

VILLAGE STUDY – KOLATTY PANCHAYAT-
BIKKANAPALLY VILLAGE

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Krishnagiri District – An Overview:

Krishnagiri district is situated in the north-west part of Tamil Nadu bordering Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh. 'Krishna' refers to 'black' and 'giri' refers to 'hill'. The area contains many granite hillocks hence the name 'Krishnagiri'. Krishnagiri district was formed as the 30th district separate district of Tamil Nadu in 2004. There are five taluks namely Krishnagiri, Hosur, Pochampalli, Uthangarai and Denkanikottai.

As of 2011, the district had a population of about 18 lakhs with a sex-ratio of 958 females for every 1,000 males. The district population is comprised of 23% urban and 77% rural population. The population density of the district is 370 persons per sq. km. The literacy rate is 80% for males and 65 for females. The District receives an annual rainfall of about 930 mms. The important crops of Krishnagiri District are Paddy, Maize, Ragi, Banana, Sugarcane, Cotton, Tamarind, Coconut, Mango, Groundnut, Vegetables and Flowers. The district is renowned for horticulture, especially floriculture. Trade in roses fetch about 20 crore revenue for the district per annum. The district is also one of the major producers of mangoes. Bamboo products, honey collection and tamarind production are the forestry land activities found in Anchetty, Denkanikotta, Thally and Berigai areas. Hosur, one of the most industrialized places in the state is located in this district. Since the district contains granite hillocks, quarrying of granite is another major industrial activity in this district. Krishnagiri is also famous for Sericulture. Training in Mulberry farming, Rearing Silk Worms is done through a large network of Govt. Departmental Institutions of Sericulture.

The major wild animals include Elephants, Sambar, Spotted Deer, Gaur, Wild boar, Panther etc. The forest area of Denkanikottai Taluk forms the prime elephant habitat.

The main rivers that flow across the district are Kaveri and South Pennar

Krishnagiri reservoir project (KRP): KRP dam is situated at a distance of 7 Kms from Krishnagiri. It is in between Dharmapuri and Krishnagiri. Thousands of acres of land around Krishnagiri are irrigated with the help of this dam. This is a famous tourist spot too.

Shree Parshwa Padmavathi Shaktipeet Tirth Dham : This temple is located in Orappam village, just 7 km away from Krishnagiri. The concept of Krishnagiri Shaktipeetam concentrates on the worship (Aradhana) of Sri Parshwanath Bhagwan, the 23rd Thirthankar of the 24 Thirthankars in the holy dharma of Jainism.

Our activities:

Our team was sent to village study to Kolatty Panchayat which comes under Denkanikota Taluk, Thalli Block. The panchayat comprises of six habitations called Bikkanapally, Omandapally, Muchandiram, Thandaraimedu, Kolatty, Gulisandram. Our team chose Bikkanapally village for our study since it was the largest of the six villages but still had a moderate population of around 1000 and had around 250 households.

Our team reached Bikkanapally village on 1st November, 2014 at 1930 hours. We were welcomed by the village president Mrs. Bhagya Nagabhushanam and other village members. Two male members of the team were provided accommodation in the village panchayat office and two female members stayed in the village president's home. After dinner, we spoke to the village officials and asked them to arrange for 15-20 villagers for the next day's transect walk. We also discussed about the approach we would follow in carrying out the village study. We arrived at a consensus that we would adopt a non-interventionist, non-supervisory participatory approach so that the villagers and the officials would freely interact with us without having the fear of some government officers inspecting their work. We also agreed that we would socialise freely, talk informally and interact by asking 'trigger' questions and listening.

The Pre-Transect Walk and The Transect Walk:

Since the villagers had told us that the transect walk could be started by 0800 hours, our team decided to take a casual stroll around the village by 0630 hours. It turned out to be a very useful exercise as we could observe the early morning activities of the villagers without anyone telling us about it. The villagers of Bikkanapally spent their early mornings in cleaning the cattle sheds, feeding the cattle, milking them, fetching drinking water and washing clothes. The pre-transect walk also gave us an idea about the village's roads, drinking water facilities and the basic distribution of houses and fields. This helped us to plan the transect walk in two phases covering all the four directions.

