

Democratizing Forest Governance in India



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The forest sector in India is currently going through an unprecedented churning. Every dimension of forestrelated decision-making, including rights of local communities, conversion of forests to non-forest uses and setting aside forests for wildlife conservation, has become the subject of intense scrutiny, debate and change. The involvement of multiple actors, from local communities to the Supreme Court, marks a shift in the discourse from forest management to forest governance. Questions of forest rights, responsibilities, regulatory structures, transparency and accountability have increasingly become central to the discourse. The need to democratize all these components of forest governance is being repeatedly articulated. This book highlights this shift in the discourse and analyses the complex issues involved in bringing about democratic governance of forests in India. The essays in this book review developments over the last two decades along four dimensions: forests for local management, forests for wildlife conservation, conversion to non-forest purposes, and the wider socio-economic context and how it poses challenges to the idea of democratic governance. The themes range from the relevance of the Joint Forest Management programme, the contribution of the Forest Rights Act, the complexities of the Godavarman case and the changes in the Wildlife Act to challenges posed by shifting cultivation, scientific versus traditional knowledge, and the effect of economic growth on forest dependence.

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