of them have well established business in these resources. The timber business and supply of sand, pebbles and boulders to the big construction companies in private or government sector becomes highly preferred and profitable economic venture in recent time. As such, the penetration of market economy due to the intervention of state sponsored developmental activities has created ample opportunities for commercial activities in relation to the forest resources thereby increasing the employment and earning capacity of the indigenous tribal people of the state. As such, the various modern amenities like health care facility, education and other facilities are at the reach of tribal people. However, there is also a challenge from social and cultural front.

2. SOCIAL LIFE

There is inverse relationship between economic and social life of the people. The economic men emphasize more on skill and social men on value and attitude. The economic condition of a person plays an important role in determining social and value system of a person. Due to the introduction of market economy every piece of assets or resources and even activities becomes saleable property and measures in term of money in the state of Arunachal Pradesh. Hence, the people become an economic man that measures every resources and activities in term of monetary value. There is also an adverse affect on social value system and relationship. The traditional or cultural based economy gives more importance on relationship, attitude and character of the individual or an institution whereas the market economy rely more on benefit, profitability and performances. In fact, the tribal society is built on cultural ethos, social relationship and value system. The monetary economy has no place in the domain of tribal society. Hence, the upcoming of rapid commercialisation of forest resources under market economy posed great challenges to the tribal society of the state. Furthermore, developmental projects have seen large scale immigration of people from outside, in search of employment, thus distorting demography of the tribal society that may lead to conflict and destruction of tribal lifestyle.

IMPACT OF COMMERCIALIZATION OF FOREST RESOURCES ON ENVIRONMENT

The conservation of forest resources is of great importance for every country in the world today and it is a global issue for discussion in international level. In recent years, the depletion of forest resources has become a major concern for governments and organizations such as the United Nations (UN). Depletion of forest resources is of great concern for sustainable development as it has the ability to degrade current environments and potential to impact the needs of future generations. Due to the massive and unprotected commercialization of forest resources many valuable forest resources of the state are getting depleted every movement. Precious animals and plants species like wild cat, deer, elephant, tiger, bear, cane, bamboo, variety of timber trees etc are marketed illegally leading to even extinction of some endangered and rare flora and fauna. Rapid commercialization of these resources results in the loss of even natural habitat of different species and ecosystem throughout the state. Due to huge exploitation of forest resources in the state, rapid rises in temperature, decreases in rainfall and frequent cases of soil erosion have been evident in recent times. So, there is growing needs to create awareness among local populace of the state on sustainability of forest tree, bamboo, cane, vegetable, land, sand and gravels, etc so that present as well future generations equally takes benefits of valuable and precious forest resources. In doing so, general masses of the state should be made well acquainted with different legal acts and frameworks related to wild life and forest and also cost of not being abiding by these laws (penalties & fines). The impact on physical environment or forest resources are summarised below:

1. DEPLETION OF FOREST RESOURCES

There is a danger of depletion of forest resources. The massive exploitation of forest resources like flora, fauna and land due to the construction of roads, highways, dams, bridges, etc lead to the exhaustion of these resources. Recently, the land resources especially the boulders in the foothill region of the state are being exported to the neighbouring state for the construction roads and bridges. Moreover, the regular supply of logs, bamboo and its shoots, cane, vegetable, land products like sand, sand gravels, boulders, etc to the market add fuel to the issue. As a result there is possibility of extinction of many trees, grass, etc. in the forest of the state and the indigenous common people will not even get these resources for their domestic use or consumption.

2. EXTINCTION OF MANY FAUNAL RESOURCES

The hunting of wild animal and its sale in the local market is regular feature in the state recently. The wild cock, birds, deer, bear, boar, squirrel, etc and their skin and meat are highly demanded in the market. The fact that such activity is undertaken not only in domestic market but also as border trade to Tibet has been identified recently. The new cross border trade items called 'caterpillar fungus' has been identified in Mechuka region of the state, recently.

3. SOIL EROSION AND LAND SLIDES

The unprecedented problem of soil erosion and land slide during the rainy season in the state of Arunachal Pradesh may be attributed to the impact of commercial interest on land. The land becomes saleable property though there is no official recognition to it so far. The commercialisation of land near the road or urban centres and their exploitation leads to land slide. Moreover, the commercialisation of sands, sand gravels and boulders in the river beds causes soil erosion and loss of fertile land.

4. DANGER TO THE BIODIVERSITY RESOURCES

The massive exploitation and commercialisation of forest resources results in the loss of natural habitat and ecosystem that leads to the complete destruction of biodiversity in the state or region. There will be a loss of endangered species of flora and fauna and other microorganism that need for sustenance of biodiversity resources.

5. GLOBAL WARMING

The massive exploitation of forest and its resources leads to the rising of temperature of the earth. The constant use of the forest and its resources without sustainability leads to the reduction of this resource and thereby reducing the amount of oxygen and rainfall that ultimately affect human life.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

A state's forest resources determine its wealth, economic status and social prosperity and Arunachal Pradesh- the tribal state is not exception to this. State still to great extend depend on her vast forest resources which gives testimony of being underdevelopment as developed states have greater reliance on infrastructural capital for production. Indeed, Arunachal Pradesh has abundance of forest resources in the form animals, plants, trees, water, vegetable & fruits. She is also known for her vast amount of land resources like sand, sand gravels and boulders having strategic economic significance. Since time immemorial, tribal people of the state have been using these resources for only domestic consumption especially during festival, marriage, rituals and other socio-cultural ceremonies. However, in last few years the state has been experiencing tremendous changes from subsistence to commercial use of the forest resources among tribal people throughout the state. So, different forest based products ranging from hunted wild animals to wild medicinal plants have become regular feature of local markets. In recent times, these forest products which are known to have consumed at subsistence level are making entry into markets in a big way. However, it has also beefed up alarm to government in one side and increased socio-economic status of local merchants in other side. Thus, the growing commercial interest in these natural or forest assets among the tribal people have provided economic opportunity but environment and social challenges.

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SHORT SUCCINCT NOTES

¹ Local bamboo is sold at Rs. 100 per piece. Sliced bamboo is Rs. 35 per piece.

² Rs. 50 per processed bunch.

³ The project like Trans Himalaya highway, hydro power project and Railways pay compensation @ Rs. 4000/- , Rs. 3500/- and Rs. 4300/- per sq. Meter.

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