The transect walk began at around 0800 hours towards east in the direction of the Kolatty Silk farm. Our team explained the villagers accompanying us about the objective of the transect walk.

Our transect walk was carried out in two phases. During the first phase we exited the village in the east direction, branched off from the main road, entered the fields and non-habitation areas and entered the village again from south direction through the road to Omandapalli.

Before we branched off from the main road we noticed the village library. After that it was only the metallic road lined with tamarind trees and banyan trees on either side for around 100 meters. After that, we entered a mud road leading to a nursery and horticultural fields. The nursery had rose, dahlia, gerbera, chrysanthemum, marigold saplings. The nursery worker explained us the way the saplings are grown, the climatic conditions required and the way they are sold to Karnataka, Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh.

We observed that Bikkanapally had mainly red soil which was irrigated mainly through bore wells and wells. We saw that the horticultural crops were drip irrigated while the cereals and millets were irrigated by channelling water from the bore well. The farmers practising horticulture were using an instrument called venturi to mix fertilisers with drip irrigation system.

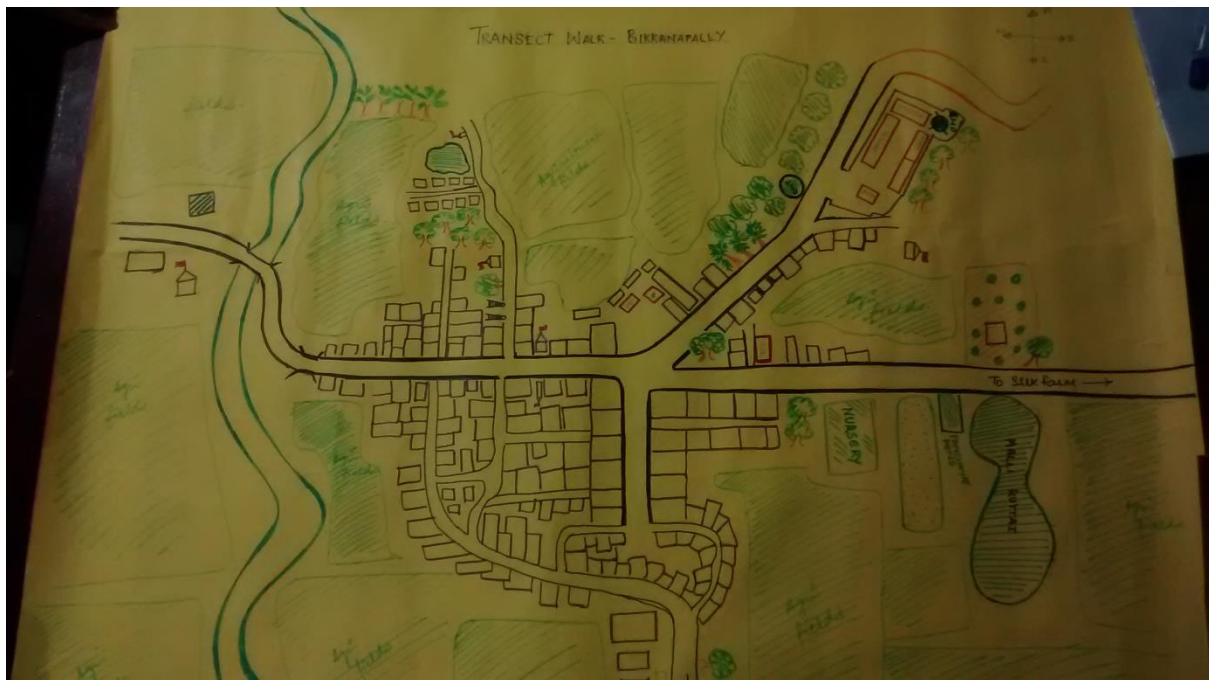
During the first phase of the transect walk, we came to know about the major crops of the village namely ragi, groundnut, horsegram, sesame, corn, lentils. Besides these, horticultural crops like tomato, broad beans, French beans, onions, chillies were widely cultivated. Jowar was cultivated as cattle feed. Mustard and castor were also cultivated, though in a small extent.

