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Review Of Research



CHALLENGES OF FOREST FRINGE VILLAGES: A CASE STUDY OF METIKUPPE VILLAGE OF NAGARAHOLE RESERVE FOREST



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ABSTRACT

Forest fringe villages in Karnataka are entangled with many conflicts. Basically most of the villages at present which are adjoining to the forest boundary were a true forest lands. Time since British invaded India in order to boost the revenue through agriculture, (Sharad Kulkarni, 1987), and forest based resources, huge area under forest were deforested and agricultural activities were encouraged. Subsequently the people from various parts of respective forest possessing districts migrated; as a result new settlements have emerged. The early migrants settled before 1930 got land registration under their name whereas late migrants could not occupy the land for agriculture but did not get land ownership through legal means. Since past 70 to 80 years these farmers are engaged in

agriculture without proper land documents.

KEYWORDS: forest boundary, intellectuals and environmentalists.

INTRODUCTION:

If you look in to the history of forest department of India and as well as in Karnataka the forest department came into existence in order to



regulate the forest based products, in early decades of 1871, instead of conservation.

According to the growing awareness among the intellectual community who demanded for conservation of forest and wild animals, the forest policies kept fluctuating and changing to suit the required needs. On the other hand, human rights, N G O's and individuals has seriously debated on bringing the tribal community in to the main stream who are living inside the forest since time immemorial (R N SHARMA, 2003). Apart from the domestic cry for forest conservation re-habitation of tribal community, the international pressure on the Indian government to cope up with the demands

of international standards of forest cover, rain water harvesting, soil conservation, micro watershed development programs, declaration of biodiversity hot zones, conservation of endangered species and plants and animals have tremendously brought changes in the forest policies and conservation programs.

Reciprocal to the growing environmental awareness, many public interest litigation writ appeals were filed in the law of justice seeking speedy implementation of forest acts (KalpanaKannabiran, et al, 2012).

Amidst of all these development, the government had tight cat walk tactic's to be played in order to keep their vote bank and also to please the population living along the forest and as well as eye wash drama towards the intellectuals and environmentalists.

The Supreme Court in its recent order stated all the encroached land for agriculture and other purpose should be recovered by the forest department. Although this was ordered in 1988 by the Supreme Court, many land losers challenged in higher bench. At last the Supreme Court on 21st May 2014 gave its final verdict in favor of forest department.

From this date until today the government and forest department are seeking time to implement the Supreme Court order all at once in the entire country. (MuzaffarAssadi 1998) Instead they have implemented this rule where population set to be weak and do not have good political back up.

Reciprocal to this, the forest fringe villagers are giving a strong fight to keep the encroached land under their control. Although this looks to be a strong fight, at the same time the challenges encountered by these villagers in order to make their livelihood for three meals a day and shelter looks to be incredible, Especially, in terms of risk they are facing at the cost of their life is something which do not have proper answer to questions. Whether do they live to get killed or do they live to kill the animals. Secondly do they want to keep their land at the cost of both external (administrative) and internal (Animal Conflict) forest based problems.

In this context, the villages that are put up along the forest fringe have entirely different set of problems and challenges which neither exactly fit into any of the existing amicable forest based programs or the agricultural policies of the present time, or the legal protection entitled to them through the government or the court. It is therefore most controversial, complex and ambiguous region which need to be addressed as a separate region, rather than as a whole like generalizing non forest based villages.

Addressing the challenges faced by the fringe villages of Indian forest and finding out the solutions are the need of the time to provide decent life to farmers. The farmers of this region have already tolerated and paid heavily for simple reason for deforesting and cultivating the land along the forest fringe.

The conflicts that are faced by villagers are enlisted based on sample survey conducted in one of the declared biosphere region of India that is Nagarahole wild life sanctuary. There are 176 villages adjoined to Nagarahole forest, but for the detailed and typical forest fringe village, Metikuppe village has been chosen for detailed sample study which is entangled by forest from all directions. Secondly to get a broader perception about various issues encounter in their daily life, Mettikuppe village is found to be most appropriate. Based on the issues and solution emanated for this village can act as a model for the rest of the fringe villages of Karnataka and India.

