

SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND CULTURAL FACTORS OF PROPERTY RIGHT REGIMES AND ITS IMPACT ON ECOLOGY AND ENVIRONMENT IN WESTERN GHATS, KARNATAKA, INDIA.

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ABSTRACT

Western ghats of India is an example of over pressurized tropical rainforest ecosystem. These rainforests are one among the world's most complex biomes like coral reefs. The term 'western Ghats' gives a picture of abundance of natural resources, vast areas of dense vegetation with multiple species of great economic value and rich fauna. They also provide important soil and water conservation services in addition to fuelwood, fodder, manure and minor forest products for subsistence and commercial use. The condition and status of these forests are under going drastic changes from last century due to change in agricultural practices, introduction of more profitable commercial crops (like coffee, tea, rubber, cashew), industrialization, mining, and also changes in the government policies and priorities from colonial to post colonial periods.

The changes in the condition of the forest is the replication of the changes in the social, economical, political factors influencing the use of forest by the people. The socio-economic factors like population density, livestock density, shift in the cropping pattern, caste composition, literacy level and political factors like, change in government's policies, subsidy schemes monoculture plantations, external funded forestry activities etc., are responsible for the change in the conditions of the forest in terms of diversity and density.

In this study a effort is made to classify different property right regimes which are site specific to western ghats of Karnataka into broad categories and document different management practices and there effect on the condition of these property right regimes.

Based on the privileges, ownership, access, management in the forest these forest or uncultivated lands in western ghats could be classified into four property right regimes viz., *Individual access/ownership, Communal access/management, open access and Complete State controlled lands*. There are more than thirty five tenure systems found in western ghat region which fall under one of the above four broad property right regimes.

The preliminary results shows that in case of *Individual access* regimes the forest is somewhat well maintained where the open access land area is more, it is due to less dependence of the individual on the these lands and also due to less attack by the other people. Also the recent trend in the minds of farmers to go for organic farming which is the traditional practice in this region after experiencing the draw backs of chemical farming (especially in areca and also to some extent in paddy and coffee) made the farmers to keep more area under vegetation. The condition of the forest in certain tenure where the individual privilege has been threatened by the frequent change in rules and regulation is varied from place to place. Private forests are also exists in some parts of western ghats of Karnataka, where people can use or sell any forest products even timber with permission of the State forest department. Though some farmers convert these lands to crops, vast number of people maintain them as woodlot as it acts as insurance in the time of emergency. The higher caste farmers who are socially, economically and politically strong tend to keep more woodlot than poor farmers as the poor farmer could not offer to wait for long period (15 to 20 years) for getting income due to his financial obligations like

daughters marriage, illness etc., he tend to harvest the timber and convert it to cashew or other crops keeping a small portion of woodlot for fuelwood and manure purposes.

In case of *communal access* tenure the forest condition is good where the individual management practices are followed and where the community forest protecting committees are formed. The condition in the lands where government controls the entry and use of forest products, forest conditions are good even though some clandestine activities are taking place.

Open access areas are the highly degraded areas where every one tries to harvest maximum benefit.

Complete State controlled lands like national parks and sanctuaries as there is no major disturbances out side except in some areas where some private firm has permitted to open a star hotel forest condition is quite good.

The overall finding of this study reveals that the property right regimes where individual privileges or rights are prevailing and also where community control on the forest exists the forest conditions are better. But the uncertainty of these privileges and rights due to frequent changes in govt. rules and regulations and also increasing population intern creating pressure on these lands. Encroachment is common in all types of regimes which varies from type of regime and individual political, economical and social strength.

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