The transect walk starting from east and ending in south gave us the opportunity to understand the topography and waterbodies of Bikkanapally. The topography was not plain, it was undulating slightly. On covering the east-south route we found that the terrain was sloping outwards from the village. We also observed two water bodies, a panchayat pond just on the outskirts of the village and a larger one called 'Mallikuttai' near the fields. Rainwater, because of the outward sloping topography, naturally flows towards the panchayat pond and once it gets filled, the water overflows towards the Mallikuttai. Because of the recent rains, both the water bodies were filled with water.

The second phase of the transact walk was done by exiting the village towards northwest direction and entering it from south. The road we took lead us to Thandaraimedu, another habitation coming under Kolatty panchayat. Thandaraimedu had 10-20 households and a large waterbody called the Thandaraimedu Eri. After the waterbody, the soil began to change. It was slowly becoming dry and rocky. Then we came to know that we had reached the panchayat limit and there was a granite quarry ahead. Though it fell under a neighbouring panchayat, we quickly paid a visit to the grantite quarry. After that, we branched off from the road into a coconut grove. Running along the coconut grove was a stream called 'Chikkama Doddamma Aaru'. After crossing the grove and a few fields we reached the bitumen road connecting Bikkanapally and Maniyambadi. Coming in the same road, we entered the village from the south through the Chikkamma Doddama temple.

Our transect walk covered both the habitation areas and the non-habitation areas, though majority of the time was spent in exploring the fields on the outskirts of the village. We realised that the village had a unique nature linguistically. Around 50% of the villagers spoke Kannada, around 30% spoke Telugu and around 20% spoke Tamil. The village had a high school teaching in both telugu and tamil mediums.

After the transect walk, we sat together, discussed and translated the mental map into a physical map on a chart. We also requested the village officials to give us details about where the village elders met normally to carry out the timeline exercise.



Timeline:

Our team met the village elders near the panchayat office peepal tree. Around 15 of them had gathered there. We first explained them the objective of carrying out the timeline exercise so that they can recollect relevant memories.

Initially, only few of the villagers spoke, but later on, gradually many of them joined the exercise in recollecting their childhood memories. The elders recollected the existence of bonded labour before independence and how it gradually disappeared. They described how the villagers elected their first panchayat president Shri.B.N Doddagowdu by lifting hands for ayes. However, their most important recollection was the 850 acre land acquisition by the government in 1967 to set up a large scale silk farm. They described how a 300 household village called Gulisandram evacuated and migrated due to the acquisition. The villagers

could recollect events like the first radio, building of the first concrete well, arrival of electricity and street lights, the working of first diesel engine to pump water etc. as they were all related to their childhood. The village got its primary school in 1955 which became middle school in 1960, but got upgraded to a high school only in 2011.

The villagers also expressed that the village's climate has changed over these decades. They said that earlier the nights were very cold and food remained unspoilt for days together. The rains were predictable and regular to a large extent when compared to the current days.

The timeline exercise helped us realise how slowly technology and education had reached the remote village. The villagers expressed that the village had moved forward albeit in a very slow way. They emphasised the need for a hospital and an increase in frequency of the bus connectivity in the upcoming years.

Year	Event
1918	Some unknown disease. People died in large numbers; migration
1922-1947	Period of bonded labour
1955	First Panchayat election, voice voting
1955	First school – upto class 5
1960	School upgraded to class 8
1965-1970	First radio; first pucca house
1967	850 acres of land acquired by Govt. for farm factory. Gulisandram village displaced.
1970	Building of first well

1973	First diesel engine
1975	Electricity and street lights
1975-1980	No panchayat elections
1987	First tractor; driver from Salem
1990	First television; first pucca road
2011	School upgraded to high school

Visit to the school and anganwadi:

The School:

Our team visited the high school at Bikkanapally and the Anganwadi situated within the village. The high school had 132 children in total, 68 of them girls and 64 of them boys. There were 7 teachers and all of them taught classes from 6-10. The school had no room for expansion and the high school was running with the land allocated for the primary school. Toilets were available for males and females but insufficient in number (Only 1 toilet for 68 girls). Drinking water was available through an overhead tank but the garbage was being dumped close to the drinking water facility. The school did not have a play ground or a physical education teacher. The class 10 had 27 students in total, 24 in telugu medium and 3 in tamil medium. Paradoxically, the tamil medium had a teacher whereas the telugu medium did not have a telugu teacher.