2 Background of Metikuppe: A Nagarahole Forest Fringe Village

The location of metikuppe which any one could have an aerial view from Google earth will be

surprised to see a village existing amidst of thick forest and also having habitat of wild animals. The reason behind the emergence of a new village dates back to the British period. The then British government let two families to engage in the production of charcoal from dry and removed trees.

Even today this village stands amidst of forest but well connected by roads from H D Kote and Hunsur town.

3 Origin of Metikuppevillage: A Village inside the Forest (History of Metikuppe)

The oldest data available about the presence of this village amidst of forest can be seen from topographical map published in 1930 during the British period.

This clearly indicates that, this village was present prior to 1900 AD. According to the senior persons of the village, the two families belonging to the carpenter community (Achar) were allowed by British forest officials for production of charcoal. The charcoal produced at metikuppe forest was supplied for steam engine trains and also for pottery. These families were allowed to produce charcoal until the forest policy act was amended after the independence. This activity continued until restrictions on cutting the trees to produce charcoal was imposed.

The two families who have settled for many years begin to utilize the cleared forest area for agricultural activity. Due to inevitable situation these two families transformed into agriculture occupation from traditional carpentry and charcoal production.

In course of time to strengthen their occupation and have claim on land, many relatives of these two families were also induced to migrate to Metikuppe. Additional forest land was encroached for agricultural use. This was encouraged by British government. Between 1930 to 1960 Mettikuppe village expanded spatially by two times that of the original size.

4 Major Challenges of Forest Fringe Villages are:

Challenges of forest fringe village are listed as below

- ✦ Human animal conflict,
 - Guarding and Prevention of Animal entry
 - Crop Damage
 - Human Death
 - Human Casualties

- ✦ Conflict with forest department.
 - o Animal Grazing
 - o Fire Wood Collection
 - o NTFP(Non Timber Forest Product)
 - o Tribal Disguise
 - o Tribal Land Encroachment by other communities
 - o Objection to raise elephant liking crops by Forest department
 - o Traditional Sacred religious Symbols and Signs inside forest
 - o Forest land encroachment and re-acclaim by forest department,

- ✦ Contradictory agriculture and forest department policies.

Among the above listed Challenges faced by the Farmers the following are the most crucial complaints by the villagers.

1. Guarding the crops from animal damage.

2. Non Co-operation by the forest department to conduct traditional rituals which now inside the forest. (Temples, Tree worship, Water point etc.).

3. Reclamation of Agriculture Land by forest department.

Broadly the challenges can be classified in to four categories

a) Human animal conflict

b) Conflict with forest department

c) Reclamation of encroached forest land by forest department

d) Contradictory agricultural and forest department policies

5 Human animal conflict

5.1 Crop damage:

Despite of guarding to protect the crop some quantity of crop get damaged by frequent raid by elephant and deer etc. (Kalyana Sundram Ramakumar, 2014). For which they have to claim compensation by the forest department. But in their experience most of the time, forest department reject the claims. In few cases even though they pay compensation, the amount paid will be negligible compare to the extent of damage occurred. It is a huge cry shared by 87% of the farmers of this village, who rightly accept that, compensation paid by the forest department is not in lieu of damage occurred. The farmers also categorically pointed out that, to obtain the declared compensation from the forest department they have to move from post to pillar. The time incurred to get the compensation easily takes one and half to two years. Depending upon the amount sanctioned against damage at the time of field inspection of the forest officials, the farmers sometimes do not take trouble of applying for compensation.

5.2 Human death:

Chasing the animal out of the farm land result into human casualties and seldom into death. During the time of driving the elephant out of the farmland the farmers who are on the foot become victim of sudden charge by the elephant. (R Sukumar 1991).

In matikuppe village since past ten years five persons have been killed by elephant one by tiger and many cows, sheep, and other domesticated animals have taken away by wild animals. The life of the farmers in these forest fringe villages neither has a reliable income through animal husbandry nor by crop production. Both the sources of life are at stake and also involve high risk.

