

Wood in Jagannath Cult and Its Management during Colonial and Post-Colonial Period

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ABSTRACT : There is enough evidence to show that dense forests once covered in India. The changing forest composition and cover can be closely linked to the growth and change of civilizations. Over the years, as man progressed the forest began gradually depleting. The growing population and man's dependence on the forest have been mainly responsible for this. In 1840, the British colonial administration promulgated an ordinance called Crown Land (Encroachment) Ordinance. This ordinance targeted forests in Britain's Asian colonies, and vested all forests, wastes, unoccupied and uncultivated lands to the crown. Odisha is known as the land of Lord Jagannath due to unflinching faith of general populace of the State in the deity. The world-famous Ratha Yatra (Car Festival) of Lord Jagannath, Puri is the most important festival and is being celebrated since time immemorial in the grandest manner, in accordance with the ancient prescribed rituals and rites. The Ratha Yatra of Lord Lingaraj at Bhubaneswar is also equally important and both the Ratha Yatras have been accorded the status of states festivals. The species required for construction of above 3 chariots are Phasi (*Anogeissus acuminata*), Dhaura (*Anogeissus latifolia*), Asan (*Terminalia tomentosa*), Moi (*Lannea corommondalica*), Simili (*Bombax ceiba*), Sal (*Shorea robusta*), Kansa (*Hymenodictyon orixense*), and Paladhua (*Erythrina indica*), Mahalimba (*Ailanthus excelsa*), Gambhari (*Gmelina arborea*), Kadamba (*Anthocephalus Kadamba*), Kalachua (*Diospyros sylvatica*), Devadaru (*Polyalthia longifolia*). Forests of Odisha are scientifically managed by Forest Department to augment timber and firewood production to cater to the needs of the people and to regenerate the natural forest by adopting various silvicultural practices supported by plantations in the interest of the environment. For the purpose of restocking the forest with required trees on exists or gaps created after plantations of are raise under the working circle.

I. INTRODUCTION

Odisha is located on the east coast of the country having 155,707 sq.kms geographical area which constitutes 4.74% area of the country. It lies in the tropical zone between latitude 17 degree 47 minutes & 22 degree 34 minutes North Longitude 81 degree 22 minutes & 87.29' East. Physiographically, the state can be divided into 4 regions, viz, Northern plateau, Eastern Ghats, Central table land, & coastal plains. The state is drained by three major rivers Mahanadi, Brahmani, & Baitarani. Odisha is home to Hirakud dam one of the longest dams in the world. The state is rich in mineral resources including coal, iron, bauxite, chromites & nickel. The annual rainfall varies between 1200 to 1600 mm & mean annual temperature ranges between 25°C to 27.5°C. As per census 2011 the total population of the state is 42 million of which the rural population constitutes 85.03%. The population of the state constitutes 3.47% of the country's population. The population density is 236 persons per sq.kms. The scheduled tribes constitute 22.21% of the population. The population growth of the state is 14.05%.

Land use pattern of the state is given -(India Report 2009)

Land use	Area in '000ha	%
Total geographical area	15,571	
Reporting area for land utilization	15,571	100.00
Forests	5,813	37.33
No available for cultivation	1,842	11.83
Permanent pastures & other grazing lands	443	2.85
Land under misc. tree crops & groves	482	3.10
Cultivable wasteland	392	2.52
Fallow lands other than current fallows	434	2.79
Current fallows	426	2.74
Net area sown	5,739	36.8

Source-land use statistics, ministry of Agriculture, GOI.2006

II. STATUS OF FOREST IN CONOLINIAL PERIOD

There is enough evidence to show that dense forests once covered India. The changing forest composition and cover can be closely linked to the growth and change of civilizations. Over the years, as man progressed the forest began gradually depleting. The growing population and man's dependence on the forest have been mainly responsible for this. All ancient texts have some mention of the forest and the activities that were performed in these areas. Forests were revered by the people and a large number of religious ceremonies centered on trees and plants. The *Agni Puraná*, written about 4000 years ago, stated that man should protect trees to have material gains and religious blessings. Around 25 years. Sacred groves were marked around the temples where certain rules and regulations applied.