Noon meal scheme was prevalent and all the students of the school had opted for noon meal (mainly because uniforms were given free only to those children who opted for noon meal scheme). The noon meal organiser said that the kitchen is small and needs expansion.

Informal interactions with the students and the teachers revealed that the remoteness and poor connectivity of the village caused the teachers and the headmasters take transfers often. The present set of teachers was also not residing in the village, but was commuting

from Denkanikottai and hence the school started late mostly and closed early (so as to catch the last bus).

The Anganwadi:

The Anganwadi of the village was situated within the school campus itself. The enrolled list has 25 kids, though only 5 of them were present that day at 10AM. The Anganwadi teacher conveyed that the mothers finished their household chores first and then prepared the kids to the anganwadi, at around 10.30-11.00 AM. So Bikkanapally's anganwadi had a teacher who came on time and ready to teach but not kids! Another interesting aspect of the anganwadi is that the teacher's mother tongue was telugu and she did not know to write Tamil but had to teach the kids in Tamil. The distribution of health-mix flour and the noon meal were regular. Our team happened to witness a mother's meeting at the anganwadi where the mothers of the kids, pregnant and lactating mothers were advised about healthy bringing up of children.

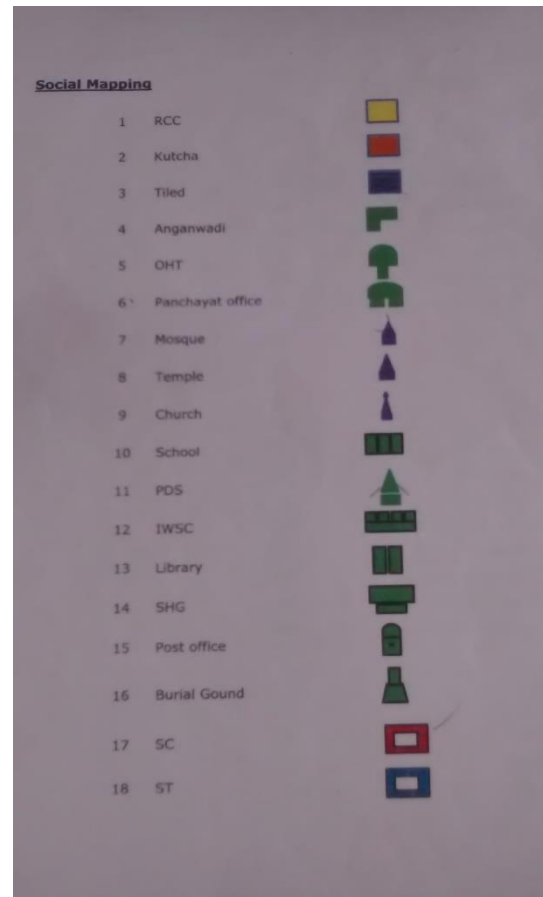
Resource Mapping and Social Mapping:

Our resource mapping and social mapping exercise served many purposes. First, it made us realise the innate geographical sense the villagers had about their village. Two, it helped us compare the map that we had made based on the transect walk with the map made by the villagers. Third, it served as a tool to identify their NREGS durable asset needs for the upcoming year.

The focus of the resource map and social map was Bikkanapally village, eventhough Kolatty, Omandapally, Muchandiram, Thandaraimeedu, Gulisandram were pictorially represented. During the process of drawing, the map underwent corrections as the villagers disagreed with some aspects like position and linking of roads and location of their houses. Around 10 of them were involved in the actual drawing of the map and around 20 of them were watching.

The social map was drawn based on the housing type of the village. In other words, after physically representing the village and its resources, the villagers marked their houses as RCC, Tiled, Kuchcha, without toilet house, migrated, landless, physically disabled, women headed, without job card etc. This was a long exercise as every household of the village had to be identified and marked. Since, the villagers had an experience of doing resource and social mapping they had the idea of representing each category with a unique symbol and colour. Once the social map was done, villagers were invited to look at the map, identify their

house and check whether it had been represented correctly or not. It is noteworthy to mention that the SHG members of the village took active participation in drawing the resource and social map.