6. Conflict with forest department:

6.1 Animal grazing:

The limited land owned by each farmer and maintained the farm operations livestock farming becomes an inevitable aspect of agriculture (The Indian Forest Act, 1927), out of 30 house sampled 27 households rare domesticate cow and sheep,

To rare the animal the immediate option they left with forest land, past 100 to 150 years there were no restriction to rare animals inside the forest but from date of forest reformed act 1977 raring animal inside the forest is prohibited (Olivia Salmon, 2012).

Although prohibition existed past two decades, the strict implementation seen as for the Metikuppe village in past three years, illegally they take their livestock inside the forest for raring which result into conflict between forest department and villagers, most of the time they had to bare the pinch of huge penalty levied against them.

Most of the farmers innocently claims what if animal reared could cost damage to the forest nearly 65% of performance of the villages still do not have awareness about forest rules laws and implication of perish, result of these huge fight between staff of forest department and villagers.

6.2 Fire wood collection:

As the size of the village population increased both by natural means and immigration shortage of land has pushed 30% families of metikuppe as nonagricultural households who primarily dependent on service oriented activities and as casual labors as their annual income is less than 30000 rupees. They inevitably compelled to make their life through most-easiest possible way. The immediate solution behind cutting the forest trees for fire woods for self-consumption and for selling (wunder, 2001). This impact restricted by the forest department and warned many times as they indulged in illegal cutting fire wood trees their part of livelihood it is most of the time they caught and penalized.

6.3 Collection of NTFP(Non Timber Forest Products)

Collection of NTFP is another trouble seeker where some of the forest related households who are engaged in forest related activities are given pass to collect non- timber products (M J Mutenje, et al, 2010). The complication raised when few non pass holders as well as duplicate pass holders also enter into the forest disturbing the tribal people, at present this NTFP pass issuing scheme has abolished and only for the tribes who are recently rehabilitated from the forest are issued, in metikuppe many tribes are rehabilitated, out of these only recently rehabilitated people are getting passes from the forest department to collect NTFP whereas it is restricted for previously rehabilitated tribes and to other people.

6.4 Objection by forest department to raise the crops:

The farmers of the fringe villages are more tempted to grow the commercial crops, such as, sugarcane, banana and vegetables etc. These crops fetch them higher profit, as well as less labor oriented. There is a dual approach among the farmers, although they know that, the crops like sugarcane, bananas are favorite food for elephant, they grow taking the risk of damage (State of Environment Report: Himachal Pradesh 2011& Maharashtra, 2012). Farmers also have assurance of getting compensation from the forest department in case of any crop damage; as such forest officials orally ask them to grow the crops which do not attract the animals. But it is least bothered, as per field observation done, such kind of restriction are not enforced and it does not have any impact over the farmers. It is only few farmers who abide by such type of restrictions and it is a challenge to forest department to control the crop selection; one can easily understand this by the cropping pattern of Metikuppe village.

In the state of Himachal Pradesh, the government has introduced a new law in the forest fringe villages. Farmers of the forest fringe villages need to get No Objection Certificate from the District forest officer to cultivate agriculture crops. In many instances the agriculturist is issued a license, only when he submits an affidavit in the office of the sub Division Magistrate with an undertaking that, he will deposit his weapon with local police station between November to May months. Source:indiansforguns.com

6.5 Traditional- Sacred –religious Signs and Symbols inside the forest:

The tribal people of Nagarahole forest, who have lived inside the forest over centuries, have a number of traditional belief and rituals to be performed every year. The tribal hamlets rehabilitated

from the forest to the peripheral boundary after the Supreme Court ruling, demand to enter into the forest to perform certain rituals (R N SHARMA 2003). Literally the tribal people have a strong sentimental, emotional attachment towards forest and they have their deities and small temple constructed inside the forest near to their earlier hamlets. These tribal people wish to perform ancestral rituals once in a year to continue the traditional belief inside the forest. Since these forests are now under the reserve status, the forest departments do not allow the tribal to enter inside the forest. A circumstance of this nature, leads to violation of forest rules and a conflict between forest department and the tribal people. According to the forest officials, permitting the people to enter into forest is not a major issue, but at the pretext of performing some rituals the tribes sacrifice the animals by hunting as their traditional practice. This is the violation of forest rules and cause for the conflict. The rituals performed for 3-4 days. During this form of rituals, the tribes from surrounding hamlets also join on invitation; as such it is a big gathering and a great disturbance inside the forest.

