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Climate Change And Colonial State Discourse In Naga Hills

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ABSTRACT
Introduction: *The linking of deforestation to climatic change and rainfall deduction laid the basis for the initiation and proliferation of colonial forest protection systems. The business of forest protection and tree planting had thus acquired, by the late eighteenth century, far more acute meaning in the colonial setting than it had in contemporary Europe. During the early eighteenth century the urgent need to understand unfamiliar floras, faunas and geologies, both for commercial purposes and to counter environmental and health risks, had propelled many erstwhile physicians and surgeons into consulting positions and employment with the trading companies as fully fledged professional and state scientists long before such a phenomenon existed in Europe. Many of the prescriptions of the scientific pioneers of early environmentalism were constrained by the needs of the colonial state, even though the state at first resisted the notion of conversation. In the second half of the nineteenth century, too, forest conservation and associated forced resettlement methods were frequently the cause of a fierce oppression of indigenous peoples and became a highly convenient form of social control. However, despite the overarching priorities and distortions of colonialism, the early colonial conservationists nevertheless remain entitled to occupy a very important historical niche. This is above all, because they were able to foresee, the apparently unmanageable environmental problems of today. Their antecedents, motivations and agendas therefore demand our close attention.*
Materials and Methods: This paper is basically depends on archival, Ethnographic and secondary sources. It follows historical method to arrive at conclusions
Conclusion: *We can safely conclude that Naga tribes had been following traditional methods of collecting forest produce and shifting cultivation for a long time. The efforts of the British to discourage them from following traditional methods in the name of conservation and reserve forests did not yield good results.*
Key Words*: Naga tribes ,Naga Hills, shifting cultivation, forest produce, conservation and Colonial state*

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I. Introduction

It is certainly true that anxieties about soil erosion and deforestation had arisen at earlier periods in the literature of ancient Greece, Imperial Rome and Mauryan India and then in a sporadic and unconnected fashion in the annals of the early Venetian, Spanish and Portuguese colonial empires.[1] Since time immemorial indigenous strategies for environmental management on a small scale, often involving a considerable understanding of environmental processes had existed in many parts of the world. However, it was not until the mid seventeenth century that a coherent and relatively organised awareness of the ecological impact of the demands of emergent capitalism and colonial rule started to develop, to grow into a fully fledged understanding of the limited nature of the earth's natural resources and to stimulate a concomitant awareness of a need for conservation. Much of the modern conservation thinking and fear of artificially caused climatic changes, developed specially in the tropical colonial context.

The linking of deforestation to climatic change and rainfall deduction (the essence of desiccationism) laid the basis for the initiation and proliferation of colonial forest protection systems. The business of forest protection and tree planting had thus acquired, by the late eighteenth century, far more acute meaning in the colonial setting than it had in contemporary Europe.[2]During the early eighteenth century the urgent need to understand unfamiliar floras, faunas and geologies, both for commercial purposes and to counter environmental and health risks, had propelled many erstwhile physicians and surgeons into consulting positions and employment with the trading companies as fully fledged professional and state scientists long before such a phenomenon existed in Europe. Many of the prescriptions of the scientific pioneers of early environmentalism were constrained by the needs of the colonial state, even though the state at first resisted the notion of conversation.[3] In the second half of the nineteenth century, too, forest conservation and associated forced

resettlement methods were frequently the cause of a fierce oppression of indigenous peoples and became a highly convenient form of social control. However, despite the overarching priorities and distortions of colonialism, the early colonial conservationists nevertheless remain entitled to occupy a very important historical niche. This is above all, because they were able to foresee, the apparently unmanageable environmental problems of today. Their antecedents, motivations and agendas therefore demand our close attention.

