



Indian Forest Act, 1927

The Indian Forest Act, 1927 aimed to regulate the movement of forest produce, and duty leviable forest produce. It also explains the procedure to be followed for declaring an area as Reserved Forest, Protected Forest or a Village Forest.

This act has details of what a forest offence is, what are the acts prohibited inside a Reserved Forest, and penalties leviable on violation of the provisions of the Act. After the Forest Act was enacted in 1865, it was amended twice (1878 and 1927).

History

- **Indian Forest Act of 1865:** The Imperial Forest Department, set up in 1864, attempted to establish British control over forests, by various legislations
 - It empowered the British government to declare any land covered with trees as a government forest and make rules to manage it.
- **Indian Forest Act of 1878:** By the Forest Act of 1878, the British Administration acquired the sovereignty of all wastelands which by definition included forests.
 - This Act also enabled the administration to demarcate reserved and protected forests. The local rights were refused in the case of protected forests while some privileges which were given to the local people by the government which can be taken away are anytime.
 - This Act classified the forests into three – **reserved forests, protected forests and village forests**. It attempted to regulate the collection of forest produce by forest dwellers and some activities declared as offences and imprisonment and fines were imposed in this policy to establish the state control over forests.
- **Indian Forest Act of 1927:** This Act impacted the life of forest-dependent communities. The penalties and procedures given in this Act aimed to extend the state's control over forests as well as diminishing the status of people's rights to forest use.
 - The village communities were alienated from their age-old symbiotic association with forests. Further amendments were also made to restrain the local use of forests mainly by forest-dependent communities.
 - It was enacted to make forest laws more effective and to improve the previous forest laws.

Objective

- To consolidate all the previous laws regarding forests.
- To give the Government the power to create different classes of forests for their effective usage for the colonial purpose.
- To regulate movement and transit of forest produce, and duty leviable on timber and other forest produce.
- To define the procedure to be followed for declaring an area as Reserved Forest, Protected Forest or Village Forest.
- To define forest offences acts prohibited inside the Reserved Forest, and penalties leviable on the violation.
- To make conservation of forests and wildlife more accountable.

Types of Forests

- **Reserved Forests:** Reserve forests are the most restricted forests and are constituted by the State Government on any forest land or wasteland which is the property of the Government.
 - In reserved forests, local people are prohibited, unless specifically allowed by a Forest Officer in the course of the settlement.
- **Protected Forests:** The State Government is empowered to constitute any land other than reserved forests as protected forests over which the Government has proprietary rights and the power to issue rules regarding the use of such forests.
 - This power has been used to establish State control over trees, whose timber, fruit or other non-wood products have revenue-raising potential.
- **Village forest:** Village forests are the one in which the State Government may assign to 'any village community the rights of Government to or over any land which has been constituted a reserved forest'.
- **Degree of protection**
 - **Reserved forests > Protected forests > Village forests**
- **Forest Settlement Officer**
 - The Forest Settlement Office is appointed, by the State government, to inquire into and determine the existence, nature and extent of any rights alleged to exist in favour of any person in or over any land comprising a Reserved forest.
 - He/she is empowered even to acquire land over which right is claimed.

Drawbacks

- The government claimed that the act was aimed to protect the vegetation cover of India. However, a deep investigation of the act reveals that the real motive behind the act was to earn revenue from the cutting of the trees and from the forest produce.
- The act gave immense discretion and power to the forest bureaucracy which often led to the harassment of the forest dwellers.
- Moreover, it led to depriving the nomads and tribal people their age-old rights and privileges to use the forests and forest produce.
- The revenue earning potential from timber overshadowed the other values like biodiversity, prevention of soil erosion, etc.

Later Initiatives

- **Indian Forest Policy, 1952:** The Indian Forest Policy, 1952 was a simple extension of colonial forest policy. However, it became conscious about the need to increase the forest cover to one-third of the total land area.
 - At that time maximum annual revenue from forests is the vital national need. The two World Wars, need for defence, developmental projects such as river valley projects, industries like pulp, paper and plywood, and communication heavily depended on forest produce on national interest, as a result, huge areas of forests were cleared to raise revenue for the State.
- **Forest Conservation Act, 1980:** The Forest Conservation Act, 1980 stipulated that the central permission is necessary to practice sustainable agro-forestry in forest areas. Violation or lack of permit was treated as a criminal offence.
 - It targeted to limit deforestation, conserve biodiversity and save wildlife. Though this Act provides greater hope towards forest conservation it was not successful in its target.
- **National Forest Policy, 1988:** The ultimate objective of the National Forest policy was to maintain environmental stability and ecological balance through conservation of forests as a natural heritage.
 - The National Forest Policy in 1988 made a very significant and categorical shift from

commercial concerns to focus on the ecological role of the forests and participatory management.

- Some of the other Acts related to forest conservation are :
 - [The Wildlife Protection Act of 1972](#), The Environment Protection Act of 1986, and The Biodiversity Protection Act of 2003.
 - [Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers \(Recognition of Forest Rights\) Act, 2006](#): It has been enacted to recognize and vest the forest rights and occupation of forest land in forest-dwelling Scheduled Tribes and other traditional forest dwellers, who have been residing in such forests for generations.

Read more

[India State of Forest Report \(ISFR\) 2019](#)

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