

IMPORTANCE OF REVIVAL OF PADDY LAND IN KERALA**Dr. Sheeba Abraham,**

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ABSTRACT

Agriculture has played a key role in the development of human civilization. The welfare of a state to a large extent is dependent upon the prosperity of agriculture. It remains the back bone of an economy. Land is the most important natural resource which human beings have inherited. It is the main source for the basic necessities. The increasing population and developmental activities put pressure on the utilization of land. With the developmental activities, the most ecologically valuable paddy fields are drastically reduced. The Kerala Conservation of Paddy Land and Wetland Act, 2008 was enacted to conserve the paddy land and wetlands in Kerala and to restrict the conversion or reclamation in order to promote growth in the agricultural sector and to sustain the ecological system, in the State of Kerala. The study clearly brings out the causes of paddy land conversion, its impact and the steps taken by the local authorities to revive the existing paddy lands in the study area.

Keywords:

Paddy land conversion, Causes, Impact, Conservation

INTRODUCTION

Paddy farms are fast disappearing from Kerala. Efforts to sustain paddy cultivation did not shown any efficient result. Kerala is the only state that has witnessed area under paddy cultivation falling continuously. Interestingly, this is happening at a time when price of rice in the wholesale market are increasing. Diminishing rice fields from Kerala, creates threat to food security of the state. For preventing conversion of paddy fields, Kerala Government had made law to stop converting the paddy fields. Paddy fields are being converted for several purposes. The Honorable High Court of Kerala has reacted in strong words about this issue. The Court comments that even God cannot save this God's own country if this trend is continued'. If necessary actions are not taken immediately by the authorities concerned, there will be nothing to hand over to the coming generations. Under this condition everybody must be aware of the impact and refrain from converting paddy fields for other purposes.

The consequences of paddy land conversion vary from region to region. So a regional specific study was thought worthwhile to study.

Objectives of the Study

1. To find out the extent of paddy land conversion in the study area.
2. To analyze the consequences of the paddy land conversion in the study area.
3. To bring out the steps for the revival of paddy lands in the study area.

Methodology

The study is based on both primary and secondary data. The data requires for the study are collected from both published and unpublished data. In order to collect information on the causes and consequences of conversion of paddy lands, a detailed enquiry was conducted among the farmers in the Veliyannoor panchayat of Kottayam District, Kerala. In Veliyannoor panchayat there are 3434 households; among them 1159 are paddy land owners.

Paddy Cultivation in Kerala - An Overview

A Paddy field is a flooded parcel of arable land used for growing semiaquatic rice. The word paddy is derived from the Malay word 'padi' rice plant. The paddy cultivation plays a major role in socio-cultural life of rural India. The paddy cultivation in our state is mainly depends on the rain fall. Paddy cultivation was part of the proud culture of

Kerala state. Rice is the staple food produced and consumed in India. In earlier days rice used to be cultivated almost in all parts of Kerala in three seasons.

The Kerala Conservation of Paddy Land and Wetland Act 2008

The Kerala Conservation of Paddy Land and Wetland Act 2008 is an act to conserve the paddy land and wetland and to restrict the conversion or reclamation thereof, in order to promote growth in the agricultural sector and to sustain the ecological system, in the state of Kerala.

The Kerala Conservation of Paddy Land and Wetland Act were enacted in 2008 after much hue and cry over acute food crisis and people's struggles against large-scale filling up of paddy fields. It was enforced despite stiff resistance from the real estate lobby.

Impact of Paddy Land conversion

Paddy land conversion in Kerala becomes a widely common activity in every parts mainly because paddy lands are cheaper than other lands in Kerala. Veliyanloor is a grama panchayat in Kottayam District of Kerala formed in the year 1972. There are 13 wards. Total geographical area is 19.49 sq. km. The total population as per the 2001 census is 13737. Majority of the people in the panchayat are farmers. For the last several years there is a tremendous change in the cropping pattern. The major changes are the steady decline in the area of paddy cultivation. The paddy lands in the study area are converted or used for other crops or kept as fallow. The conversion of the paddy fields put several impacts on the study area.

The extend of Paddy Land Conversion in the Study Area

For the analysis of the changes in the area conversion under the paddy cultivation was prepared with the help of records available from local Krishibhavan, panchayat and village and detailed field survey was conducted.