II. Factors Responsible For Environmentalism Debates

Anxieties about environmental change, climatic change and extinctions and even the fear of famine , all of which helped to motivate early environmentalism, mirrored anxiety about social form and motivated social reform.[4] At the core of environmental concern lay anxiety about society and its discontents. Many eighteenth century climatic theorists were armed with a conviction that change of climate might cause a transformation or even degeneration in man himself.[5] The possibility of anthropogenically produced climatic change was thus a far more serious business in tropical colonies than might at first appear, and thus well worth counteracting, even by reluctant capitalist states or companies.[6] These fears were carried on in anxieties and discourses about species extinctions even before the end of the eighteenth century. The underlying fear always consisted in the possibility of the disappearance of man himself.

Besides, colonial states increasingly found conservationism to their taste and economic advantage, particularly in ensuing sustainable timber and water supplies and in using the structures of forest protection to control their unruly marginal subjects. [7] Despite this, the apocalyptic environmental discourses of the colonial scientists frequently articulated a vision and a message of a far less cynical kind, and indeed, one that resonates with us today.[8] The colonial environmentalists felt a steadily growing danger in which, they argued, the whole earth might be threatened by deforestation, famine, extinctions and climatic change.

Until the end of 1880s, a direct connection between decline in forest area and apparent regional increases in desiccation in India was not put forward as an argument for controlling deforestation. Throughout the 1820s and 1830s anxieties about deforestation were frequently expressed. The delay in acknowledging this need for controlling deforestation can be partly attributed to a lack of evidence about the rates of deforestation in India as a whole. A second reason for the delay may have been the paucity of articles in sufficiently authoritative technical publication on the link between deforestation and climate. Consequently, a more convincing body of evidence collected on an all India basis was required, as well as theoretical basis for adjudging the likely consequences of deforestation. By1847, the supremacy of the medical service in its hold over government policy had become well established and was further institutionalised in Gibson' supremacy of the Bombay Forest Department. Thus, it is noteworthy that the employment of medical surgeons as superintendents of botanical gardens in India had expanded the professional role of the surgeons outside the medical service. When the medical surgeons began to define deforestation as a matter requiring serious policy initiatives and an expansion in the role of the state, their opinion carried considerable weight. The Bombay Forest Department was formed with the aim of inhibiting the whole range of environment and social consequences which deforestation might cause. The fear of the consequences especially that of widespread climatic change, forced the colonial state to comply with a conservationist prescription. Thus, conservationism of the surgeons remained a decisive factor in the evolution of colonial forest policy in India and elsewhere.

It is true, however, that individual conservation propagandists such as surgeons Hugh Cleghorn and Robert Wight often expressed a virulent hostility to much in the way of development of a colonial infrastructure.[9] The threat posed by the economic and social consequences of desiccation first effectively promoted by Butter, Gibson, Balfour and Cleghorn continued to preoccupy the official mind of government throughout the period 1850-1880.[10] Moreover a growing number of scientists, in and outside the medical service, believed that they had found new evidence to support their theories linking deforestation with run-off, rainfall and famine incidence.[11] In India , serious drought in 1835- 9, the early 1860s and 1877- 8 were all rapidly followed by the initiation or renewal of state programmes designed to strengthen forest protection, often with the specific aim of preventing subsequent droughts. [12] Further, such legislation resulted in the increase of state control over land and timber supplies. This expansion in state forest control almost always took place at the expense of traditional rights and customs over forests and grazing. How far the state forest control penetrated into the Naga Hills District as a part of Assam shall be discussed in Chapter IV. If one stands back to survey the transition from uncontrolled deforestation to the ambitious programme of state conservation that had developed by the time the first Indian Forest Act of 1865, a number of mile stones stand out. And intensive period of campaigning by the East India Company Medical Service, based principally on the dangers of the climatic effects of deforestation, culminated in the establishment of the Bombay Forest Conservancy in 1847.

