CHAPTER - XII

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The forest products are classified into two broad categories, namely, timber and non-timber forest products (NTFPs). The NTFPs encompass all biological material other than timber, which are extracted from natural forests for human use. The NTFPs play a key role in the life and economy of tribal communities living in and around forests. These communities live in abject poverty having very little access to capital assets, health and educational facilities and hardly any protection against vagaries of nature. Their dependence centers around nature. To a vast majority of tribal people extraction processing and marketing of NTFPs is a source of employment throughout the year. Without much capital investment and with little skill it provides employment opportunities to all groups of tribals and the income generated by NTFPs significantly contributes to household income in tribal areas.

NTFPs, however, have certain inherent disadvantages with regard to exploitation. They are bulky and most of them do not occur in compact areas but widely scattered making economic exploitation difficult. They are often found in difficult and inaccessible terrain where mode of transport is non-existent or primitive. Most of these products are easily perishable and they present serious problems in
harvesting and storage. Lack of precise information on the best season and proper methods of collection, their processing, drying, grading, storage and such other factors have stood in the way of proper exploitation and utilization of number of products. It is also a fact that many of the tribals do not know where and to whom to sell their produce, for want of information and partly without realizing the need for quality. They sell the produce locally at whatever price is offered to them with the consequent low revenue to the collectors as well as to the state. Therefore, in the best interest of the state and collectors, the later will have to be educated on the scientific exploitation and marketing NTFPs. The present study is an attempt to understand the collection and marketing practices of NTFPs and its impact on the income and quality of life of people engaged in this occupation with special reference to the tribals of Kollegal taluk.

Kollegal taluk of Chamarajanagar district has been purposively selected for the study because of good concentration of forest cover and distribution of tribal population in the taluk. The study included 200 tribal household units based on a stratified two stage sampling technique. Information was also collected from NTFPs traders and co-operative society, operating in the study area so as to understand the marketing aspects of NTFPs. The important findings of the study are summarized below.
The tribals inhabiting Kollegal taluk are mainly Soligas. They live in abject poverty, virtually devoid of any productive resources and exposed to education. Majority of the tribals do not own any land, and the average size of land holding was 1.40 acres, entirely dry where subsistence cropping was followed.

More than one third of their income was derived from NTFPs activities. The employment opportunities in agriculture were low in view of their forest habitat and subsistence living. Supplementary activities such as dairying, poultry and similar other activities were rather low or absent. Majority of the tribals continue to depend upon NTFPs, as a fall back arrangement for income and employment as they do not have other alternative sources of employment.

The tribals practiced very simple food habit, living from hand to mouth. In terms of caloric intake the food consumption, in general, was limited to a meager 1324.68 k.cal per capita, per day, which was far below the minimum consumption needs. In order to make up the deficit, the tribals depend heavily on edible forest products to sustain themselves.

The exploitation pattern of NTFPs indicated that there were more than twenty items of NTFPs having different usages being commercially exploited in Kollegal region. In addition, numerous
other items such as fruits, berries, tubers and herbs were collected for their daily consumption needs.

The seasonal calendar of activities has shown that one or the other forest product was available for exploitation all through the year and the tribals could depend on forest-based activities for much of the year. However, NTFPs extraction was more intense during summer and winter months and the collection activity was at its low ebb during Kharif season during which most of the NTFPs regenerate and grow. But certain items like fuel wood head loading and collection of dry and dead bamboo continued throughout the year.

To gauge the importance of NTFPs collection as an economic activity among the tribals, a multiple linear regression with income from NTFPs as a dependent variable and size of households, land holding, education, employment, agriculture income, wages, allied income, cash expenses and others as independent variables. The multilinear regression analysis establishes the contribution of selected variable in collection of NTFPs. Six variables out of nine variables showed positive impact on the dependent variable and also reveal the agricultural income, wages and allied income were statistical significant contributing factors. However, it can be conducted that agricultural income and wages play a major and significant role in the enhancement of the dependent variable i.e., NTFPs.
The factor analysis was employed to identify the factors influencing the collection of NTFPs by sample households. Higher the factor loading of a variable on a particular dimension, higher will be its association with that dimensions than its association with other dimensions. The highest factor leading in dimension 1 is land holding (-0.152) and education (-0.068) with negative relationship. However, other variables loading with positive relationships emphasizing the main factor as NTFPs income (0.7162) in dimension 1, and dimension 2 (0.5424), dimension 3 (0.4785) and dimension 4 (0.4369). The variance contribution explained by factor 1 found to be highest (63.85%) followed by second factor (47.50%), third factor (35.39%) and fourth factor (22.59%).

