

MIGRATION AND CHANGES IN LAND USE PATTERN IN UDUMBANCHOLA TALUK- IDUKKI DISTRICT KERALA

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Abstract

This paper outlines the history of migration and the changes in land use pattern in Udumbanchola taluk in Idukki district, Kerala. The relationship between various religious communities has greatly influenced migration, forest encroachment and conflict over land control in this area. A historical analysis of this relationship is essential to understanding the causes of changes in land use pattern in the study area. The comparative study shows that the settlement areas that occupied hardly 0.73% in 1910 were increased to 30.57% in 1990 by transferring forest lands, grasslands and cardamom plantations. Due to the depletion of natural vegetation and grass land system by the establishment of houses, cash crops and infrastructural facilities, combined with the absence of sufficient land management measures in the side slopes resulted severe land degradation in the study area.

Introduction

Idukki district was formed in the year 1972 as per Government notification No54131/C2/72/RD dated 24th January 1972. The district consists of Devikulam, Udumbanchola and Peerumedu taluk of the east while Kottayam district and Thodupuzha taluk of the eastwhile Ernakulam district¹. At the time of formation, the district headquarters started functioning at kottayam and from there it was shifted to painavu in Thodupuzha taluk in June 1976, where it is proposed to build a new planned forest township². For the land revenue administration the district is divided into four taluks, Thodupuzha, Peerumadu, Devikulam and Udumbanchola taluk.

Profile of Udumbanchola Taluk

Udumbanchola forms major portions of the Cardamom Hills Reserve Forest and one of the four taluks of Idukki district of Kerala. Udumbanchola taluk, with a total geographical area of 1071.40 km² and total population of 434954 persons (census of India 2001), is the most densely populated taluk of Idukki district. It is located between 9° 8'55" N to 10° 4'52" N latitudes and 76° 58'00" E to 77° 16' 27" E longitudes. Udumbanchola forms part of the western Ghat, and forms the relic of a much higher plateau, dissected, eroded and considerably planted. From review of literatures like Vikasana reports it is known that climate of the study area has undergone tremendous change between the period of 1900 and 1960, which was also the period of migration and drastic land use modifications³.

Background of migration

Origin of plantation along with various forest acts passed by the Travancore Government acted as catalyst in migration process in Idukki district. Plantation plays a very important role in Kerala's economy in terms of employment and income generation. The history of plantation sector in Kerala dates back to the pre independence period ie during the colonial rule in India and can be considered as the product of colonialism⁴. The planters mostly British with their influence on the imperial government made constant political pressure on the Travancore princely state to acquire cheap land, labour and capital necessary for establishing plantation⁵. The institutional role played by British government paved the way for the establishment of plantations in Kerala. The institutional factors like Government, family, caste were very beneficial in the growth of plantation sector in the state. The plantation estates in the earlier period were specialized more in growing tea and coffee⁶.

Government measures like provision of land at easy terms and promotion of labour migration played a significant role in the flourishing plantation sector in Kerala. During the early 1940s extensive food shortages occurred throughout Travancore. As a result, the government opened forest lands on an emergency basis for food cultivation. Large migrations particularly by Syrian Christians also occurred⁷. In 1941 the Government first granted exclusive cultivation rights (known as Kuthakapattom) in state forest areas. Under these rules up to five acres of land could be distributed to individuals for food cultivation on a short term lease basis. Food shortage and famine in 1941-44 led to regular demands for the opening of large forest areas to food cultivation⁸. Land grants for cardamom cultivations in the cardamom hill reserve continued throughout this time. In 1940 a limit of 60 acres was placed on the amount of land an individual could be allotted, and in 1942 the government stopped all registries of cardamom lands but continued to allow occupation (as with grow more food land) on a short term lease basis. The lease term was revised regularly and finally fixed in 1959 at 20 years. Migration and encroachment on forest land were also growing more frequent at this time. The area is characterized by rapid land use changes due to massive population pressure mainly in the form of migration⁹.