After the end of the company rule, the institutional strength and continuity of the earlier established conservation policy, inimical to private interests and heavily influenced by the cumulative strength of the desiccationist case of the scientific lobby was explicitly restated under Crown rule.[13] The restatement expressed

in a letter from the Secretary of state for India to the Governor General in Calcutta, serves as an appropriate summary of the political and propaganda success of conservationism in its relations with colonial state in India. The Secretary of state pointed out in 1862,[14] Thus most countries have suffered from similar neglect within bracket to that in India', not only in the dearth and consequent high price of timber, but very often in the deterioration of climate, and in the barrenness of land formerly cultivable, if not fertile, situated at the base of hills, when this have stripped of the forests which clothed them, condensed the vapours into rain and give protection to the country below them …….. It is satisfactory to me to learn that you have come to the same conclusion as Her Majesty's government, that individuals cannot be relied upon for due care in the management of forests, in as much as private capital must be opposed in this instance to public interest.'

The proceedings of Supra – colonial scientific meetings, such as those of the British Association for the Advancement of Science in 1851 and the Royal Geographical Society in 1865 and 1866 reinforced the strength of the desiccation threats welded by colonial scientist and gave them a new source of authority which no single colonial state could safely decide to ignore.[15] The history of forest administration and conservancy in Assam was directly related to the growth and development of the forest administration and conservancy efforts under the British Government of India. The earlier British administrators were more occupied with the building up of an empire and therefore never thought of the important part forests have always played and would play in the household of nature, or of the immense influence forest exercise on the physical well being of the country.[16] However, it must also be mentioned that the needs of forests or the various beneficial effects of the same were pondered upon by several British administrator. The relation of forests to the hydrological cycle was seriously thought of.[17] For instance, Inspector General of Forest to the Government of India had observed, 'Inundation and carrying away of top soil by torrents because of destruction of forests have also been observed in Assam, where the surface soil in many tea gardens has been washed away and where the yield has dwindled down to next to nothing.'[18] Likewise, even the confirmed imperialist Baden Powell observed that forests might have a role in the climatic effects.[19] Many scholars dismiss colonial conservation and forestry regulation, especially in India, as mere disguises legitimised by a subordinate colonial science for resource exploitation and land seizure by the state.[20] However, in act a food deal of evidence indicates that complex notions of state intervention in natural resource protection emerged and were extensively promulgated in the colonial context.

Anyhow, the variety of factors responsible for the deforestation apparently witnessed within India, and in the hill districts of Assam had caused apprehension to the colonial power. Deforestation was caused because the main consumers of forest produce have been the Railways, tea industry, the match factory, East Bengal for Sal, Calcutta for furniture timbers and to some extent the urban population.

III. Causes Of Deforestation

Globally speaking, by around 1860, Britain had emerged as the world leader in deforestation, devastating its own woods and the forests of Ireland, South Africa, and north eastern United States to draw timber for ship building, iron-smelting and farming.[21] The early treatment of Indian forests by the British Raj confirmed the view held by many that the British were responsible for the beginning of the process of depletion of India's forest wealth.[22] With Oaks forests vanishing in England, a permanent supply of durable timber was required for the Royal Navy as the safety of the empire depended on its wooden walls.[23] In a period of fierce competition between the colonial powers, Indian teak, the most durable of shipbuilding timbers, saved England during the war with Napoleon and later maritime expansion. As late as the1880s the Indian Forest Department was entertaining repeated requests from the British Admiralty for the supply of Madras and Burma Teak.[24] This show of interest in teak (eg, the reservation of teak in Malabar in 1806) was predictably dictated by imperialistic consideration for revenue and timber for defence.[25] The imperial forest department in India was established in 1864, however, it was only in the year 1868 that an Assistant Conservator was deputed to inspect and report on the forests of Assam. After the general inspection of the Assam forests was completed in 1869- 70, the special examination, with a view of selecting reserves commenced and experimental timber and plantation works were started in 1870- 71.[26]

Tracts of forest lands were declared as reserved forest in the Naga Hills as well as transferred from one district to another for the convenience of the British administration and for future exploitation of the forests. From 1874 onwards there was gradual extension of colonial forest policy into the Naga Hills because prior to that, the information received from the civil authorities regarding the forests was insufficient even to prepare a map or to give a comprehensive description of those forest in Assam.[27] Details of the colonial forest policy shall be discussed in chapter IV. However it has to be noted that, deforestation was evidently happening even in the Naga Hills district of Assam due to the demand of timber markets in Sylhet and East Bengal. The Unclassed State forests round Dimapur having nearly exhausted, the timber merchants who had been making fellings there to supply markets in Sylhet and East Bengal were on the lookout for suitable areas for working by 1913 which had led to the reservation of Rangapahar forest.[28]