6.6 Tribal disguise:

There are people in this region who are in disguise of tribes, as stated earlier; metikuppe is village of re-habilitated tribes who migrated very recently as well as the tribes who settled since long ago. NTFP passes are issued only to recently migrated tribes. So the previously settled tribes and other people are having the conflict with the recently migrated tribes regarding pass issue.

6.7 Tribal land encroachment by other communities:

The tribal who were living inside the forest has been re-habited by the government to the periphery of forest. To keep them away from the forest based activities and provide them livelihood the forest department has allotted 2 acres of land to each family at the forest boundary. To accomplish the task there was no availability of revenue land; as a consequence the forest department removed the trees in the forest land and allotted 2 acres to each family. The tribes who are very new to agriculture could not able to practice farming, realizing the fact the forest department assisted through some of basic procedure of forming for 2 years, even then only few families could able to involve in agriculture by themselves. Where as many tribal family could not gear up producing the crops. Taking the advantage of this, the adjacent villagers, co-villagers and other non -tribal farmers lure them to lease out the land on an oral contract by giving them a petty cash which they have not seen in their life time. In this process of leasing and raising crops the co- farmers have encroached the land belonging to tribal community. Today we find most of the fringe villages where, tribes are re habituated this problem exist. Either the forest department or the government could not able to find amicable solution for this issue, since there is no registered document between tribes and non-tribal farmers in this regard, so the tribal farmers cannot lodge compliant out of ignorance as well as out of fear to go against the civilized main stream man. The end result of this is a total debacle of the policy. The purpose for which the forest land was deforested for the livelihood of the tribes is benefiting the non tribes indirectly and the land is in the hands of non-tribal community although not with a legal claim.

6.8 Forest land encroachment and re-acclaim by the forest department:

As per the Supreme Court ruling to re-acclaim the forest land which is illegally encroached (Supriya Sharma 2012), the forest department at the first phase reclaiming the lands which are recently encroached. In this process 20 percentage of the farmers who had encroached the forest at the fringe are losing their land. About 95% of the land owners of Metikuppe village are against this move but only few people have courage to protest, nearly 80% of the people do not join this move with the fear that

even their lands may be acquired by the forest department if they join the protest. This issue has become most sensitive and created instability among the farmers of adjoining forest fringe villages. As per the survey the farmers are also ready to give up (SHEKHAR SINGH, 2006) their land if the government pays compensation with land at other place to make their livelihood. See graph showing farmers the willing to give up their land.

Map no: 1 Forest land encroachment and re-acclaim by forest department



6.9 Unplanned-Unscientific-substandard preventive methods:

Although there is serious conflict between villages and the animals, the preventive measures taken by the forest department and local government bodies are subjected to evaluation. The forest department has built trenches all along the fringe of the forest boundary, due to the poor quality of materials and unscientific way of construction, purpose of the project has not been served (prithiviraj Fernando, at, el, 2008). The self-owned solar fence by the villagers to protect their crop land and solar fences laid by the forest department in patches does not serve the purpose of prevention. Elephant a clever animal has adapted a tactics to overcome these hurdles by disconnecting the cable through slashing the fence with a huge dry wooden log. Apart from the above major preventive measures, none of the other preventive measures can be considered as good means to prevent elephant entry into crop land. The picture shown below, explains the standard and unplanned methods of preventing elephant's entry. See figure no 1.