Seasonality:

Our team while interacting with the villagers came to know that agriculture while remaining the major occupation of the villagers did not turn out to be as profitable as before. Hence, our team wanted to understand the rainfall pattern and the corresponding crops raised to understand issues related to agriculture. Besides, we also wanted to understand the link between NREGS employment and agriculture. We interacted with around 5-6 farmers and with their inputs, started plotting the village's seasonality. The farmers shared that their rainfall calendar is based on the 27 stars namely Mungari, Aswini, Barani, Kiruthikai, Misiri, Aathiri, Thottasla, Sikkasla, Assla, Magha, Uppha, Uththara, Aththa, Siththa, Saathi, Visaathi, Anragi, Manragi etc . We asked them what crop did they raise during which season and they explained us the time of sowing, raising and harvesting ragi, groundnut, sesame,

horsegram. Because of lack of space, the stars were marked in two rows of x axis and the corresponding crops raised were marked in two rows below them. This exercise helped us to understand that the crops raised and the rains are not strictly separate and more than one crop was being raised during one rain. Also, the villagers raise another crop suited to the rainfall pattern, when a crop is halfway under cultivation. Such overlapping and simultaneous raising of crops (depending upon the rainfall) was the major outcome of the first part of the seasonality graph.

The second part was the linking of NREGS employment to rainfall pattern and crops. The villagers told us that NREGS employment does not have any particular season and people went to work under NREGS throughout the year. However they also shared that there are specific times during which NREGS work is not undertaken. This was during the times of intense agricultural activity, as sending people to NREGS would cause severe shortage in agricultural labour. We marked their response in the graph by adding two rows for employment beneath the crop rows. We denoted the NREGS employment as a continuous line and marked the periods of refrainment (which was during intense agricultural activity) by a dip.

During the plotting of seasonality graph, the villagers put forth their arguments as how NREGS has severely affected their life. Though it was surprising that the beneficiaries themselves were criticising the scheme, our team listened to them and noted down their arguments. The farmers complain that NREGS has increased agricultural labour cost significantly. Their grief is that even with elevated wages, nowadays they don't get agricultural labourers to work on their fields. The panchayat president felt that NREGS has not given anything fruitful and durable to the village. Though they carried out desilting activities of Majjikeri, Mallikuttai, Thandaraimedu eri and Muchandhiram eri, the work was not sustainable, he said. For the desilting work to remain, the desilted soil has to be deposited on the banks and some RCC or stonework should be done to retain it. However, this was not done and as a result, during the rains, the silt was washed back into the waterbodies. He also felt that without proper monitoring mechanism, the work was unsupervised. He generally feels that NREGS has made the villagers lazy and less effective at work. He noted how they went for lunch and came back late or never returned for work. The agricultural labourers, beneficiaries of NREGS themselves agreed to the criticisms. Our team advised the villagers to set their own schedule for NREGS employment depending upon the seasonality graph. For example, during the "Aadhiri" rains, when the land is prepared and the first crop is sown, we advised them not to schedule any NREGS work. We also suggested them to take up activities like strengthening banks of waterbodies through RCC, building SHG office building etc. so that NREGS can be used to create some durable

assets for the village. After an hour and a half long plotting and interaction we thanked the farmers, labourers and others for their inputs.



Ranking:

As we had mentioned earlier, many of the villagers of Bikkanapally had told our team how agriculture has become unsustainable and unprofitable in recent times. We also noticed houses abandoned as the residents had migrated to Hosur in search of work leaving behind their lands fallow. So, agriculture not being profitable was one major issue faced by the farmers. Hence, we asked the villagers the reasons why agriculture had become unprofitable and recorded their responses. We initially asked them to tell us all the reasons without setting any priority and then asked them to rank them by asking them the reasons.

The farmers of the village cited the following reasons:

Rainfall is erratic and unpredictable: Earlier the rains used to follow their local rain calendar (mentioned above in seasonality). But in the past few decades, the farmers feel that the rains do not fit into any particular pattern. It has become erratic and the intensity also has come down.

Agricultural labour deficit: The farmers believe that the availability of farm labourers has come down due to NREGS and migration of workers to industrial areas like Hosur.