Thus, any well stocked forest, being generally of useful species was reserved with the intention of future exploitation. For the sake of convenience in the Naga Hills the three reserved forests namely, Desoi valley and Rangapahar reserved forest were under the control of D.F.O. Sibsagar and Intanki forest was under the control of D.F.O. Nowgong.[29] In 1931, on the wish of J.P.Mills, Deputy Commissioner Naga Hills, Mr. Martins, the Divisional Forest Officer (D.F.O), Sibsagar was allowed to inspect the forests in the Naga Hills which were protected by the executive order, with a view to advising what should be protected what should be reserved or what should be disforested, in order to conserve a water supply for the extension of terrace cultivation.[30] Under a dual approach of exploitation and conservation, the British forest policy had begun to give preferential treatment to some tree species over the others thereby affecting the diversity of the forests. The principle followed in the exploitation of the forests was to retain all the valuable species which formed the over wood and remove all the inferior species which generally formed underwood.[31] In most of the reserves, unsystematic exploitation was carried on from time to time both under the permit system by purchasers and departmentally.[32] Under the British government deforestation took place to satisfy the needs of the main consumers of forest produce. The demands of the consumers had direct as well as indirect impact in the form of gradual depletion of forest even in the long isolated Naga Hills district of Assam.

The construction of railways had a dual impact on Indian forests. Railways hastened their destruction but also provided a stimulus for conservation. Railways spread and forest growth disappeared with incredible rapidity within the reach of the railway lies and even beyond, partly on account of the direct demands made on them(like the supply of railway sleepers) for the construction works and fuel demands which were frequently met by an exploitation carried on in a reckless manner.[33] The Assam-Bengal railways started using 'Nahor' and 'Uriam' for sleepers in 1911- 12 and later 'Ajhar' also became an acceptable species.[34] The Nambor forest and the Diphu forest, declared as reserved forests in 1878 and 1887, respectively were known to possess in large quantities the first class timbers viz; Jarul(Lagerstroemia Reginoe) , Nahor (Mesua ferrea), Sam (Artocarpus Chaplasha), Paroli (Sterenspermum Chelonoides), Gunserai (Cinnamomum Glanduliferum) and Uriam (Bischoffia Javanica).[35] Those portions of the Nambor forest reserve which contain trees such as Nahor and Ajhar were of much prospective value than those which did not contain these trees. Unlike other parts of India, deforestation on a large scale did not take place in the Naga Hills due to the direct demands of railways. In this connection the Agent and Chief Engineer of the Assam –Bengal Railways had reported that the timber standing on that portion of the Nambor reserve which was disforested for the railway line was useless for railway purposes, and that, in a previous communication on this subject, the Conservator had remarked as follows ;

"It is not probable that the Assam – Bengal Railways will take any timber from this Department in any quantity for sleepers or any other purpose from these forests or from any other forests. Their local temporary requirements are at present being met from the timber on the line concession, and they procure their other timber and sleepers (they say) cheaper than they can themselves utilised timber on the spot free of royalty."[36]

IV. Conclusion

Thus, we can safely conclude that the colonial power had reserved the forest tracks having valuable species of trees yet, disforested portion of reserved forest for the extension of railways. Dense evergreen forest of Diphu and Nambor reserves in the Naga Hills had to be disforested due to the requirement of strips of land for the Assam – Bengal Railway which passes through the reserves. For instance ; two strips of land namely, 40 acres and 1189 acres of land which forms a portions of Diphu and Nambor reserve forests respectively under Barpathar Mauza in the Naga hills had to be disforested for the Assam – Bengal Railways in 1895.[37] The rhetoric and propaganda of the colonial state that it was genuinely concerned about the environmental degradation sounded shallow in the Naga Hills in the long run.

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