

ABSTRACT

Medicinal Plants in Landscape Dynamics of the Western Ghats in Kerala: The Combined Issue of Biodiversity Conservation and Participation of Populations in Resource Management

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In Kerala, the booming of ayurvedic pharmaceutical industry has resulted in an increasing demand on medicinal plants used for drug production. Most of those plants are harvested in the forest and an enlightened management of it is a crucial environmental and economic issue.

The forests of the Western Ghats belong to the twenty-five Biodiversity Hotspots identified in the world; it contains 27% of the Indian plant species and around 1800 endemic species. The area of this study covers several Forest Divisions of the Western Ghats and is situated in Thrissur region, South of the Palghat pass. It includes different rich ecosystems but its density is high as four dams have been built there and many estates are managing commercial plantations. Different groups categorised as “Scheduled Tribes” live in the hills more or less isolated. As those populations are the only one authorised to collect Non-Wood Forest Products, including medicinal plants, they are integrated to an economic network going further the limits of the forest. Based on the idea that the forest space is included in spatial, economic and social large dynamics, this work will try to understand and explain the organisation of these flows and the change wherein. I will focus on the relationships between actors involved in collection and marketing of medicinal plants and on the participation and benefits of local population in the forest conservation strategies.

Three main topics will be looked into: 1/ the use of the forest resource and its management: methods of collection, appropriation of the forest space by collectors of NWFP, impact of different policies about forest conservation, 2/ the flows related to NWFP collection and marketing: itineraries of the collectors and the plants, actors involved, impact on population welfare and environment, and 3/ the integration of the forest in regional dynamics related to the marketing of NWFP.

The methodology is based on interviews of collectors and local observations. An analysis of official texts will permit an understanding of the frame of actors’ relationships. The use of GIS and cartography will also be essential in such a geographical work. This research project will be closely linked to the work of Santoshagouda V. Patil (see abstract below).