British forestry in the Western Ghats (India) and French forestry in Indochina: a comparison

M. Buchy

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DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

FRENCH INSTITUTE, 11 ST. LOUIS STREET, P.B. 33, PONDICHERRY 605001, INDIA.
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M. BUCHY¹

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¹. Lecturer in Forest Sciences, University College of North Wales, Bangor.
JUSTIFICATION AND DELIMITATION OF THE TOPIC

At first glance, the disparities between India and Indochina appear to be so glaring that a comparative study would be useless or of little interest. Although both these countries were the birthplaces of highly successful agrarian civilizations, their ecological conditions are rather different, and, in the case of India, even extremely diverse. However, the aim of this paper is not to compare the environmental history of two countries in minute detail but rather to try to analyze the strategies followed by the British and French foresters in the Asian colonial context. As forest policies may have been different in Africa, I shall be cautious while drawing conclusions; and it is clear that broader comparative studies would be useful.

I shall focus on each of the areas in turn taking into account their ecological, economic and sociological conditions. In both cases my object will be to examine the methods used by the forest administration, the part played by the local people, and then the degree of awareness regarding ecological degradation—all this, within the chronological framework of an entire century. It would be an error to draw conclusions about British forest policy throughout India, by extrapolating the findings made about one district. In the same way, a summary of the forest history of Indochina, despite its smaller size, is beyond the scope of this paper.

As the French presence in Indochina occurred later than the British occupation of India—a time-lag which might also account for certain differences—the period of study will not be sharply delimited. What is significant is the way in which certain stages succeeded one

1. French Indochina was divided into five distinctive territories and without wishing to offend anybody, the terms "Tonkin", "Annam", "Cochinchine" (i.e. present-day Viet-Nam), will be used as these, along with Laos and Cambodia, were the colonial administrative divisions of French Indochina.
another, rather than what happened at a given date in either country. Nevertheless, as this study is about colonial history, the investigations stop at the time of Independence (1947 for India and 1954 for Indochina). So the approximate time-period covered is from the second half of the nineteenth century up to the middle of the twentieth century.

The district of North Canara borders the territory of Goa facing the Arabian Sea. Prior to 1862 it was administered by the Madras Presidency; it was then shifted to the Bombay Presidency before becoming part of Karnataka state in 1957. 90% of the district was covered by forest, with considerable areas of teak, valued originally for shipbuilding and later for railway sleepers.

In the case of Indochina, it was not possible to select a particular district for study, for two main reasons:

- there would not have been enough detailed information on one limited area, and one needs to combine information from different parts of the colony to be able to build up its history;
- evolution of the forest policy there was more or less homogeneous, and information can therefore be gleaned from different parts of the colony.

Nevertheless, Tonkin and Cambodia will be cited more often, while Laos hardly occurs at all. This is mainly because the Forest Department of Laos was not set up until the 1930s. Most probably, at the time when the French explorers first arrived the forest was more or less untouched and proportionally greater in extent. While teak was not a major species, the forests were rich in ironwood and eaglewood.

A BRIEF SURVEY OF THE SOURCES

A comparison of the archives and sources of material used reveals certain differences in approach.

Having worked first on archives relating to Indochina, located in France and Viet-Nam, the British colonial archives on the subject were found to be markedly different. The nature, size, and method of classification of the latter, available in Bombay, New Delhi and London, and also at the district level, reveal a quite different approach to administration, not only on forest matters.

The Indochinese forest archives are classified by boxes under the heading "Agence Economique" (Economic Agency). There, without special distinction or classification, one can find files containing forest reports (either scientific or administrative), letters, a few newspaper cuttings, extracts from gazettes, technical booklets, applications for
contracts, auction sales and so on, Administrative matters, such as allowances, postings, salaries-etc., seem to have been organised more systematically. The archives kept in Hanoï - I was not able to consult those in Ho Chi Minh City - deal more with local details, while those in Paris and Aix-en Provence cover discussions and reports at the Residency level. The statistical series are seldom complete, which makes it more difficult to grasp the situation accurately. This gives the general impression of a relatively casual forest administration.

This apparent lack of seriousness is contrasted in the British archives by an incredible amount of material, indexed, classified, and organised. The British administrators, not only in their Forest Proceedings (which form part of the Revenue Department Proceedings), but also in their Forest Administrative Reports, seem to have entered into the minutest details, following a pattern of conception established by a fixed code, every year of exercise being meticulously reported. Most of these documents are printed, which is not the case for the French ones.

These structural differences, reflecting two different kinds of administrative approach, give rise to a few questions:

- Is the apparent strength of the British forestry management the result of a better and more developed administration? Were the British more interested in forest issues, more efficient in their management? Did they have a better awareness of the environment?

In any case it appears to reflect a concern for controlling every inch of the system, which could be related to the general colonial attitude.

The administrative reports follow a definite pattern, designed by technocrats, and contain only what would have been thought relevant by them. As the same pattern is followed throughout the period, they do not take into account any contemporary changes in forestry matters.

