

IMPACT OF SOME POLICIES OF THE FOREST DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION ON THE WORKING OF THE FOREST LABOURERS' COOPERATIVES

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The forests in Maharashtra were being exclusively managed by the State Forest Department until the incorporation of the Forest Development Corporation in February 1974. Some parts of the forest lands in possession of the Forest Department were transferred to the Corporation with an objective to raise the production of timber, therefrom. The policies which the Corporation framed to manage these lands, however, came in conflict with the interests of the local population and their organisations which had formed a distinct relationship with the forest land, now transferred to the Corporation. One such entity to be affected by the policies of the Corporation was the institution of the forest labourers' cooperatives which had developed in and around the forest areas during the last three decades. An attempt is made in the following sections to examine how the policies of the Corporation affected the working of these cooperatives in one district of Maharashtra, viz. Thana district. The relevant details about the Forest Development Corporation and the Forest Labourers' Cooperatives are given in Section I whereas the impact of the policies of the Corporation on the working of the cooperatives is examined in Section II. The results are discussed in Section III.

I. Introduction

1.1 *The Forest Development Corporation*

A large part of the forests in Maharashtra possesses the potential to grow economically valuable species such as teak, bamboo and pulpwoods. The conversion of the existing forests into forests of the high value species is, however, held up on account of the heavy capital investments needed to bring about this change over. The traditional objective of merely 'sustaining the yield'¹ over time by the adoption of the 'selection system'² to

1 The traditional management of forests is based on the concept of sustaining the yield over time. The growing stock in a forest represents the capital in hand. Each tree puts on some growth every year, the cumulative total of which represents the annual interest earned by the forest capital. It is not possible to recover from each tree the interest in the form of the increment put on by it during a year. Fellings are, therefore, concentrated over a small part of a forest - annually (a coupe), the total volume felled being maintained as near as possible to the estimated increment put on by the entire forest.