When Chandra Gupta Maurya came to power around 300 BC, he realized the importance of the forests and appointed a high officer to look after the forests. Ashoka stated that wild animals and forests should be preserved and protected. He launched programmes to plant trees on a large scale. These rules continued even during Gupta period. During the Muslim invasions a large number of people had to flee from the attacks and take refuge in the forests. This was the beginning of a phase of migration to the forest. They cleared vast areas of forests to make way for settlements. The Muslim invaders were all keen hunters and therefore had to have patches of forests where they could go hunting. This ensured that the trees in these areas were not felled, and the forest ecology was not tampered with. The Mughals showed more interest in gardens and their development. Akbar ordered the planting of trees in various parts of his kingdom. Jahangir was well known for laying out beautiful gardens and planting trees. During the early part of the British rule, trees were felled without any thought. Large numbers of trees such as the Sal, phasi, teak, and sandalwood were cut for export. The history of modern Indian forestry was a process by which the British gradually appropriated forest resources for revenue generation. Trees could not be felled without prior permission and knowledge of the authority. This step was taken to ensure that they were the sole users of the forest trees. But after some time, the British began to regulate and conserve. In 1800, a commissioner was appointed to look into the availability of teak in the Malabar forests. In 1806, the Madras government appointed Capt. Watson as the commissioner of forests for organizing the production of teak and other timber suitable for the building of ships. 200 years ago, Gautama Buddha preached that man should plant a tree every

The Imperial Forest Department was established in India in 1864. British state's monopoly over Indian forests was first asserted through the Indian Forest Act of 1865. This law simply established the government's claims over forests. The British colonial administration then enacted a further far-reaching Forest Act of 1878, thereby acquiring the sovereignty of all wastelands which in its definition included all forests. This Act also enabled the administration to demarcate reserved and protected forests. In the former, all local rights were abolished while in the latter some existing rights were accepted as a privilege offered by the British government to the local people which can be taken away if necessary. These colonial laws brought the forests under the centralized sovereignty of the state. The original intent of these colonial laws was driven by 19th century priorities, an era when global awareness of conservation, biodiversity and sustainable use were limited, and for some absent. An FAO report claims it was believed in colonial times that the forest is a national resource which should be utilized for the interests of the government. That a particular section of the people inhabits the land adjoining the forest is an accident of history and cannot be accepted as a sufficient reason to allow them to manage it either for subsistence or profit. Like coal and gold mines, it was believed that forests belonged to the state for exploitation. Forest areas became a source of revenue. For example, teak was extensively exploited by the British colonial government for ship construction, sale and pine in India for railway sleepers and so on. Forest contracts, such as that of *biri pata* (leaves of *Diospyros melanoxylon*), earned so much revenue that it was often used by the people involved in this business as a leverage for political power. These contracts also created forest *zaminders* (government recognized forest landowners). Additionally, as in Africa, some forests in India were earmarked by the government officials and the rulers with the sole purpose of using them for hunting and sport for the royalty and the colonial officials.

III. STATUS OF FOREST IN POST CONONIAL PERIOD

In 1953 the Indian government nationalized the forests which were earlier with the *zamindars*. India also nationalized most of the forest wood industry and non-wood forest products industry. Over the years, many rules and regulations were introduced by India. In 1980, the Conservation Act was passed, which stipulated that the central permission is required to practice sustainable agro-forestry in a forest area. Violations or lack of permits was made a criminal offense. These nationalization wave and laws intended to limit deforestation, conserve biodiversity, and save wildlife. However, the intent of these regulations was not matched by reality that followed. Neither investment aimed at sustainable forestry nor knowledge transfer followed once India as well as in Odisha had nationalized and heavily regulated forestry.

Deforestation increased, biodiversity diminished and wildlife dwindled. India's rural population and impoverished families continued to ignore the laws passed in Delhi & also use the forests by the other states near sustenance. India launched its National forestry policy in 1988 & which is implemented by Odisha & other states. This led to a programme named joint forest management, which proposed that specific villages in association with the forest department of concerned states will manage specific forest block. In particular the protection of forests will be responsibility of the people. By 1992 17 states of India participated in JFM, bringing about 2 million hectares of forests under protection. The effect of this initiative has been led the Govt. of Odisha to conserve the car timbers by implemented a project known as "Shree Jagannath Banaprakalap", to fulfillment of the wood required for construction of three chariots in every year. Odisha is known as the land of Lord Jagannath due to unflinching faith of general populace of the State in the deity. The world famous Ratha Yatra (Car Festival) of Lord Jagannath, Puri is the most important festival and is being celebrated since time immemorial in the grandest manner, in accordance with the ancient prescribed rituals and rites. The Ratha Yatra of Lord Lingaraj at Bhubaneswar is also equally important and both the Ratha Yatras have been accorded the status of states festivals