In contrast to these reports, which are full of statistical data, the French ones are very poor in quantitative information, and in fact are of a different nature. The series numbers, although never complete, are printed in the official "Agence Economique" journal. The fact that these series never appear exhaustively in the forest archives could mean that purely economic matters were kept separate from forestry ones, which was not the case under British administration. French yearly administrative reports are not always available, and it is difficult to

2. Now all French colonial archives have been transferred to the "Archives d'Outre-Mer" in Aix-en-Provence.
3. The Indochinese territory was divided into "Résidence Supérieure du Tonkin", "de l'Annam", etc.
ascertain whether some have been lost or just not written. The foresters' reports, which are never printed, and sometimes not even signed, provide more qualitative information. They contain long ecological observations, descriptions of the local timber-market, of the types of wood exploited, information on water-management and shifting cultivation, and scientific comments on tree growth and silvicultural work, as well as administrative progress. This does not mean that the French foresters knew their forests better than the Britih, since they themselves confess that, until the late 1920s, the forest remained largely unexplored. It just suggests that the British were more in charge of administration, and probably more concerned about economic results.

The surveys of both sets of sources interestingly revealed that the data most helpful to the scholar have not been registered, whether deliberately or otherwise. For example, although one may find data on timber output, one never really finds out how many cubic feet of a given species have been extracted from a given area. In this case how can one assess whether the wood extraction was sustainable or not? There is also little, if any, precise information regarding the timber market: who was buying the wood at what price? What was the local purchasing power? What was the role played by the local timber network at a national level? What little information is available on such topics is widely scattered.

Little or no criticism surfaces, and whether reading reports, proceedings or books, one has the feeling of a wide consensus which forbade any open questioning of the administration or of established forest policy.

The major conclusion that can be drawn from a brief survey of the material is that the British Government had a strong forest administration while that of the French appears more uncertain. A few questions can be raised: for example what was the real nature of the differences? Are they evidence of a completely different colonial objective? Is this not also an indication that the Indochinese forest had a minor role in the economy of France as well as in that of Indochina itself?

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THE EXECUTIVE TOOL

Before analysing the legislation, which is central to the forest policies, I would like to give some brief information concerning the administrations themselves. At this stage of my research, I can only provide some qualitative indications, which although not complete are still useful for a better understanding of the two strategies.

First of all, one has to highlight the fact that in India, the Forest Department came under the legal authority of the Revenue Department, while the French one depended on the Ministry of Agriculture. In the one case, the Forest was considered primarily as a source of income, in the other, it was considered as a natural resource requiring as much care as any other agricultural product. "Revenue" is related to "taxes", but "Agriculture" implies more an idea of produce and of food. In the same way, some of the French foresters had been trained as agronomists. Of course this does not mean that the French were more concerned about Nature, or that they were willing to develop a really sustainable management of their colonial resources. In fact, in the beginning, the French foresters were better known as tax collectors; but still, this distinction between Revenue and Agriculture indicates a completely different approach to what can be taken out from the forest.

In India as in Indochina, the higher forest officers were trained in the home country, while at the field level local people were recruited. For a long time the Indochinese staff was badly trained and composed mostly of former army NCOs, a fact which often led to friction with the local population.

All over India one can find an uniform pattern of forest administrative hierarchy; the State or Presidency is divided into circles, divisions, ranges, beats and coupes, supervised respectively by a Conservator (CF), Deputy Conservators (DCF), Assistant Conservators (ACF), Guards and Foresters. In Canara each single patch of forest came under the administration of one officer. The Indochinese forests were divided into "cantonnements", divisions and "triages" under the overall responsibility of the "Conservateur des Eaux et Forêts". The "cantonnements" were supervised by "Inspecteur des Eaux et Forêts" and the other subdivisions, under "agents forestiers" (foresters) of various "grades" (ranks). Unfortunately, many areas could not be managed properly because they were too large and the staff too few. As we shall see further on in this study, the French hold

over the forest was weaker. Was this due entirely to a lack of staff, or was it voluntary, the result of a lack of interest?

THE LEGISLATIVE TOOL

Forestry exploitation and management began in a similar way in each of the two colonies. It was the Marine Department or Navy in need of timber which first recognised the interesting value potential of some tropical woods.

For a long time in the nineteenth century, the Canara forests, which were relatively inaccessible, were left alone while the Bombay Dockyards got their teak supply from the Malabar forests. Later, however, faced with a decline in the quality of the logs, they began to survey the Canara forests. Like those everywhere else in India, these forests were at first logged without any consideration until Lord Dalhousie’s Minute of 1855 marked the start of a new official attitude towards forests and their management. The creation of the Forest Department in India in 1864 was followed in 1865 by the first Indian Forest Act.

In the same way, it was French sailors who first arrived on the Cochinchina coast in the middle of the nineteenth century. They were captivated by the apparently inexhaustible wealth of the forests there, and organised the beginnings of the timber extraction. The very first regulation dates from 1862 in Cochinchina, followed by an order of coupe regulation in 1888 in Tonkin. But curiously enough, it was only in 1901 for Tonkin and Cochinchina, 1902 for Cambodia and 1903 for Annam that a Forest Department was created.