Figure no: 1 Unplanned-Unscientific-substandard preventive methods



Photo: vishwanatha HR



Unplanned trench at Muddanahalli village photo: vishwanatha HR



Elephant proof wall constructed with substandard material at Uthenahalli, photo: vishwanatha HR



Unplanned trench at Alalor village, photo: vishwanatha HR

7. Who are the real victims?

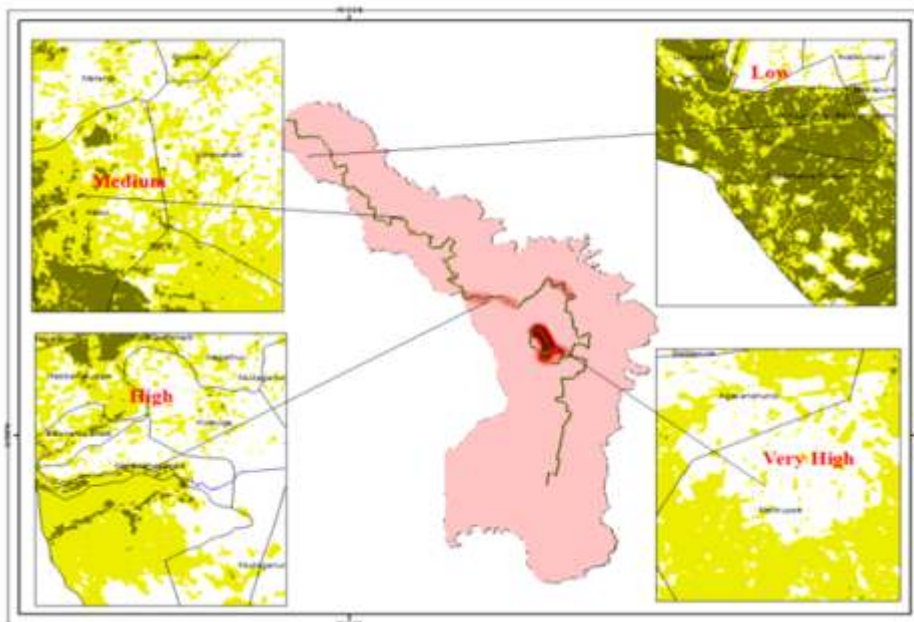
The first and foremost victim in this issue of human animal conflict is animal; I stand in favor of the farmers next only to animals. The animals which do not have voice to cry to demand for their requirements and to bust open their anguish of problems inside the forest is the real victims. The natural habitat of these animals has been encroached and destroyed by man for his livelihood and for his comfort at the cost of the animals. The animals whenever enter into the crop land, either chased out by pelting stones or hit by fire balls or sometimes even get killed by gun shots. At least every year there

will be about 5-6 elephants killed along the Nagarahole national park fringe villages. Overall statistics collected through personal interview states that, totally 38 elephants have been killed in a very little span of time i.e. from 2009-2015, in forest fringe of Nagarahole national park. The statistics clearly shows that, more number of animals have killed by man, more than the number of humans killed by the animals. Thus animals are the real victims in the conflict.

7.1 Farmers:

Many farm lands which are situated adjoining to the forest cover are almost encountering the threat of animals at least once in a month (Born Free Foundation, 2009,). There are certain points where there is a serious animal conflict, either it is at the point of entry into the corridor path or at the sparse vegetative cover, which ultimately pushes the elephants into farm land.

Map no: 1.2 densities of elephant entry points and forest cover



The map no 1.2 clearly envisage the concentration of the points of elephant's entry. According to the map of elephant's entry point, three points have been identified which are prone to conflict almost at every alternate day. Almost all farmers living adjoining to the forest boundary spend their night during the cropping season outside their home to guard the crops from the animals. Preventing animal is not an easy task, especially with wild boar and elephants. The farmers spend whole night watching from tree huts built over the tree tops and during the day time they engaged in the agricultural operations. In such a busy schedule due to the lack of rest and sleep the farmers lose their health. The farmers for their petty requirement and livelihood are struggling hard to prevent the crops from elephant raiding. In the Nagarahole forest region, in the year 2013-14, 9 farmers have been killed by elephants (See table no 5.18) and two people were killed by tiger. Many casualties and injuries which have occurred along boundary and inside the forest are unreported; the farmers do not report the incident occurs inside due to the dire consequences of forest laws.