IV. THE MAKING OF CHARIOTS

The construction of the wooden chariots for the Car Festivals of Shree Jagannath temple at Puri and Shree Lingaraj temple at Bhubaneswar is an annual event, i.e. every year the chariots are constructed afresh and finally disposed off after the festival is over. Three chariots of the Jagannath temple, Puri for the three deities named Taladhwaaja for Lord Balabhadra, Nandighosha for Lord Jagannath and Deba Dalana for Goddess Subhadra require about 400 cubic meters of timber for construction. The species required for construction of above 3 chariots are Phasi (*Anogeissus accuminata*), Dhaura (*Anogeissus latifolia*), Asan (*Terminalia tomentosa*), Moi (*Lannea corommondalica*), Simili (*Bombax ceiba*), Sal (*Shorea robusta*), Kansa (*Hymenodictyon orixense*), and Paladhua (*Erythrina indica*), Mahalimba (*Ailanthus excelsa*), Gambhari (*Gmelina arborea*), Kadamba (*Anthocephalus cadamba*), Kalachua (*Diospyros sylvatica*), Devadaru (*Polyalthia longifolia*). The dimension of various species of timber and their usage in the construction of the chariots are given hereunder body is cremated at Swarga Dwara, Puri.

V. THE PURI RATHA YATRA CODE 1983

It must be appreciated that the timber requirement for the chariot construction is huge. During the regime of Maratha rulers, traditionally the timbers for construction of grand chariots/cars of Lord Jagannath at Puri were supplied by the King of Dasapalla, an ex-Princely State of Odisha free of cost on the basis of 'Sateisi Hazari Mahal' lands in the state of Dasapalla. After merger of Dasapalla in the State during 1948, the Govt. of Odisha continued to uphold the traditional commitment for the temple. The DFOs, Nayagarh, Khordha and Boudh on the direction of State Govt. have been supplying the annual requirement of timbers for the Car Festival at Puri, free of cost till delivery at Ratha khala, Puri. Similarly, the DFO, Nayagarh supplies timber for construction of chariot of Lord Lingaraj at Bhubaneswar for Ashokastami car festival during Chaitra. In order to do away with the adhocism of the past and to bring about order into the system, this arrangement has been formalized under Rule 4(1) of Puri Car Festival (Ratha Yatra) Code, 1983 which envisages: (i). It is the responsibility of the Forest Department, Govt. of Odisha to supply the required timber for construction of Rathas free of cost each year. (ii). The DFO, Nayagarh, Khordha and Boudh will supply the required quantities of timber of different species to Temple Administrator, Shree Jagannath Temple, Puri and the Executive Officer, Lord Lingaraj Temple, Bhubaneswar for the purpose of Annual Car Festivals by December so that it can be worshipped on Saraswati Puja.

VI. STRATAGEY SHREE JAGANNATH BANAPRAKALAP

Gone are the days when trees of the desired species and desired dimensions were available in the forests of the State in abundance. The gradual depletion of natural forests has rendered the supply of such quantities of timber and fire wood of specified species more and more difficult year after year. The inadvertent adhocism in its exploitation in the past has further compounded the problem whereby the population of the aforesaid desired species in the forests has diminished alarmingly. Therefore a two pronged strategy has been conceptualized to address this problem. First, systematic management of some identified natural forest areas bearing naturally grown car timber species are being taken up to meet the immediate requirement. Second, intensive plantations have been taken up under the scheme 'Jagannath Bana Prakalpa' (JBP) for all the car timber species except Sal to meet the future requirements of car timber in a sustained manner.

