



## **Ban on Grazing**



Two decades ago, Sikkim forests had witnessed rampant and large scale grazing in the mountainous region. The whole phenomena started from the mid twentieth century, when transborder *Bhutia* yak herders from eastern Nepal started migrating and settled in the border villages of West Sikkim adjacent to KNP. With the merger of Sikkim into India in 1975, rapid development created new opportunities and markets. In order to meet the growing demand for dairy products, the herd size of the recently introduced pastoral systems like the yak and the cow yak crossbreeds started increasing. The increase in the cattle population resulted in the increased pressure on the fragile mountain eco-system.

History is thus proof to the rampant traditional grazing practice and the consequential deterioration to the endemic eco-system in Sikkim. In 1998 Government of Sikkim imposed ban on Grazing in reserved forest areas, plantation areas and water sources areas. This age old system of grazing was thrown over thus set the tone for umpteen numbers of follow-up policy and legal inroads that led to the forest floor becoming clear of this nuisance and menace.

The effects of which reflects its visibility in the recent years. Forests regenerating with natural succession, water-regime in the catchment areas improved, sick and dying lakes brimming with water, more water flowing down the streams and streamlets than before. Wildlife, avian-fauna and wilderness areas being better adapted leading to increase in population on account of creating an ideal habitat for their living, breeding and propagating. All of these project a positive natural scenario that speaks of sustainability and viability of life support systems in the hills and valleys of Sikkim.

Since a strong conservation oriented policies and programmes were put foreword by the forest department, forest cover in Sikkim have registered a substantial increase from 37.34% to 47.59%

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during this fifteen years from 1994 and 2010. These are no mean achievements considering the fact that forest resources in many States of India and even the world are registering a serious decline.

In response to the ban on grazing and the increase in forest cover, an independent survey was conducted by a Noida based non-governmental organization 'INSCRIPTION' whose report has been published in Down-to-Earth magazine found Sikkim to rate the highest in Forest Protection Index among all States of India.



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**Cattle sheds (*goth*) in Barsey Rhododendron Sanctuary which now have been removed after the ban on Grazing.**