

Menace of Illicit Felling and Timber Smuggling

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Abstract

Only after the last tree has been cut down, only after the last river has been poisoned, only after the last fish has been caught, only then will you find that you cannot eat money.

-Cree Prophecy, Native American.

India has seen a triumphant increase in the total forest area by 3775 sq. km. as reported by the Forest Report 2015, on the other hand, there have been innumerable cases of illegal felling of trees and growing unauthorised trade in Timberwood. Efforts have been made to curb this menace, the Indian Forest Act, 1927 does not categorically prohibits felling of trees however it restricts any act in prohibition of any rules made by State Government. Maharashtra & Himachal Pradesh are a few states which has prohibited felling of trees however the actuality of implementation is debatable.

The authors will discuss the development of various state provisions regarding felling of trees through case laws, its current position and impact on environment. The authors will further discuss violation of the general provision to not trade in timber thereby analysing the role of Mafia in Timber Smuggling and its overall effect on environment for only India but also the world. Specific case study of the state of Himachal Pradesh, Kerala, and Maharashtra etc. will be made to understand, both illicit felling and timber smuggling, and the ground reality of implementation of provisions thereby assessing the outcome of abovementioned provisions.

Keywords: *Timber smuggling, Felling of trees, environmental damage, Timber Mafia, Curbing menace.*

I. Introduction

The concept of reserved forest started from when India was ruled by British. Certain forests were given protection under the crown. After independence, this status was to continue. Permission has to be taken to enter the forest; cutting of trees is prohibited with a few exceptions to the local population who depends on the forest to survive. 70 years later, the practice of cutting trees from reserved lands and smuggling them across international borders has become a common practice. The act of cutting down trees is known as felling. The Trees are chopped for their use for timber. Oxford Dictionary defines timber as the wood 'prepared for use in building and carpentry. Therefore the menace of felling and smuggling timber should be stopped before it is too late and reach a point from where mankind cannot return, ever.

A new-born tree will take 20-30 years to fully grow, the rate we are cutting down trees does not compensate for the loss of trees even if we grow trees regularly. This process is called forest regeneration but the practice is followed by almost none, however, a practice common to many is deforestation. Deforestation according to Oxford Dictionary means 'the action of clearing a wide area of trees', a practice which is, unfortunately, common to mankind. Population bomb and growing economy put pressure on the forests to provide for timber and area.