Inappropriate price for the produce: Irrespective of difficulties faced, those farmers who continue to pursue agriculture feel that they don't get the appropriate price for the produce.

After harvesting, thrashing and packing, they make enquireies about the market price, wait for the price to go up till 5-7 days and then take their produce to Denkanikota and sell it at the price they get that day because they cant bring it back and store it.

Middlemen: The farmers shared that they do not directly sell it to the suppliers as they cant selling the entire produce in bulk to one seller. Hence, the farmers are dependent on middlemen who buy the produce in bulk and in turn sell it in parts to the sellers. Because of this one way dependency, the farmers feel that the middlemen take advantage of the situation and exploit them.

Lack of market information: The farmers also accepted that they are not aware of the sellers, dealers, demand for the week and month, price variation patterns etc. This is also attributed to the remoteness and poor connectivity of the village. They also don't have the practice of checking prices in the newspapers. This lack of information makes them vulnerable to price fluctuation and they end up selling their produce at low prices.

Rains during harvest and threshing: The farmers also shared that sudden rains, even mild downpours, during the times of harvesting, threshing and packaging caused severe damage to the produce making them less saleable.

Input costs escalation: The rise in agricultural labour wages due to NREGS, the escalating rents of farm equipments like tractors, rise in price of seeds and fertilisers etc have resulted in an overall increase in the input cost.

Venn Diagram Exercise:

The purpose of venn diagram exercise was to assess the importance and accessibility of the government institutions in the village. Ranking various assets highlights the importance people of the village attach to the institutions and it also helps in underlying the reasons behind non/poor performance of the institutions.

We approached a group of villagers for the same and explained them the process. They not only had to rank the importance of the institution but also to prioritize their location based on their accessibility and performance. Of the 11 institutions the villagers listed, the most important institution perceived by them was the WATER TANK. Needless to debate on its importance, the villagers unanimously ranked it as their topmost asset and prioritized its location to be in proximity of habitation. The second most important institution was SCHOOL and AANGANWADI. Open minded people of village acknowledged the importance of

education in lives of their children and how it bettered the standards of living, thus ranked at 2. Awareness among pregnant women and lactating mothers, owing to existence of aanganwadi, drove them to the centre to improve the nutritional status and health of infants. Based on quality of the outcome and its functioning, they prioritized its location to be near the homes thus making these accessible by people.

The third important institution identified by the people was the Fair Price Shop. Likewise the decreasing order of importance attached to institutions was POST OFFICE on 4th number, LIBRARY on 5th, BUS STOP on 6th, PUDHU VAAZHUVU PROJECT OFFICE on 7th, SILK FARM on 8th, PANCHAYAT OFFICE on 9th and COMMUNITY TOILET on 10th. Though the villagers knew the importance of the community toilet, they ranked it the last because, practically, it was not being used. The village had a culture of using the fields and hence though there was a community toilet with running water, no one was using it. Out of the 518 households in the entire panchayat, only 65 had toilets.

The people of Bikkanapally knew the institutions, their functioning and also their ease of access and service delivery. Though there were few changes during the course of the exercise, when the venn diagram was completed, there was consensus among the group about the ranking and distance from the people. Our team realised that the people had certain expectations from each of these institutions and their ranking was dependent on the extent of service delivery and satisfaction.



Conclusion:

Our stay in Bikkanapally for 6 days gave us an opportunity to observe a village, its resources, its livelihood activities, the functioning of village level institutions, its social structures and dynamics etc from close quarters. Our focus was towards understanding the dynamics, the nuances of village level economy, polity and governance rather than collecting factual data. This approach helped us gain useful insights about Bikkanapally's agriculture, plight of farmers, issues and roadblocks in providing service delivery, infrastructure, and livelihood opportunities by the government. Besides learning, we also had fun by playing with the village kids, talking to village elders and learning cooking from the women. We realised that in spite of the handicaps, the village people led a harmonious life with nature with interdependence among themselves. The judicious use of resources, the peaceful co-existence of communities and the unique multilingual culture left permanent impressions in all our minds. The village study tour ended as a lively, insightful learning-unlearning experience for the entire team.