8. Contradictory agriculture and forest department policies:

The forest department is committed to several flaws in managing the forest.

(KulbhushanBalooni& Makoto, 2009)The forest fringe region is totally a typical set of villages which do not fit exactly either to the forest rules or to the agricultural policies implemented in other villages. All forms of forest based programs and policies are confined up to the forest boundary. The forest department does not have any responsibility or control over the adjoining fringe villages. In case of any major events of death or crop raids, the forest department easily shirks its responsibility and escapes by saying that, the area do not comes under their purview. On the other hand the agricultural department without realizing the intensity and seriousness of the human elephant conflict along the fringe, it has implemented the same agricultural policies at the fringe villages which are framed for normal villages for example, subsidy on certain crops like banana, sugarcane, subsidy on drilling bore wells, subsidy on fertilizers etc. It all resulted into many contradictions in fringe villages. To avoid these problems it is very much necessary to introduce a new agricultural policy for the forest fringe villages in accordance with the forest department.

9. Role of Forest Department:

The forest department policies on tribal re-habilitation look to be more conspicuous, because the forest department considers that, as soon as re-habilitation is done, their responsibility is over; so the department can (Planning commission, TENTH FIVE YEAR PLAN 2002-07) totally withdraw its support to the tribal community. Secondly the forest department have a dual approach where the tribal are given land for agriculture and construction of houses by clearing the reserve forest at fringe limit, at the same time they restrict the tribal to enter into the forest for NTFP (M J Mutenje, et,al, 2010). The forest policies and programs focus only on the conservation of animals and vegetation rather than finding amicable solution to the fringe farming community. So for the forest department has not come out with any solutions in order to address the issues faced by fringe farming community. The interview conducted with forest officials speaks that, they have highly concern over the forest not the fringe villages; they are empowered with lot of power over the forest but zero level power over the fringe villages. Neither they do co-operate nor they have any solutions to mitigate the problems of fringe villagers, this kind of situation is really put the fringe villages under great uncertainty.

10.Role of local administrative:

The local administrative bodies such as village panchayath and talukpanchayath, the agricultural department, the rural development programme department, tribal social welfare department do not have any common agenda or a common platform of sharing views to arrive at a single decision (Mukul, 1997), as such many programs carried out by different departments without any proper coordination among sisterly concern departments lead to partial success but total failure of programmes. For example, tribal re-habilitation has not given full result because the agriculture department, rural development programme department and others are not coordinating with the tribal welfare department and the forest department(R N SHARMA,2003);in Metikuppehaadi a programme has been taken up by tribal welfare department to provide drinking water, education and health facilities to tribal, which is not fully supported by education and health departments resulted into partial success of the programme. The forest department withdrawn its support soon after re-habilitation (Antoine Lasgorceix&Ashish Kothari, 2009)programme, they consider that bringing the tribes from the forest to the peripheral areas is the only agenda and responsibility. Whenever the villages in the fringe area face a problem, they will be in total confuse and ambiguity in, to whom to approach, how to approach and how to find the solution to the problems.

11. CONCLUSION:

Integrated Forest Fringe Management Committee should have a separate administrative powers comprising of bringing all state departments under one fold to control and remove all forms of discrepancies existing along the forest fringe in the entire state as well as in the nation. All the villages which are located inside the reserve forest need to be relocated. Secondly, the villages which are within 1 km buffer zone need to be relocated. All villages located across the elephant corridor need to be shifted. The regional governance can overcome with all the issues by having coordination with the local people, local administrative bodies, forest department and the state departments.

Implementation of this requires the deliberation and phased manner of planning with the co-operation of international institutions and policies, discarding the existing forest policy. If the local people and the local administrative bodies, are entrusted with the responsibility, will give true stake holders of the forest. It is always better to keep trust on local people who can really restrict the conflict at their village level. Instead of giving subsidies on elephant liking crops, should be given to non-liking crops. Besides, subsidies should be extended for fertilizers and tube wells. An agricultural policy should be framed especially for forest fringe villages to support their economy. To address the issues quite seriously, separate forest fringe governance is required for fringe villages.

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