Changes in the area under the paddy cultivation in the study area

From the survey we can understand that the area under paddy cultivation gradually declining from 59 hectares in 1972 to 40.62 hectares in 2021-2022.

In order to collect the details regarding the causes of conversion of paddy lands, detailed enquiry was done among the paddy land owners. Most of the paddy land owners in the panchayat were having either marginal or small holdings. There are no large paddy land holders in the study area. In the Panchayat as per the official records there are 159.96 hectares of paddy fields in the beginning. But in course of time these paddy fields are put to other uses. Major portion of the paddy fields are converted. The Table (1) shows the type with which paddy lands are used.

Land type	Area in hectares
Paddy cultivation	20.34
Converted to other crops	107
Converted area –filled up land	24.37
Fallow	8.25
Total	159.96

Source: Survey data

Some portion are used for the cultivation of crops other than paddy. These crops are cultivated by filling the paddy fields fully or partially. Certain portion are fully converted and constructed buildings and houses.

Causes of Paddy land conversion in the study area

At present the paddy farm sector in the study area is on a serious crisis and farmers are facing a lot of problems like

- the shortage of labour
- declining profitability
- slow pace of mechanization
- increasing cost of cultivation
- uneconomic size of holdings and so on.

The major reasons of the conversion of paddy lands attributed by the paddy land holders in the study area are labour shortage and increased cost of cultivation.

Consequences of Paddy Land Conversion in the study area

Having identified the main reasons for conversion of paddy lands in the study area also enquired into the consequences these paddy land holders faced due to the conversion. The important consequence due to the conversion of paddy fields into filled up land is shortage of water during summer season. The people are of the opinion that the shortage of water is due to the conversion of the paddy fields. This is because the water storage capacity of the paddy fields is high and due to conversion it lost. Another consequence is that the small creatures, fishes etc are vanished. Generally the conversion of paddy lands leads to the negative impact on the ecological condition of the environment. Due to the conversion of paddy fields into filled up land leads to depleting the small fishes, creatures, etc. from paddy fields. It also leads to the water scarcity because the ground water is depleting. Therefore the ecological system loses its quality irrecoverably forever and the entire society is the loser.

Having noticed the importance of paddy cultivation, the causes of the conversion, the impact of conversion, the local bodies take steps for reviving the existing paddy fields in the study area.

Steps for the revival of paddy fields

The sustainable management of paddy fields and wetlands requires continuous and regular monitoring. Concern about the increasing impact of human beings on the environmental issues has received much global attention. In order to address the various pressures that often interact the environment it motivates much multi disciplinary assessments. Conservation of paddy fields is essential not only for the availability of the safe staple food but also in the preservation of the environment. The availability of the staple food from the domestic fields helps to prevent the adulteration of the food for the households. It helps to grow enormous species of flora and fauna which are essential for the biodiversity.

The existing laws for protecting the wetlands and paddy fields give legal support for the preservation of the paddy fields. But in its enactment side there is much failure. The local self governments have to play an important role in conserving paddy fields and reviving paddy cultivation.

Under the initiative of Krishibhavan and Grama panchayat the existing paddy fields are brought under cultivation. This becomes possible because of the assistance from the funds of the Central government and funds allocated by the Krishibhavan. Under the RKVY of Central government ATMA scheme was introduced and under this scheme Rs. 30,000 is allocated for one hectare. Under the scheme of Sustainable development of rice scheme an amount of Rs. 1500 for one ha is allocated.

In the scheme of Panchayat farmers availed 50 percent subsidy for fertilizers for 3 times for cultivation. Seeds are made available to farmers at free of cost.

The works like cleaning the public canals and small streams, making side bunds of the paddy fields are allotted in the MGNREGA scheme and it will reduce the problem of lack of availability of farm workers.

The sowing and harvesting is done successfully with the help of machines and it helps to overcome the difficulties in the availability of labourers. The cost of sowing is completely incurred by the Panchayat and for harvesting Rs.2500 for one hour and also the

CONCLUSION

The paddy land conversion in Kerala is an important issue in the sustainability of the state. If proper actions and steps are taken from the part of the authorities these ecological spots can be regained.

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