

FORESTRY ECONOMICS IN INDIA —SOME AREAS FOR RESEARCH¹

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THE IMPORTANT ROLE that forests play in a nation's economy cannot be over-emphasized. Forests perform both protective and productive functions. In their protective role, they prevent the deterioration and wasting-away of the soils, temper the climate, and regulate stream-flow, without which it would be impossible to organize agriculture efficiently. Out of a little over 32.6 lakh square kilometers of the geographical area of India, forests occupy approximately 7 lakh square kilometers, i.e. slightly more than 21 per cent. Thus a very large proportion of land is under forests. As against this, the contribution of forests to the national income is less than one per cent. It is extremely poor even if it is recognized, as mentioned earlier, that the economic importance of forests is much more than what their contribution to the national income suggests. The agricultural sector (leaving out animal husbandry) generates nearly forty times the forest income with only about twice the forest area. Even though the protective functions of the forests, which are essentially non-productive, keep the level of income low, the disproportionately low income in relation to the area occupied by the forests amply speaks of how low is the productivity of the forests and how poorly they are managed. It is therefore imperative that a serious attention is paid to the understanding of forestry's basic problems and their solutions. The basic needs seem to be to evolve the right policy, to enunciate principles, to decide on objectives, and finally to implement effectively the accepted policy and principles. The pre-requisite for these is research in economics and other allied problems of forestry.

Unfortunately, very little thinking has been done so far in India

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