

Indian Forest Act, 1927

The Indian Forest Act was **first enacted in 1865**. The Indian Forest Act was **amended** in 1878 and once again it was amended in 1927. The Indian Forest Act, 1927 did not focus on the conservation of forests, rather the laws of the British Colonial Government focused on control of extraction of timber from the forests.

Indian Forest Act - Reasons for Implementation of New Forest Laws

- The British wanted forests in order to meet the demands of the massively expanding railways.
- Expansion of railways was very important for the movement of Imperial troops and to carry out trade.
- Wood was needed to lay down railway sleepers, and it also served as fuel for running locomotives.
- There was a problem of timber supply for the Royal British Navy. They needed wood to build their ships in order to protect their massive empire.
- The British were worried about the use of forests in India by the local people.
- All these reasons led to the implementation of forest laws by the Colonial British Government.

Indian Forest Act - Division of Forests into 3 Categories

As per the Indian Forest Act of 1878, the forests in India were divided into 3 different categories.

- Reserved Forests
- Protected Forests
- Village Forests

Villagers could not take anything from the Reserved Forests for their own use. Villagers could use the forest products only from the village forests and protected forests, either to build their house or for fuel.

Impact of Indian Forest Act on Villagers Across the Country

There was a very severe negative impact on villagers across the country due to the Indian Forest Act of 1927.

- Fishing, hunting, collecting roots and fruits, grazing the cattle, and cutting wood became illegal activities.
- Due to the restrictions imposed by Indian Forest Act, villagers were compelled to steal wood by entering forests without permission.
- The villagers were forced to offer bribes to forest guards as they were at the mercy of these forest guards who would capture these villagers.
- The villagers were also harassed to give free food to these forest guards and police constables.

Indian Forest Act - Impact on Cultivation

Through the Indian Forest Act, the British colonial government decided to **ban shifting cultivation** which was practiced by villagers. This resulted in forcible displacement of many communities from their homes in forests.

- Villagers used to practice shifting cultivation.
- The British believed that the practice of shifting cultivation would affect the supply of timber for railways.
- They also thought that valuable timber would be lost in flames, as shifting cultivation involved cutting forest and burning them in rotation.
- The Government also found it difficult to calculate the taxes due to shifting cultivation.
- As a result shifting cultivation was banned by the Government.

Indian Forest Act - Loss of Livelihoods for Nomads

- Many nomadic communities like the Yerukula of the Madras Presidency, Korava, and Karacha lost their livelihoods due to the restrictions imposed on hunting and grazing by the local people. Some of the tribes were branded as 'criminal tribes'.
- Under strict supervision of the British colonial government, they were forced to work in mines, factories and plantations.

- Workers were not allowed to visit their homes, their working conditions were very poor and their wages were very low.
- The tea plantations in Assam had workers from forest dwelling communities like Gonds of Chhattisgarh, Oraons and Santhals of Jharkhand.

Indian Forest Act - Rebellion in the Forests

- Forest Communities in different parts of India rebelled against the British colonial Government due to the restrictions imposed on them.
- Some of the most popular leaders who carried out rebellion in forests were Alluri Sitarama Raju of Andhra Pradesh, Birsa Munda of Chhotanagpur, Siddhu and Kanu in the Santhal Parganas.

Forest Conservation in India

- To address the problem of deforestation, the Forest Conservation Act (FCA), 1980, came into force.
- The Forest Conservation Act was amended twice in 1988 and 1996.