In order to operate freely both Departments had to provide themselves with laws, analysis of which will once again reveal differing approaches towards the management of natural resources, and to the rights of the local populace.

Composed of 14 chapters, the Indian Forest Act of 1878, provides rules and regulations concerning all forest land, private or otherwise, controls the collection of timber, and provides penalties and procedures in case of offences. Leaving nothing to chance, the Act starts out with a juridical definition of terms such as "Forest Officers".

7. 100 Years of Indian Forestry, Dehra Dun, 1964, p. 73.
"trees", "timber", "forest produce", "forest offence", "cattle" and "river" (Section 2).

A specially appointed Forest Settlement Officer had to divide the forest land into Reserved, Protected or Village Forests. Reserved Forests were usually very valuable economically, and they were consequently closed, restricting the local people's access drastically. The procedures for creating this type of forest are scrupulously defined by the code. After an official declaration in the Gazette (Section 4), the Forest Settlement Officer had to localise and delimit precisely the aforementioned forest, inform the public of the consequences of the decision, give at least three months delay for people to make any claim (Section 6) and enquire into their possible rights (Section 7).

Every claim, and the rights recognized by the Forest Settlement Officer, had to be precisely recorded (Section 13) and could not be changed. The acts prohibited in a Reserved Forest are listed in Section 25, along with the relevant penalties. The rest of the forest area, whether Government property or not, could be declared "Protected Forest" provided the rights and claims of different parties had been duly certified and recorded (Section 28). In addition, depending on economic circumstances, and on the requirements of the forestry work, some rights of use could be prohibited from time to time after notification (Section 29). In chapter V, the text defines "control over forests and lands not being the property of government". In this way, notifications could prohibit cultivation, pasturing of cattle or burning of vegetation in sensitive areas such as hill slopes, on grounds of ecological protection, such as maintenance of water supply and protection of roads (Section 35). The rules which regulated the duties to be paid on various forest products, control of their transportation, and the collection of timber, are to be found in Sections 39 to 51. The rest of the Act deals with "penalties and procedures", (Sections 52 to 68), cattle trespass (Sections 69 to 70), and subsidiary and miscellaneous rules (Sections 71 to 84).

The Forest Act strategy consisted of three salient features:
- I. to define terms or fix juridical markers;
- II. to assert and justify the powers of the state in matters related to forest policy, i.e. administrative division of territory, extraction and removal of forest produce;
- III. to legislate in case of challenges to its supremacy.

I. The preliminary definition of terms is a normal precaution and requires no special observation except, maybe, to note that "forest produce" included soil, laterite and all minerals. Anything extracted from a Reserved Forest was state property.

II. On the other hand, the definition of the extent of State authority in forestry matters was the central idea of the Act, and
assumes the existence of two parties of unequal strength. Before the Act, there was forest land, where people could fulfil their domestic needs freely whenever they wanted; in North Canara, there were no private forests and farmers could go wherever they wanted, except for some sacred forests, which were protected for religious purposes, as well as for ecological reasons. For a long time, a State monopoly had existed over the harvesting and trade of some valuable species such as Teak, Sandalwood and Ebony, and certain spices such as cardamom and pepper. But the colonial State granted to powerful Forest Settlement Officers the authority to disrupt this ancient order. To satisfy the new needs of the colony, the forest was divided into administrative categories with fixed rules of access and usage. The Land Acquisition Act of 1870 bestowed upon the State the power to acquire any land, private or otherwise, for reasons of state-approved utility. Thus, when creating a Reserved Forest, the Officer, even though inquiring into public rights, could easily close a forest.

Section 28 concerning Protected Forests, subtly shows the monopoly of the State, saying: "the rule is applicable to any forest land or waste land which is not included in a Reserved Forest, but which is the property of the government, or over which the government has proprietary rights, or to the whole or any part of the forest produce to which the government is entitled". It clearly indicates that outside the areas officially constituted as State land, the State retains all rights over any other forest produce, even on private lands. For example, the State can decide by notification to reserve any species of wood for its own use, to close a new area for 20 years, or to prohibit private collection of any forest produce. The "local government" has the power, among others, to grant or refuse felling licences to the local people, and to fix and modify the rates of taxes and duties payable.

III. What had previously formed part of the daily activities of the local farmers, e.g. clearing land for cultivation, setting fire to plots of jungle, and allowing animals to graze, became offences punishable with imprisonment for terms which could extend to six months (Section 32). Even those rights which were recognized were transformed into "privileges" which could be withdrawn at any time.

Whatever the justifications underlying the terms of this Forest Act, whether "the general interest" or a more rational and efficient forest management, it had several repercussions:

- the law gave to the State the legitimate right of property over all forest areas, as well as the power to decide anything

concerning the management of this natural resource; the local communities had no right to participate in the making of these decisions.

- through the Forest Settlement the entire territory was surveyed, divided and mapped out -ostensibly to enable better management, but this also ensured a total control over the land and the people; it made it easier subsequently to enrol local peasants more or less by force for forest labour;

- since the farmers were dispossessed of "their" forest, the "newly created forest" became a source of harassment and trouble: the aim became no longer to manage a communal good, but to take advantage of the situation whenever possible, which led to all sorts of abuses;

- the major consequence in the long term was that from the outset, the colonial state, through the Forest Department, created an unhealthy situation: the local people did not trust the foresters, who in turn did not consider the farmers to have any say in forest matters.

