

Conservation and Management of Biological Resources in Himalaya

P. S. Ramkrishnan, A. N. Purohit, K. G. Saxena, K. S. Rao and R. K. Maikhuri, eds. G. B. Pant Institute of Himalayan Environment and Development, Koshi-Katarmal, Almora and Oxford & IBH Publishing Co. Pvt. Ltd., 66, Janpath, New Delhi 110 001. Price Rs. 950. 603 pp.

Biodiversity is these days a hot topic. A number of scientists, policy makers, administrators and even politicians are expressing their concern and crying out for conservation of biological resources. How genuine their concerns and cry are, are reflected in their resource allocation towards biodiversity conservation, adoption of biodiversity-friendly lifestyle, amount of genuine differences they tolerate and the value system promoting diversity they practise. Talking too much about ethics without doing something would not help conserve biodiversity either. A number of people have discussed and put together their ideas and experiences regarding conservation of biological resources in Himalaya in the form of this book and thus done something for the sake of biodiversity. It is up to the larger society to see value in this book and play its role in sustainable use and conservation of biodiversity.

This book is the result of a regional seminar held at Srinagar, Garhwal during 21–30 September 1993. The book contains 36 chapters that are organized into five sections. (The preface of the book mistakenly says four sections.) Section 1 gives the setting of issues and priorities in regional/national context, specifically in the context of Himalayan region though there are studies from other regions as far as Sri Lanka and Iran. Other sections deal with a variety of issues relevant to biodiversity and its management. The book seems to have chapters containing mere ideas, opinion, suggestions, and recommendations (e.g., Chapters 2, 16) as well as those with backing of facts and figures and long-drawn experience (e.g., Chapters 6, 8, 11). The general trend in these chapters is to point out the conservation and management problems and prescribe/offer/suggest a few remedial measures based on their experience. However,

majority of the suggested remedial measures are not very convincing and often do not lead us anywhere as they lack supporting data.

In Chapter 1, the authors wish for revival of traditional land rights system and policy changes for NTFP-based economic benefits to the local populace. Pointing towards a mismatch between local knowledge and market values of species, the contributors give examples of seven wild species having no local uses but with high price and market demand. They speculate that such species have the risks of unsustainable extraction. As a policy suggestion, they wish that taxes should be proportionate to the market price/demand of the species. In the next sentence, they also opine that a high rate of taxation becomes a disincentive for sustainable utilization. Such statements without saying how much of tax and why, may not lead us in devising and operationalizing a system for conservation and use of biodiversity. However, the suggestion made in the next paragraph is useful since it states clearly that to capitalize upon the benefits of biodiversity, local communities would have to make themselves aware of the technological developments, market intelligence, and organize themselves for co-operative marketing to resist economic exploitation.

In Chapter 6, the authors rightly spell out that conservation concerns are more often expressed than practised. Consensus on modalities of conservation among different sections of society is essential. On the one hand, diversity of socio-economic and environmental conditions is responsible for maintenance of biodiversity and on the other hand, differences lead to various complex problems in the way of conservation. In the ultimate analysis, people living in and around the wilderness or natural areas find themselves pushed to the corner and conservation being thrust upon them. The authors conclude that the long-term conservation goals and rural development schemes will have to be made compatible rather than conflicting. There is doubt whether development is possible without conservation.

Most of the authors lament about bad state of management of biological resources and forests whereas Htun Paw Oo of Myanmar (Chapter 8) boasts of

their sound forest policy and disciplined management system called Myanmar Selection System. This 130-year-old management system has maintained its resources in an enviable state with a sustained yield. Myanmar's Forest Act of 1992 also seems to be effective as it clearly states its legislation regarding conservation. Similarly, Htun Paw Oo says that there is a strong tradition of public participation in Myanmar, whereas the authors of Chapter 6 speculate that the current system of management may be repelling to the native people (in India). Therefore, there is need for introspection about repelling nature of management system and non-participation of local populace in India. In Chapter 9, M. K. Giri rightly points out that population growth is a big problem and hence the environmental awareness is either almost non-existent in several areas or people pretend not to understand environmental significance so that they can use the resource for their livelihood.

According to M. Vannucci, total conservation is utopia. He argues for rational use and management. He proposes a health care delivery system and medicinal plants to meet the twin objectives of conservation of genetic diversity and development of the society in Kumaon and Garhwal. Chapter 17 articulates the need for protected areas with examples like the story of two kernels of rice providing resistance to grassy stunt virus, and importance of ecological interrelationship among components of biodiversity to man. The authors also appeal to the wildlife and forest managers and people to be co-operative for sharing the benefits of conservation. However, they are aware of the harsh realities of internal differences, class, caste and political conflicts.

The discipline of biodiversity is still in the stage of infancy and generally people talk about higher animals and plants in the name of biodiversity. This trend is broken in Chapter 18 by L. R. Verma by talking about a very useful and diverse segment of the lower organisms – the insects. However, there are no authors invited to contribute about the diversity of many other lower organisms. Similarly, most of the authors talk about presence/availability/existence of organisms of their interest but not much

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about abundance. That is why a number of users of biodiversity would not find this book very useful to them in their decision making. One also wonders whether it is worth paying Rs 950/- for this book. A few paragraphs on medicinal plants (Chapter 11) indicating their

whereabouts and a full chapter (Chapter 35) on their cultivation, and similar useful information may help the readers in this regard. Using and finding uses of biodiversity is a better way of conserving biodiversity than just shouting conservation. Authors and editors of this

book have given some information in the right direction.

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MEETINGS/SYMPOSIA/SEMINARS

85th Indian Science Congress

Date: 3-7 January 1998
Place: Hyderabad

The focal theme has been chosen as 'Science and Technology in Independent India: Retrospect and Prospect'. There will be arrangements for lectures, discussions on technical and innovative aspects of science education, home science, science & society, communication & information science, environmental science, forensic science, science for school students, etc. and societal problems pertaining to people's interest.

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National Symposium on Biopesticides and Insect Pest Management

Date: 26-27 February 1998
Place: Chennai

The broad themes covered will be: Botanicals and their role in agriculture; Microorganisms in insect-pest management; and Chemistry of plant products in relation to insect pest control.

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National Seminar on Recent Trends of Geoscientific Investigations in Narmada Valley

Date: 20-21 February 1998
Place: Ujjain

The seminar is an effort to bring together researchers from various disciplines interested in Narmada Valley research programmes and will focus on recent developments, gap in existing knowledge and future course of research.

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National Conference on Recent Trends in Spices & Medicinal Plant Research and the 7th Annual Meeting of the Academy of Plant Sciences, India

Date: 2-4 April 1998
Place: Calcutta

The following topics will be covered by invited and contributed papers: Chemistry and bioactivity of natural products; Oleoresins, aromatics, natural flavouring and colouring substances; Medicinal properties of spices; Preservation, processing and trade of spices and medicinal plants; Genetic stock identification, biodiversity and conservation; Productivity and cultivation; Micropropagation, production of secondary metabolites in tissue culture; Spices and medicinal plants in rural economy; Export market, collaboration, IPR and gene patenting.

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