

A study on Participatory Community Biodiversity Management practices of *Malayali tribes of KolliHills in South India*

Introduction

India is rich in biodiversity and associated traditional knowledge. India with only 2.4% the world's area, it is home for over 8% of its Biological diversity and is also one of the 17 mega-diversity countries of the world. It has been recognized that valuable and productive biological resources that are crucial for sustainable economic development. The rural populations of India always believe that biodiversity is important for their livelihood and survival. Biodiversity is often defined as the variety of all life forms-the different plants, animals and microorganisms; the genes they contain and the ecosystems of which they form a part.

Varieties of plants and animals genetic resources are domesticated by human beings. Agro biodiversity in the tribal and rural areas that played a significant role in the safeguarding the food and nutritional security of the society. Contributions of the Tribal and Rural families are remarkable.

However in recent times, due to various socio economic changes, the biodiversity and associated traditional knowledge is eroding in the rural and tribal areas results in the poverty, hidden hunger and Malnutrition. Therefore, it is timely need to understand the participatory approaches that has enabled community to conserve, use and sustainably manage the natural resources. One such initiative has been demonstrated in KolliHills which forms its part of Eastern ghats of south India. The "4Cs integrated approach" (Conservation, cultivation, Consumption and Commerce) has helped the tribal farm families to conserve and effectively manage the agro biodiversity. This people initiative has help to not only conserve the local biodiversity and also provided them strength and capacities, skill sets, increased awareness, mobility and public participation in decision making processes. Besides, stakeholders of initiatives had opportunities to increase their economic status and to access developmental infrastructure to manage their bioresources. Understanding these initiatives would help researcher to document the processes, impact and possible improvements areas that would further shape the community biodiversity management practices.

Project Location:

Kolli Hills located in the extreme eastern part of Namakkal district of Tamil Nadu. It is bounded on the North by Namagiripet Block, east by Uppiliapuram Block (Trichirapalli District), West by Sendamangalam and Erumaipatty Blocks and South by Erumaipatty Block. It falls within the following coordinates, Longitude: 78⁰17'05''E to 78⁰27'45''E and Latitude: 11⁰55'05''N to 11⁰21'10''N in S.O.I topo sheets 581/8. They spread over an area of 28 293 ha and agricultural activities take place in 51.6 percent of the total area; the forest occupies 44 percent; and other activities. The total Geographical area account for 36,397.06 ha. Concern less than five percent of the territory. The area receives an average of 1440 mm annual rainfall distributed fairly over the two seasons. The elevation ranges between 1 000 and 1 350 metres. Irrigation facilities are available to less than 15 percent of the area through springs and wells. The remainder is under rain-fed farming. The agricultural season starts with the onset of the southwest monsoon in June-July.

The Semmedu is headquarter of Kolli Hills is located about 60 km away from the district headquarters. Kolli Hills consist of 16 revenue panchayats (14 Village panchayats). Kolli Hills block has 16 inhabited revenue villages comprise of 273 settlements of which 266 are electrified. The total population of Namakkal district is 14.96 lakh, of which, the ST population is 0.51 lakhs. Total population in Kolli Hills is about 36,525. Of this, 95.43% (34,854) belongs to Scheduled tribes. Kolli Hills constitutes about 68.34 % of the total tribal population in the district.

The Study area like KolliHills is inhabited by a group of tribal community known as "Malayali", and total population is about 36,525. Of this, 95.43% (34,854) belongs to Scheduled tribes. Kolli Hills constitutes about 95.43% of tribal population and about 68.34 % of the total tribal population in the district.

The history of these hills took a major change with the arrival of "*Malaiyali*" community. There are very little historical evidences regarding the movement of the Malaiyali into KolliHills. The myths connected to the migration of the Malaiyali community into Kolli Hills have been well described by Thurston (1909). These

descriptions have been corroborated by the oral history of some of the hereditary leaders such as *pattakaran*, *sadhi koundan* and *kangani*. According to Thurston (1909) the word Malayali denotes inhabitant of the hills (Malai = hills). Malayali believe that they are Vellalas who migrated to various hills including Kolli hills from Kanchipuram.

Thurston (1909) does not consider Malayalis as tribals. He argues “ The Malayalis have not... like Todas of Nilagiris, any claim to be considered as an ancient hill tribe, but are Tamil speaking people, who migrated from the plains to the hills in comparatively recent times”. Many authors including Thurston have shown that Malayali do not have tribal qualities. The Malayalis call themselves as “*Malai-Vazh-Makkal*” (people of hills) and not as “*Pazhang-Gudi-Makkal*” (Original people). However, they have been recognized by Government of India as Scheduled Tribe due to their social and economic backwardness and they are entitled to all the rights and benefits provided for Scheduled Tribes.

M.S.Swaminathan Research foundation has been facilitating participatory research with Farm families of Kolli Hills since 1996. The following table indicates wide range of activities adopted by the communities that have helped them to manage the resources effectively.

Activities of the CBM group at Kolli Hills
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Mobilization, Rapport building and Self Help Groups formation for Community Institution building , organising for participatory research and training to understand the dynamic changes in life and livelihoods
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Seeds collection, Multiplication, Seed Banks (Thombai, Barrels), Seed exchange and Promotions of relay cropping, Vegetable garden through distribution of seeds ○ Mini percolation Ponds for effective use of water for crops
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Characterization of local landraces as well as improved varieties to ensure Quality Seed Availability and distribution at cluster of villages
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Millet supply chain Management - Building capacities to prepare diversified Nutritional Millets products through Value addition, exposure to Machinery, Marketing linkages and Markets, ensuring quality of supply chain

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Promotion of Organic Farming through Public Private Partnership (PPP) approach and Organic input preparation, Vermicomposting and NADEP composting
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Documentation and Disseminations of lessons - Folk Songs, Traditional Knowledge related to Recipes of millets, Sacred forest conservation, Millets Farming - Print, Audio, Video and participation in the Academic and Non Academic events
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Infrastructure developments for the Grassroots institutions(SHG) for effective usage of resources
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Institutionalized (Village Millet Resource Centers)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Clusters formation and institutionlising the efforts
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Recognition of Traditional knowledge holders, Folk players, panchayat leaders, Leading animators

Study Sites:

Community Biodiversity Management study will be conducted in two hamlets namely **Arippalapatti** in Devanur panchayat and **Padasolai** in Thiruppuli panchayat in KolliHills. These areas are rich in biodiversity such as Natural forests, Sacred forest, Animal husbandry and crop genetic diversity particularly millet diversity. These communities have adopted Participatory method in Biodiversity conservation, Natural resource Management, Poverty reduction oriented activities. CBM study will be conducted with stakeholder includes the Farmers, Self help Groups, Panchayat leaders, Block development Officials, Market Agents, Researchers, Policy makers using participatory research tools and application.

Objectives of the CBM study in Kolli Hills

The present study will be carried out with following objectives:

- a. Understanding the role of Malayali Tribes in Managing biodiversity resources in Kolli Hills
- b. Chronicling, documenting and sharing the CBM processes of the Initiative (KHABCOFED) Kolli Hills Agrobiodiversity Conserver's Federation

CBM study in KolliHills involves the following steps:

- a. Understanding the global CBM study questionnaire and survey tools
- b. Customization of the survey instruments for the study location
- c. Translating the survey instrument into the local language
- d. Finalizing criteria for study site
- e. Selection of sites for CBM study
- f. Random selection of samples
- g. Implementation of survey
- h. Deploying the study tools envisaged under global CBM study
- i. Analyzing and preparation of draft report