

5. **CURRENT DEVELOPMENTS IN THE WESTERN
GHAT FORESTS OF KARNATAKA**

Growth of population in two Western Ghat districts, since 1901 is noted below:

Year	Uttara Kannada District	Shimonga District
1901	454,000	532,000
1911	431,000	517,000
1921	402,000	493,000
1931	418,000	520,000
1941	441,000	551,000
1951	518,000	663,000
1961	690,000	1,017,000
1971	849,000	1,301,000
1981	1,071,000	1,658,000

(Nadkarni 1989)

These figures show that the population in the Western Ghat belt was stable between 1901 and 1941, and in the next four decades it has increased by over 250 per cent.

Coupled with increases in human and cattle populations community privilege areas were drastically reduced through land grants, by the Revenue Department, for extension of agriculture. What is left is badly degraded and the dependencies on firewood as fuel and public land for grazing have not changed. This has resulted in most of the needs of the rural population for grazing and firewood now being met from reserve forests.

According to Nadkarni (1989), over 78% of fuelwood used in households in Uttara Kannada District is now obtained from reserve forests. In the case of grass, it is 69%, and mulch and manure it is close to 55%.

Forests account for nearly 15.5% of income and "the contribution of forests to the local economy can be said to be much more than what is indicated by the proportion of the imputed value of forest extraction to the local income because dependence on forests for leaf manure and fodder particularly is still the main source of sustenance of the local economy".

Nadkarni's study has however not included the value of benefits secured by the people from herbs used as medicine, wild fruits such as mango and jack fruit, vegetable butter from species like Vateria indica, souring items in culinary use like fruits of Garcinia indica, G.xanthochymus and Artocarpus lakoocha. Fruit yielding trees are the last to be eliminated by the villagers in degraded reserve forests and community privilege areas (Shyam Sunder 1989).

Therefore in the rural areas of the Western Ghat belt, there is now heavy dependence of the people on the Reserve Forests and if these forests go the way of forests in the community areas, it will not merely be an ecological and environmental disaster, but an economic crisis for the local populations.

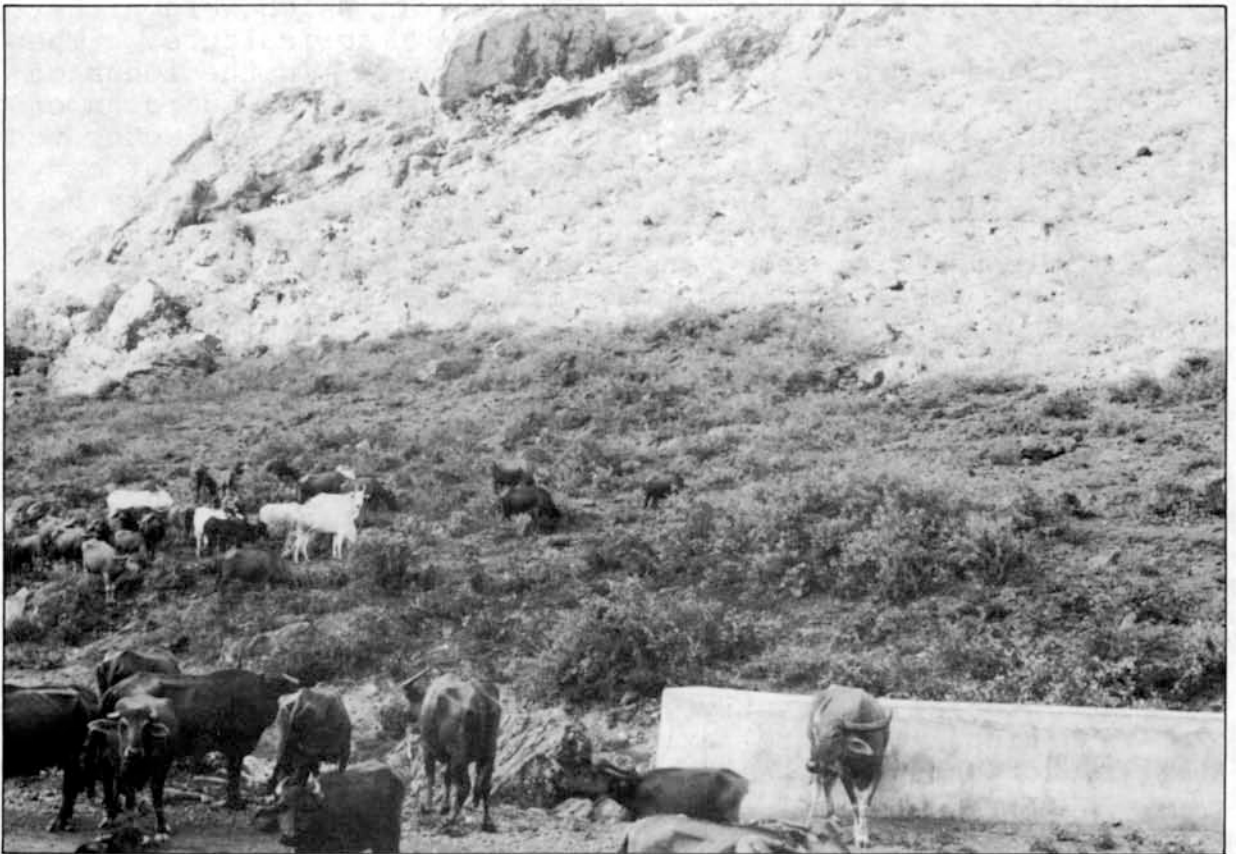
The economic importance of these forests at the State and National levels is equally significant. If we exclude the Evergreen and Semi-Evergreen forests and consider only 75% of the Moist Deciduous forests for timber extraction, with some tending and attention, an annual increment of 5M³ per hectare in perpetuity is harvestable. The forests are rich in teak, rosewood and other commercially valuable hardwoods. The timber, at current prices, should fetch on an average Rs7,000 per M³ (USD 233), producing a return to the State of Rs15,172.50 million (USD 500 million) per annum. Moreover, timber as a commodity cannot be dispensed with. In this computation of commercial value, bamboo, firewood and minor forest produce items are left for use by the people of the region, and therefore excluded from the commercial calculations.

Since the late 1970s and through the 1980s aid projects in the forestry sector in India were mostly limited to Social Forestry (SF). These programmes were aimed at rehabilitating denuded community privilege areas and waste lands in the private sector, which were either fallow or under unsustainable agriculture. The programmes required a complete shift in the focus of action by the forester. In lieu of being the guardian of public property, he had to function as a benefactor to the rural people, and help raise trees. In spite of many criticisms, some well intentioned, social forestry has been a remarkable success in India. The damages resulting from the absence of a scientific land use policy were evident, and it was the new ideas which prompted and promoted the prospects of relief. Tree planting has now been accepted as a means to improve the quality of life of the individual in rural India.

One of the major aims of social forestry was to increase production of biomass in order to reduce the pressure on reserve forests. This was the only benefit which was expected to accrue to the reserve forests and this it did. Yet, in other ways the regular forestry sector and in effect the natural forests also lost in the bargain. This was due to the system of budgetary allocations followed by the State Governments. Funds made available to social forestry projects were not treated as additional to the existing budgets, and considerable reductions in the specific budget heads dealing with other sectors of forestry resulted. In a few states a small segment of social forestry funds was used for rehabilitating degraded forests (as in Karnataka) or for involving the people in protecting the forests (as in Orissa and West Bengal). However, the overall impact was marginal and degradation of the reserve forests continued.



C.1 Forest degraded by overcutting and fire.



C.2 Intense browsing by cattle prevents any forest regeneration