The "Régime forestier du Laos" was written in 1942, and is a compilation of the numerous orders and notifications issued in the different "Residencies" of the colony. The "Régime Forestier de l'Indochine" was published in 1930, but I was not able to find the original text. The text of 1942 takes into account the previous orders from the beginning of the century, and as it appears to be a complete text of law, it has been chosen as the major source of reference for this study.

The text is divided into seven chapters, and deals with "Classified" and "Protected" Forest estates, rights of usage, private forests and appropriations.

Under "Classified forest estates", there are four categories:
- the "Protection and production reserves" mean areas closed to exploitation for either ecological or economic reasons. Some valuable forests were intended to be submitted later to "rational extraction", when technical progress rendered them accessible, or in case of urgent need (Art. 5);
- "reafforestation perimeters" in impoverished natural forests as well as in barren waste lands (Art. 6),
- colonial or local forests, and
- provincial or communal forests.

As soon as work began in forests of the first two categories, e.g. survey, extraction, management, plantation, establishment, they were reclassified under the two last categories. They became "colonial", "local", "provincial" or "communal" forests according to the legal entity
to which they belonged, i.e. a village, an administration, a religious community, etc. (Art. 7.1). The management of colonial, provincial and local forests was the responsibility of the Governor General, while other forests were supervised by the "Résident Supérieur" (Art. 7.2).

All other forests, yet to be classified, were recorded as "Protected Forest estates" (Art. 4). The procedures of classification were the usual ones: after a survey and official inquiries into local rights and uses, the forest became part of a new administrative unit subject to new rules. Nevertheless, when compared with the Indian Forest Act, it is noticeable that in Indochina there was no counterpart of the Forest Settlement Officer. The concept of one officer invested with decision-making power, in charge of the survey and the delimitation of the forest once for all, was a crucial tool for the reorganisation of the forest territory. It is an indication of the autocratic will to control the land from the outset and in the long term. In Indochina, the Forest Department, in agreement with the Chief Administrator of the province, surveyed the proposed perimeter with the village authorities (Art. 8.1). A commission composed of 5 or more members inquired into the bona fide of people's rights prior to the classification of the reserve (Art. 8.3.). In this commission, the Government, the Forest and Agriculture Departments, a delegate of each respective commune affected by the perimeter, as well as a member of the "indigenous administration", were represented.

The Forests of the last two categories were open for strictly regulated logging. The timber species were classified according to their value, and the use of some species was subject to certain conditions (Art. 48 & 49). The Forest Department organised yearly public auction sales of coupes (Art 15 to 32). There was also a possibility of acquiring long-term contracts (Art. 33 to 35).

In "Protected" Forest estates, timber extraction was allowed everywhere within the framework of auction sales, under clauses defining allowable technical means of extraction, i.e. the kind of wood to be harvested, the range of heights and girths to be extracted, etc. (Art. 48 to 59). Selling prices and taxes for every category of wood were fixed and the transfer of the produce was regulated and controlled (Art. 60 to 74). Rights of use and pasture for domestic and private purposes were recognized (Art. 75 to 83), except in the case of reserved species.

In a private forest, the owner had practically free rein. The only restriction was that he had to refer to the Provincial Chief when he wanted to clear his forest, and the administrative authority could refuse the clearance on ecological and conservation grounds (Art. 114).

The "Régime Forestier du Laos" concentrates on:
- the definition of different categories of forests, with the procedure to be followed by the Administration to classify them;

- the economic activities allowed in the respective categories together with the types of contract in case of commercial exploitation, and the rights of use for domestic needs;

- the regulation of wood transfer, selling prices, and taxes to be levied by the Forest Department.

Since in Indochina there was no formal depossession of forest land, with surveys, map-making and recordings, there were no radically apparent changes in the daily life of the local people. Nevertheless, here too the introduction of new rules, which gradually became more numerous and exacting, must have annoyed the people dispossessed of their ancestral rights. Although they had to pay some taxes and to submit themselves to new extraction rules, the local traders could continue their work as before. It was only later, facing competition from French forest companies endowed with better equipment, more capital and long-term forest concessions, that the local economy may have been affected.

TWO TEXTS, TWO MENTALITIES

If we compare the objectives of the two "Forest Acts", some major differences appear, revealing two types of functioning which should be seen in their contexts.

In Canara, harvesting of the forest was done either by the Government Agency or by contractors, and the forest produce was brought to state depots and sold by auction. Nevertheless, statistics of the Canara Forest Department reports show that revenue under Heading I (Government Agency) scored heavily over Heading II (Contractors), both in proportion and value. Analysis of the breakdown of revenue by forest produce shows that the Government Agency took mainly timber, while the contractors also extracted firewood, bamboos, grazing and Minor Forest Produce. When it was newly created, the Forest Department had to prove and ensure its economic independence and efficiency. After some years of exploitation under private

15. Ribbentrop, B., op. cit., p. 68.
contract, it was decided to abolish this kind of work, because the forests were being overexploited, a lot of waste was taking place, and the Government was losing a lot of revenue in the process. To assure itself of monopoly rule in the forests, the Administration had to provide itself with a strong framework of laws. Becoming more or less the incontestable owner of all forest land, fixing strong limitations on access and controlling the timber-market, the Forest Department, once armed with these powers, was free to decide and to implement its Forest Policy.

