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Traditional Resource Management of Kurichya Joint Families And Decentralization in Kerala



Wayanad is one of the Bio diversity hotspot in the western Ghats of south India. The Agriculture economy of the district is in distress because of the neoliberal policies followed by the central government. The environmental degradation due to changing land use priorities and development interventions are another threat to the agrarian communities. Wayanad is witnessing large scale setbacks from environmental crisis. Depletion of ground water level and drinking water shortage demands paddy field protection and revival of rice cultivation in the region. The area under rice cultivation has come down to 10,000 hectors which was 40,000 hectors in 1990. After 17 years of decentralized development planning to achieve sustainability through effective management of natural resource, a resource rich region like Wayanad is still in distress.



Pady fields of Wayanad has to be protected, paddy cultivation in Wayanad has to be promoted.

Why paddy fields are being converted ???



No profit, high labour charge, low labour availability, water shortage, no support from the Government, no subsidy for food crops.



We Kurichya the traditional Adivasi farmers do rice cultivation, We protect 20 land races of paddy, 12 varieties of banana, many trees and vegetables in our fields.. for us paddy and paddy fields are part of our life

Why Kurichya ???



Our joint family system and matrilineal succession are our strength but there are pressure on us...

Ethnographic methods:

◆ Key informant interviews ◆ semi structured interviews ◆ Participant Observation ◆ Historic time line ◆ Resource mapping



The research informed by six Kurichya joint families named Athikolly, Edathana, Nedungode, Paramoola, Naduvilmuttam, Malakotoor in Wayanad district

Discussion

- Kurichya organized as joint families under the head man called Odekkaran. farming is solely depend on family labour. There are specialists in the production of all agricultural implements with in the community. Rice and vegetable cultivation in the wetland and cattle rearing are the main economic activity of the community.
- The community developed a strong system of traditional knowledge on land, soil, biodiversity and water management over the years.
- The social and political organization is ensuring the collective management of natural and human resources for the subsistence farming.
- Kurichya culture is highly connected with paddy and paddy cultivation. Cultivated *Chennellu* is a must for all their rituals. There are 6 important rituals associated with paddy cultivation.
- The life of Kurichya men and women are controlled by many rituals and beliefs which are evolved to protect the jointly owned land, and genetic resources through collective farming to ensure food for future generations.
- This demonstrates the philosophy of sustainability and equity behind Kurichya traditional land ownership, rituals and social organisation.
- Kurichya joint families and collective ownership of land are under pressure since colonial period and later by democratic governance and development initiatives. The overall land use patterns and development scenarios of the region have serious impact on Kurichya system. Conversely Kurichya system shows great capacity of resilience to adapt with the changing socio-political situation of agrarian transformation.
- The restructuring of joint families reforms in to individual households under the common *Tharavadu* and continues joint land ownership, to cop up with the present situation and to protect their joint property.



Decentralization

- The Indian Panchayathiraj act (1993) and the decentralization programme named *peoples planning* in Kerala brought in the concept of sustainability in the development planning by introducing local level planning with high priority to the natural resource management and primary production sector (agriculture). The concept of joint farming coined by the new Kerala model development to attain sustainability through enhanced primary production is identical to Kurichya system of joint land management and farming.

Krichya experience of decentralisation

- The new institutes (LSGI) emerged as part of decentralisation gave political space for the individuals through reservation and the community to participate in the planning discussions. But it is not developed as a political process in which the community decisions reflect in local development.
- Oorukootam in practice, act as a platform for distributing state welfare measures where the community is at the receiving end. Community development interests and traditional knowledge are never reflected in the Oorukootam meetings and local development.
- The agricultural programmes designed by state agricultural department are implemented through Padasekarasamithies where Kurichya has less voice and representation. Even through in many Padasekarams Kurichya own the major portion of land. But their land management practices, crop and cultivation priorities, irrigation systems are not recognized.

This research observes,

- Kurichya Joint family system of collective ownership and traditional knowledge on natural resource management as an unused potential for collective action towards achieving sustainable development goals of the state.
- The centrally decided state policies of decentralization and sustainable development fail to include the pluralities of cultures such as Kurichya and the pluralistic concepts of developments at the local level.
- The concept of sustainable development based on the community knowledge system in Kerala is linked with micro politics of community, caste and social opportunity.
- This research challenges the current environmental discourses on traditional knowledge (TK) systems that advocates for *preservation* of TK, by integrating the political organization and social opportunity of the communities. And argues, the political meaning of the traditional knowledge of each community is determined by the community accesses to resources and social opportunity to take part in the decision making processes.