VII. PLANNING OF SHREE JAGANNATH BANAPRAKALAP(JBP)

Forests of Odisha are scientifically managed by Forest Department to augment timber and fire wood production to cater to the needs of the people and to regenerate the natural forest by adopting various silvicultural practices supported by plantations in the interest of the environment. The Divisional Forest Officer (DFO) has to follow a set of prescriptions written in the Working Plan for that division prepared by a Working Plans Officer for a period of 10 years. Forest areas requiring site-specific treatment or required to be managed for a specific purpose, are grouped under a particular working circle and several working circles constitute the working plan. Forest areas allotted for timber harvest are covered under Selection working circle, areas identified for plantation are covered under plantation working circle, forests meant for harvest of bamboo are covered under bamboo working circle and so on. Similarly forest areas managed for harvest of timber to meet the requirement of construction of chariots during Car Festival of Lord Jagannath and Lord Lingaraj are covered under the 'Car Timber (Overlapping) Working Circle'. The area allotted to this working circle is further divided into several felling series which are a group of coupes. Every year only one felling series is taken up for timber felling so that the working circle area is gradually felled over 10 years of plan period and a particular area is again ready for harvest only after 10 years. Only over matured and matured trees are felled selectively as per the guidelines contained in the working plan. Three divisions are duty-bound to supply the entire timber requirement for construction of chariots of Lord Jagannath temple, Puri and Lord Lingaraj temple at Bhubaneswar. Working circles of car timber have been constituted within the Working Plans of Boudh, Nayagarh and Khordha divisions including forest and revenue areas. Forest areas have been included for harvesting of timber whereas the revenue lands are included to raise Jagannath Van Prakalpa plantations. Further, in order to cater to the needs of fuel wood for Shree Jagannath temple,

VIII. OBJECTIVES OF SHREE JAGANNATH BANAPRAKALAP

- [1] to raise, maintain and manage intensive plantations of desired species to meet the requirement of car timber on a sustained basis and thus to cater to the socio-cultural needs of the people of Odisha.
- [2] to meet the immediate demand of Car timber for construction of cars at Puri and Bhubaneswar.
- [3] to afforest the available bare lands and thus to help improve local Environments
- [4] To cater the needs of fuel wood consumption for 'Swarga Dwara" and for preparation of 'Maha Prasad' in 'Rosai ghar" of Sri Jagannath Temple by harvesting existing exploitable trees in planting areas.

SILVICULTURAL OPERATION

After extraction of timber from the forest floor, following subsidiary silvicultural operations are carried out to help regeneration-

- [1] All timbers except of endangered species are cut.
- [2] All defective and malformed saplings of desired species are cut to boost coppice shoots.
- [3] Unwanted shrubs around the desired species are removed as silvicultural cleaning.
- [4] The area is protected from fire, grazing and illicit felling.

SPECIAL ARTIFICI REGENERATION OF CAR TIMBER SPECIES-

For the purpose of restocking the forest with required trees on existing blank patches in forest or gaps created after felling, plantations of principal car timber species are raised under the working circle

PLANING OF SHREE JAGANNATH BANAPRAKALAP (JBP)

Apart from Khordha, Nayagarh and Boudh divisions, JBP plantations have also been raised in forest divisions like Dhenkanal, Angul, Athagarh, Athamallik, Satkosia WL and City forest division over an area of 2326.34 ha. During the period from 2000-01 to 2005-06. All these divisions were selected for JVP because they are situated by the side of the River Mahanadi and Phasi trees are mostly found on river banks. District wise and division wise area planted is given below for appreciation. The species mostly planted are *Phasi (80%), Asan, Arjuna, Dhaura, Gambhari, Kadamba, Simili, Mahalimba, and Kansa*. The survival rate in most of these plantations is 65% to 90% and growth rate is satisfactory. The fast growing species like Phasi, Gambhari and Mahalimba have attained 15-20 ft height and more than 1ft girth. But they will take more than 35-40 years to attain the desired girth for use in construction of chariots. JBP plantations have been funded by respective DRDAs and now the maintenance cost of such plantations are being met from MGNREGA. In many places the local people/ Vana Samrakhyana Samities (VSS) are protecting these JBP plantations. Steps are being taken to locate new areas for raising second phase JBP plantation.

CONCLUSION

It is high time to think how to get car timbers after a decade when desired trees of specified dimensions will not be available in forest and JBP plantations will not be ready to supply timbers. The people of Odisha who have unflinching faith in Lord Jagannath, must seriously ponder over the following suggestions and reach a consensus so that car festivals of Lord Jagannath at Puri and Lord Lingaraj at Bhubaneswar are organized every year with the same amount of devotion, fervor, gaiety and enthusiasm.

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