In Indochina on the other hand, extraction was in the hands of private agencies run by Chinese and Malays, and later also by French expatriates. The Forest Department contented itself with collecting taxes and duties on auction sales, coupes and other products, whether sold locally or exported, transported or processed. To achieve this, it was not necessary to have strong rights over the land, but to have clear procedures of control over harvesting. This is also the reason why there are no detailed statistics on the harvesting of forest produce, since revenue was obtained through taxes and licence fees. This colonial situation should also be connected with the tradition in France, where the State never owned much forest, although there had been a tradition of forest management since the seventeenth century.

In these conditions, the "Régime forestier" appears more like a set of rules that can be adapted to developing circumstances, whereas the "Forest Act" is a code of law, written once and for all. The "Forest Act" governs a frame or structure; the "Régime Forestier" regulates the functioning of the system; the two legislations were not operating at the same level. The Indian Forest Act was also amended with rules such as the "Kanara Forest privileges rules", which took local conditions into account, but I did not find a French equivalent of the Indian Act in Indochina. Sources sometimes mention the "Code Forestier", but I do not think that its goals would have been significantly different from those of the "Régime Forestier". This difference of approach raises a few questions:

- from a sociological point of view, it does not seem that the relative flexibility of the French forest law was the outcome of any altruism; we shall later look in a more detailed manner at the place of human beings in the forest policy.

- the strength of the British forest establishment contrasts with an apparent lack of strength on the French side. The French foresters had colonial tropical forestry experience in North and West Africa, whereas the first British foresters in India had been trained on the continent. This was a deliberate choice on the part of the French, which reveals that either they were not interested in forest management, or that they did not have any
long-term policy. I am not talking of course about foresters at the field level, who must have had a passion for the marvellous forests; but I am questioning the political choice at the colony level. The Indochinese forests were not an important economic stake for the home country. The West and Central African forests were better known and closer, and had been supplying the tropical wood markets for a long time at cheaper rates. The Indochinese wood market on the other hand was confined to a relatively narrow range of species. The unexploited wealth of the forest actually increased the cost of extraction, as many trees without economic value had to be cleared to make way for species recognized as valuable. It seems that the administration in France did not really encourage private entrepreneurs in Indochina to invest in the timber trade. The National Committee for Tropical Woods created in 1920, alarmed by post-war scarcities, exerted pressure on the Ministry of Colonies for the popularisation of tropical woods, as well as encouragement of scientific research at the Technical Centre for Tropical Forestry (CTFT). The British were not concerned with such considerations, as in India logging was in the hands of the Department. Their major motivation for timber extraction was, of course, the development of the railway network. In India, the internal consumption of timber for the development of the colony was at a level beyond all comparison with that of Indochina. Of course, in Indochina too there was a considerable internal demand, which increased with the development of colonisation. Although there was only one major railway line from Hanoi to Saigon, coal mines in the North were an important consumer. But in fact the proportion of forest demand was much higher in Indochina, where 40% of the total area was covered by more or less virgin forests.

Since they were not really all that much affected by economic consideration, the French foresters would not have been under as much pressure as their British counterparts. This may be the reason why the Forest Department did not figure as a key department in Indochina.

Now let us take a look at the options available to the two Departments, before considering whether the French foresters took advantage of the fact that they were under less pressure to develop an appropriate forest policy. I have decided to focus my analysis on two topics: the place of human beings, and how much weight was given to ecological considerations in the French and British forest policies.

HUMAN BEINGS AND FOREST POLICY

In the Western Ghats, as in Indochina, the coastal plains are heavily populated, in contrast to the sparsely populated hill forests. Nevertheless, in Canara no major distinctions exist between the two societies. The forests sheltered an ancient system of areca-nut cultivation, in the hands of the Havig Brahmin community\textsuperscript{17}. Although they worked in their gardens themselves, these were aided by seasonal workers who lived around the landlord's house. Most of these were Siddies, a distinct exogenous group, descended from African slaves introduced into Goa by the Portuguese. Occasionally Kunbi Marathas, probably originating from Maharashtra, were also employed in the gardens during harvests\textsuperscript{18}. This group also practised shifting cultivation, known as "Kumri", on a small scale. Cattle breeding was practiced by the Gawlis and Dhangars, nomadic societies of graziers\textsuperscript{19}. Although these people were living in the forest, they had contacts with the lower ghat societies, made up of several castes of farmers, fishermen and Brahmins. There were no religious or ethnic distinctions between the two populations, which after all possessed similar roots and were, despite the presence of some Christians and Muslims, organised under the same Hindu social structures.