The marketing system for NTFPs in Kollegal region was highly unorganized and totally lack from facilities for scientific marketing. Three important marketing channels could be identified for NTFPs which include: (i) Self consumption and local sales; (ii) sale to private traders/middleman; and sale through co-operatives (LAMPS).

Sale through private trader/middlemen was the most common and popular channel of marketing. The traders who operate directly or through local collection agents buy the NTFPs in the raw form and then sell the same in the upcountry markets after processing. The method of sale was not competitive as there was no
established market for NTFPs in the region and the tribals have no option but to sell their produce to the local agents/traders at whatever the price they offered.

In order to ameliorate the conditions of tribals and to protect the interest of NTFPs collectors, large sized Adivasi multipurpose cooperative society (LAMPS) has been established in the region. However, its operation is confined to Hanur range only. The society performs two basic functions; (i) it collects NTFPs from the tribals and (ii) it supplies essential items of consumption in tribal areas. However, the society has failed in its objective to pass on the benefits of NTFPs collection to the tribals. This is evident from the comparison of prices paid by cooperative and private channels to the NTFPs collectors, which do not differ much. It was also observed that the society do not undertake any processing or value addition activities but retained a high margin. As an alternative channel, LAMPS played a minor role in effective marketing of NTFPs. Its role was just limited in acting as an agent to obtain the lease of forest areas for collection of NTFPs on behalf of tribals and in pooling the produce so collected.

**Conclusion**

Forest constitute a significant component of the natural capital of an economy, which can provide adequate food, fodder, fuel, fibre, timber and wood for local industrial uses besides maintaining
ecosystem. The NTFPs development is an important and essential item in forest management and National Forest Policy. NTFPs play a key role in the life and economy of the tribal community living in and around the forests of Kollegal region. Despite various developmental activities that are taking place in the rural areas, the tribals continued to depend on forests, to a large extent, for their livelihood. The NTFPs sustain the tribals (especially the marginal category) during the lean season. The income derived from the NTFPs was the single largest source, but it was not sufficient to meet even their subsistence requirement of food. Therefore, in order to meet the caloric deficit they are forced to depend on edible forest products to sustain themselves. The study indicated that there was no established market for NTFPs in the region. Cooperative, as an alternative channel was not effective in passing on the benefits to the NTFPs collectors. Private trade in NTFPs was often exploitative. The economic weakness, social observatism and uncertainty of market for NTFPs have made tribal life vulnerable and prone for exploitation

**Policy Implications**

The socio-economic conditions of the tribals are far from satisfactory. Majority of the tribals do not possess any productive resources and they live below poverty line. Despite the developments that are taken place in the rural area, the tribals live cut-off from these developments. They do not have access even to the minimum facilities of life such as housing, drinking water, health care and
access to education. This is mainly because of their forest habitat, low level of literacy and poor exposure to the development. It is therefore, necessary to provide them with the basic necessities to improve the quality of their life.

An important point that emerged from the study was that forest based activities provide a cushion to absorb the surplus labour force in the family and provide a major source of income to sustain in the absence of adequate productive resources. Their income from the NTFPs can be enhanced by scientific exploitation methods. However, the tribals lack knowledge about the utilization, quality aspects, market demand and scientific exploitation methods. Therefore, the tribals need to be given appropriate education about general awareness and benefits obtainable from different species of the NTFPs. Proper extension measures need to be taken through audio and video aids by highlighting the uses and importance of scientific and sustainable exploitation methods.

NTFPs markets are, by and large, imperfect and the collectors do not get a fair return for their labour. The private trade in NTFPs is often exploitative. Even the LAMP society meant to protect the interest of the tribals is not effective in passing on the benefits to the collectors. The LAMPS should improve its functional efficiency by streamlining its role in collection and marketing of NTFPs.
LAMPS should focus its attention in educating the tribals on scientific exploitation methods and extending marketing credit to avoid exploitation by middlemen. Incomes of the tribals can be improved considerably if LAMPS take up value addition at the collectors level. What is needed is careful analysis to decide what level of value addition is easiest and most cost effective. Similarly, grading and storage facilities are important that can help the collectors get a better price.

Small-scale enterprises offer another option for value addition at the local level. LAMPS can promote processing of edible products such as honey, wax, tamarind, gooseberry and medicinal plants.

Development of agriculture, horticulture, livestock enterprises and creation of alternative sources of productive employment opportunities could be used as an effective instrument to wean away the tribals from the forests in order to contain the demographic pressure on forests and to conserve the forest ecology.

The ongoing liberalization process does not provide a safe net to the tribals, which means their interest would get further marginalized for want of opportunities. It is disheartening that the lifestyle of the tribals border around primitiveness and total lack of motivation to improve their economic status. An integrated approach is necessary for sustained development of tribal economy. This calls for deliberate Government intervention through committed NGOs in order to create awareness and motivation for upliftment.