The first major migration by Malayalis into high ranges occurred in the 1940s. Between 1930 and 1951 as many as 70000 Malayalis may have migrated from Travancore to forest areas in high ranges. Most of this migration occurred in the period from 1940-1950 and most migrants were Syrian Christians from near Kottayam and Thodupuzha¹⁰. The majority of the migrants were small cultivators who settled, planted paddy, tapioca, rubber and spice crops¹¹.

Food shortages were the immediate cause of the migrations. Population growth, land fragmentation and heavy dependence on cash crops, which experienced wide perfect fluctuations, may also have been underlying factors¹².

Area of migration

Large scale migration of peasant from central Travancore regions mainly located in the low and high ranges in Idukki district. The main area of migration in Udumbanchola taluk are Kattappana, Nedumkandom, Rajakkadu Murickassery, Josgiri, Vellatathooval, Pottenkadu, Muttukkadu, and Anvaratty¹³. The migrant of this place mainly came from Meenachil, Moovattupuzha, Thodupuzha, Kothamangalam, Cherthala and Harippadu. Upputhara is considered as the first migrant place in Idukki district. Travancore governments allotted land for the cultivation of cashew nuts in this place and also provide Chembu pattayam to their land. They cleared forest firstly in Thannimmodu and migration occurred firstly in 1918¹⁴.

Ayyappan kovil another important place in Udumbanchola taluk, peasant farmers from Meenachil taluk located in and around this place and started to clear forest and cultivated paddy and tapioca under Grow More Food Plan¹⁵. Kattappana, Vellayam kudy and Thovala are other important places in which migration located from Thodupuzha. The migrants of Valiyathovala mainly came from Erumeli. In 1951 government allotted 3000 acres of land through 600 allotment to the migrants of Vellayam kudy¹⁶.

Migration and land degradation in Udumbanchola

Beginning of the 20th century, major portions of Udumbanchola taluk were covered by natural vegetation. The land cover was not altered significantly except for the establishment of cardamom plantations within the dense forests and for the establishment of isolated tea estate in the north-eastern areas. Between the periods of 1910-1990 noticeable changes have occurred in the land use/ land cover mainly due to the high rate of population increase in these areas¹⁷. Eventhough strict rules were framed during the initial periods of migration for the protection of natural vegetation, these rules were liberalized or neglected in later periods. The period 1911-1951 witnessed high rate of population increase in this area and was considerably higher during 1921-1931. The statistics shows that the total area under plantation in this area had increased from 98, 123 acres in 1921 to 136,802 acres in 1931, an increase of more than 39% (census of

Travancore 1931) . During the 1951-1961 periods this area witnessed the phenomenal population increase of 675.75%. In order to withstand the severe shortage of food crops during the 2nd world war period, the government encouraged massive migration to the vast forested and fertile areas of the high lands, for the production of staple food crops, mainly paddy. However, massive encroachments were reported only from the early fifties, and the process of encroachment continued during the sixties and the seventies¹⁸. A major change notices in the expansion of settlement areas, which acted as catalyst for further changes in the form of infrastructure development with far reaching impact on the land use pattern and ecological balance of this region¹⁹. In 1910, there was hardly 0.73% of the area under settlement that has increased to 30.57 with the combination of mixed crops. The narrow valley bottoms and marshy areas were transformed as paddy fields mainly because of the strategy adopted in the early days of migration for the producing staple food crops²⁰. The impact of land use changes, mostly the form of expansion of settlement, introduction of new cropping pattern combined with the absence of proper land management practices has resulted the ecological imbalances in Udumbanchola taluk.

Conclusion

The study has brought out the extent of migration and the subsequent land degradation occurred in the villages of Udumbanchola taluk. The basic element of land use changes was the massive population growth in the form of migration which started in early periods in a slow pace for exploring the prevailing favourable agro-climatic conditions for the growth of cardamom, followed by large scale migration supported by the government.

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