In Indochina the human facts are very different. There was a strong distinction between the coastal areas, inhabited by rice growers living in villages, and ruled by a centralised monarchy, and the wild, unknown and frightening forested hills\textsuperscript{20}. Their inhabitants, designated "Mois", meaning "wild", were shifting cultivators, free of any administration, sharing the cultivating and hunting land according to their own laws. They were actually "forest tribes" who knew every inch of their territories, possessing a wide knowledge of the vegetal world\textsuperscript{21}. They had ancient, but restricted, relations with the plainsmen, in order to exchange salt for certain medicines\textsuperscript{22}.

\textsuperscript{17} Campbell, J.M., \textit{op. cit.}, part II, p. 1.
\textsuperscript{18} Campbell, J.M., \textit{op. cit.}, part II, p. 217.
\textsuperscript{19} Campbell, J.M., \textit{op. cit.}, part II, p. 295.
\textsuperscript{20} Robecquain, Ch., \textit{L’évolution économique de l’Indochine}, Paris, 1939.
THE BRITISH AND THE VACUUM POLICY

As they wanted to rule the entire forest, the British foresters opted for the closure of the forests whenever possible. As grazing in Reserved Forests was forbidden, and strictly regulated in Protected Forests, the graziers had to fall back on the newly delimited pastur- lands. They consequently complained that these grazing areas were too small, and that the grass quality was poor. As it gradually became impossible for them to graze their herds elsewhere without the risk of being impounded, the Gawlis migrated into Mysore territory, or began to work as cowherds for local farmers.

Prior to 1862, only an average of 8000 acres of land was occupied by shifting cultivation every year. However the sustainability of this kumri cultivation was not officially recognized, and it was forbidden in 1862. It was tolerated again in 1864 in some areas of the district where the forest was found to be not as valuable as imagined earlier. The Kunbi Marathas who were dependent on it migrated first to Mysore territory and then, when it was also forbidden there, to Goa. The final prohibition of Kumri cultivation in Goa in 1894 left an entire population without any means of livelihood. Some decided to return to Canara, risking the destruction of their crops if their fields were discovered. Others became daily labourers or were successful in settling down as rice cultivators. After a while, the foresters realized that there was no labour-force left in the forest for harvesting timber. As there was pressure to once again permit shifting cultivation, this practice was rehabilitated under defined development schemes; the idea was to provide financial aid to the cultivators, allot them some forest land to cultivate, and in return they should practice the "Taungya" system as well as undertaking other work in the forest. These schemes were not wholly successful and involved only a few tens of families.

To some extent, the areca gardeners were saved by the part they were playing in the economy of the district. The Revenue Department,

23. See Revenue Department, Forest Proceedings n° 746 of 1/3/1901, n° 5425 of 15/7/1904...
25. See for example Revenue Department, Forest Proceedings: Hatch, G.W., Measures for the amelioration of the condition of the Kunbi Marathas in Bhatkal petha, 1/8/1904, n° 8454.
26. Sylviculture system first tried out in Burma: association of teak and crop during the first two years of plantation. The cultivators get free land and do some weeding in return.
keen on increasing its income, recognized the value of this type of
cultivation, and applied pressure on the Forest Department not to
restrict this culture. Areca cultivation requires a yearly supply of green
manure, traditionally collected in nearby forests known as "Bettas".
First the lopping of reserved species was forbidden, then the area of
Protected Forest which could be used for bettas was restricted to the
scale of 8 acres of betta for 1 acre of areca garden. As the foresters
feared possible extension of garden cultivation, the total area of betta
land was fixed once and for all, through the Forest Settlement. The
farmers complained that they were not allowed to lop certain species
which they considered more nutritional. This discontentment was
aggravated by the damage caused in their gardens by wild animals that
they were not allowed to hunt, and led towards a productivity crisis.27
As the Brahmins were organized in a strong, socially powerful group,
their grievances sometimes reached Bombay. During this period, an
opposition, first sporadic then organised, revealed deep-rooted
structural problems in the forest policy. Although the Forest Policy
Statement of 1894 committed the forest management to the fulfilment of
agricultural needs, which after all was a source of considerable income,
this resolution remained a pious wish.

Although the Brahmin cultivators did not migrate, there was a
noticeable decrease in population in the hill areas throughout the
district, and this was one of the issues discussed by the farmers.28 The
reasons for this decrease are still not clear, and though they may have
been an outcome of the forest policy restrictions, they may also have
been due to a general change in the local economic conditions: for
example, the development of cotton cultivation drained labour force,
attracted by better salaries, to the Dharwar district.

This examination of the human consequences of the forest policy
would need more detailed study and could be discussed at more length.
But it indicates that, except when urged by the Revenue Department,
the British foresters did not consider the human factor as an integral
part of the forest. People were tolerated in the forest as long as they
worked for the Forest Department. Unfortunately, this image of the bad
farmer unable to manage the forest, even bent on its destruction, is still
very much alive in the minds of the foresters, and it is only in the last
couple years that they have begun to be trained in social welfare.

27. A representation to the Collector treating at length some of the grievances
   embodied in the preceding statement, Kunta, 1918.
28. Joshi, N.G., Karmarkar, D.P. & Nayak, T.S., Agrarian distress in Sirsi and
   Siddapur, 1931, Dharwar, p. 6.
THE FRENCH AND THE SETTLEMENT POLICY

As they were almost the only groups living in the hills of Indochina, the minorities there were the French foresters' target. Their attitude towards shifting cultivation, the "Ray", was also negative. The "Ray", practiced by approximately 800,000 people, was probably the only possible cultivation system adapted to the extreme local conditions of slopes, soils, and rains, and fire was used as a mean of fertilisation; nevertheless it was perceived as a threat to the forest wealth.

In fact, the antagonism lay more in the contrast between the thinly populated hills and the overcrowded plains. On the banks of the Mekong, the human density was 110/km², and in the Red River delta it reached 430/km², while it was 2/km² in the Western Provinces and 17/km² in Cambodia. So, justified by increasing demographic pressure, the state encouraged a "little colonisation" scheme, through the granting of "agricultural concessions". Before 1921, 287,950 hectares of concessions had been granted all over Indochina, and after that the wave expanded at an annual average of 60,178 hectares till 1930. At the same time, rubber cultivation was developing. In 1908, 400 hectares were planted, and in 1940 no less than 1,308,000 hectares had been laid out. It really started in Cochin China in 1907 at a family level, and then spread through capitalist ventures. The Indochina Bank gave its support to credit, while corvées were instituted to develop the communications network in the Red Lands. In this way the minorities were gradually dispossessed of their habitat. In 1878, the inhabitants of the district of Chanh-Myitta in Annam took possession of 50,000 ha of land belonging to the "Mois", who were forced into slavery. It was only in 1928 that an order set some limit to the concession system in areas inhabited by mountain dwellers. But it was already too late: the traditional system was disrupted, and many died. For those who survived, the forest, once ruled by sacred laws, had lost its sacred aura, and the ancestral rules were no longer followed as

35. Henri, A., Projet de mise en valeur du domaine forestier de la colonie, Saigon, 1881.
before. At a time when the forest area was literally disappearing, the prescribed fallow periods ceased to be respected, which in the tropical conditions of heavy rains and thin soil led to dramatic, irreversible erosion. The minorities had no power, and had always been disregarded by the majority ethnic groups of the plains\textsuperscript{36}; thus their grievances never reached the capital. This ethnocide was never recorded, but has to be ascribed to the colonial establishment as a whole rather than to the foresters in particular.

As the French were not really very interested in the forest as such, they chose the option of expanding cash-crop plantations, mainly rubber. While the British were closing their forests in Canara, the French colonial administration lent its support to the invasion of the forest.

In neither case was the local people’s opinion or welfare ever taken into account.

**FOREST POLICY AND ECOLOGY: WHAT DEGREE OF AWARENESS?**

For lack of sufficient data, I cannot precisely assess the scale of the environmental degradation in the two countries.

The Canara forest was jealously guarded from human invasion, and aggression on the environment must have been confined to timber extraction. Since the foresters were following guidelines laid down by the Working Plans, elaborated for a rational and sustainable management, overexploitation of the forest should not have occurred. But unfortunately, during the First World War and subsequently, fellings in the area increased considerably\textsuperscript{37}. We do not have any records of these.

In Indochina, on the contrary, degradation must have been considerable because a lot of deforestation took place. But, as this ecological imbalance has since been aggravated by the impact of war, it is still more difficult to assess the extent of the damage.

We can try to ascertain the degree of ecological awareness among foresters and the public. As already mentioned, no ecological descriptions are found in the administrative reports of the Canara district, and almost none in the Forest Proceedings. When foresters complained about the damage caused by shifting cultivation or cattle-rearing, they were referring to economic losses, rather than to erosion

\textsuperscript{36} Robequain, Ch., *op. cit.*

\textsuperscript{37} See Forest Administrative Reports, 1920s.
as a result of overgrazing or agriculture. The foresters themselves practiced clear cutting, which in tropical conditions is a real error. It cannot be denied that at a national level there were discussions about ecological changes due to the reduction of forest; but it appears that these did not particularly concern the district of Canara. One reason for this might be that since the pressure of human settlement was less pronounced in Canara, ecological changes there were not obvious enough to alarm anyone.

In contrast, in Indochina, where the attack on the environment was more severe, some foresters seem to have been concerned about it from the very beginning. According to the source, one notes impacts at three levels:

- climate change: today, the influence of the afforestation rate on climate is still a controversial issue. In 1891, A. Henri maintained that the Conchinchina climate had been modified over thirty years. At the beginning of the century, many papers were published on this subject.

- hydrological disturbances: in this region, where floods of the Red River are ruinous, regulation of the water flow is an ancient concern. An order from the Mûnh-Mang Emperor forbade clearances along the river banks; but after the French conquest such rules were cast aside. In 1912, R. Ducamp said that any plan to control the river had to be coordinated with an effective forest policy.

- increased erosion: this may have been the major outcome. As early as 1898, Mr. Capus, Director of Agriculture and Trade, pointed out that development of rubber plantations was unequal in a cleared forest. In 1926, analysis showed that the Red River carried 80 million cubic meters of alluvium, forming earth layers of more than 300 m. per year! The silting up of Haiphong port was already noticed in 1912. In 1937, R. Ducamp in response to the threat of the silting up of all Cambodia, asked for 7 million hectares of Reserved Forest estates to be created.

It was only in 1937, in Paris, during the seventh International Congress of Tropical and Subtropical Agriculture, that for the first time

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41. Ducamp, R., "L'envasement du port d'Haiphong", in BEI, 1898.
42. Capus, "Plantes à caoutchouc en Indochine", in BEI, 1898.
43. Ducamp, R., Article de presse, in *La Vérité du Cambodge*, 1937.
the Assembly officially took note in its report of the alarm of the foresters. And this slow growth of awareness led to the International Conference on Nature Protection in Asia and Africa in London in 1939.44

In both colonies, the action taken to avert ecological disaster was more or less the same: fire was identified as the major enemy, and was combated by means of a network of firebreaks created and maintained with the aid of the local population45; shifting cultivation was forbidden or circumscribed; in Indochina, trees were planted in strips along roads and river banks and on deforested hills46. But there was no questioning of the Forest Policy: the foresters never proposed reducing forest exploitation, but grew ever more vociferous in their accusations against the bad behaviour of local farmers.

CONCLUSION

As I have not examined the sources exhaustively, I will conclude with caution. It has been seen that the two approaches to forest management were basically different. The British one can be characterised by a strong will to control all forest areas, including their inhabitants, as well as the extraction and trade of forest produce. In Canara, this policy was translated into a drastic reduction in the rights of the local people, while an extraction, whose ecological impacts are difficult to assess, was taking place. The French forest administration was less strong, and did not aim to control the forest territory so much, and it seems to have been determined by the general policy of colonisation, which encouraged the development of agriculture. Considering that the Indochinese forests appeared large and inexhaustible, while the Central African forests were supplying the metropolitan demand, I would suggest that the main reason for these differences is an economic one. First, the Indochinese forests did not play a crucial role in the French economy, whereas the Indian forests, which were proportionally less extensive than those in Indochina, were still playing an important role in the development of the railways47 as well as in the general growth of the colony. Most probably, the Indian forests were important for the home country, since India was a key

component of the British Empire. The idea that forests represented a larger stake in the economic development of India and the United Kingdom ought to be highlighted by more in-depth studies.

Although the local conditions were different and the two home countries had different aims and means, the results were almost the same. The environment was put under a new pressure without precedent in scale and density and was unbalanced, in certain areas of Indochina, irreversibly. Although forest areas were protected from clearance and human cultivation in Canara, this does not mean that the environment was not disturbed by increasing exploitation. Two quite different policies, one of emptying, the other of populating the forest managed to completely disrupt the former way of life of existing societies in the name of "public interest". The contempt for human rights in the forest shown by most foresters created communication gaps which have still not been bridged.

Unfortunately, neither of the newly independent countries have drawn any lessons from this. In Canara, the same forest management pattern has been perpetuated, exacerbated by an increasing demographic pressure. As the local people were again not taken into consideration, no trust exists between the two factions, and it will be more difficult to diffuse the tense situation. In Viet-Nam, after almost thirty years of war and a "vietnamisation" of the administration, there are no traces of the French past (as far as forest administration is concerned); but also nothing has been done for conservation or for a better management of what was one thought to be an inexhaustible green gold mine! Ironically, it seems that neither following the legacy of colonial history, nor rejecting it completely could integrate new human, economic or ecological circumstances. It may be hoped, however, that due consideration of the story of these two experiences will lead to the formulation of new forest policies determined by a better understanding of the human factor.
La foresterie britannique dans les Ghâts occidentaux (Inde) et la foresterie française en Indochine : une comparaison

L’analyse comparative des politiques et des méthodes de gestion et d'exploitation forestières suivies par les Anglais en Inde et par les Français en Indochine fait apparaître des différences significatives. L’administration et la législation forestières étaient plus rigoureuses dans l’Inde britannique, plus lâches et souples en Indochine française, sans doute parce que les forêts indochinoises ne représentaient pour la France qu’un enjeu économique secondaire par comparaison avec celles de l’Afrique noire.

Le traitement réservé aux populations des zones forestières était également différent. Les forestiers britanniques en Inde ont eu tendance à considérer le paysan comme un agent destructeur, et à l’exclure de la forêt autant qu’il était possible. En Indochine, les forestiers coloniaux ont au contraire favorisé le peuplement des forêts en y attirant les activités agricoles par l’octroi de concessions, non sans graves dommages pour les minorités ethniques qui y vivaient.

L’étendue de la dégradation du couvert forestier dans les deux colonies est difficile à évaluer faute de données précises. La politique de conservation dans les deux cas a essentiellement consisté en mesures de protection contre le feu (et notamment contre l'agriculture itinérante).

Ni l’Inde ni les pays d’Indochine n’ont malheureusement tiré, après leur accession à l’indépendance, la leçon des politiques forestières suivies à l’époque coloniale.

Mots-clés : Inde, Ghâts occidentaux, Indochine, Colonisation française,
colonisation anglaise, Environnement, forêts, politiques forestières

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