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Traditional Knowledge of Mawalli in Sundarban: A Case Study

Dr. Tapan Ray

Ex-Post Doctorate Fellow, ICSSR, New Delhi, India

Abstract

Traditional Knowledge is an important cultural trait of a social group. It is an identity and logical creation of a social group and main weapon of livelihood practices. Traditional Knowledge exhibits technological values, scientific thought and idea. It helps to solve day to day problems, practical works, daily life and livelihood practices. The Mawalli community of Sundarban has vast traditional knowledge. They depend on traditional knowledge for their livelihood practice. They collect wild honey by the help of traditional knowledge. They have acquired this knowledge from their father and forefather through continuous livelihood practices. So, the role of traditional knowledge is an important as livelihood study or community development as like as folk science and folk philosophy study. In this paper I have tried to explain actual traditional knowledge of mawalli which involves in honey collection.

Key Words: Traditional Knowledge, Honey collection, Honey preservation, Mawalli, Sundarban.

Introduction: The Mawalli is an important forest resource collector in Sundarban forest area. They are known as traditional honey collectors. They collect wild honey from many generations by the help of traditional knowledge and traditional belief. Generally this traditional knowledge based on their long experience of livelihood, deep sense and idea of forest environment, conditioning, observation and belief of Banobibi cult. Recently, some of the people have tried to apply in modern science and technology, but they have not given any extra benefit instead of traditional knowledge. So, in that situation modern science and technology is rejected by the mawalli. According to them traditional knowledge is the better than modern science and technology for their life and livelihood. They use very simple tools and technique for honey collection as a part of traditional knowledge. This knowledge is very simple to learn and acquired but application context is extremely difficult. Mangrove roots and wild animal are the main obstacles of honey collection. Majority number of cases they overcome this obstacles by the help of traditional knowledge.

Materials and Method: The present work is mainly based on primary data which were collected from Hingaljang and Gosaba blocks of West Bengal since 2011 to 2013. These study area is very significant for traditional knowledge studies owing to the dominance of different folk communities, like Mawali, Jele, Bawali and Munda. The data were collected from different caste and religious groups who are the active members of honey collection group. The information given by the informants were cross-checked. The whole research work was done by the ethnographical data collection method. Primary data collection methods like, observations, interviews, Questionnaires and case study methods were applied for qualitative data collection.

Results and Discussions:

A) Traditional Knowledge of Honey Collection: The traditional knowledge of honey collection is very simple but practical context is especially risky. Because we know the Sundarban mangrove forest is a home of Royal Bengal Tiger. Sometimes the Mawallis collect honey from forest fight against tiger. Only thin smoke, gamacha, katari and ari are used in honey collection. Thin smoke applies on to drive away bees from the beehives, gamacha helps to protection from bees biting. Katari applies on cutting the branch of tree and also beehive. Ari is a one type of container which is used in honey collection. The most important difficulty is to explore beehive in the deep mangrove forest. Mangrove roots, flood water, bushy forest and

wild animal are the main obstacles of honey collection. So, searching the honeycomb is not only difficult, but also life risk. Before entering into the forest they observe where the beehive can be found. In this context they use their traditional knowledge. These are given bellow:

1. They follow the movement of honey bees in side of the forest. They find exact way of movement.
2. They go to forest in a semi-circle way. It helps to meet each and other from some distance.
3. They belief that honey bees stay in the deep forest and middle size of tree. Because deep forest is their secure shelter. So beehive can be found in the deep forest.
4. Honey bees found in the elevated forest area rather than low forest, because flood tide can't go there.
5. Honey bees found in the anti-wind position.
6. According to their opinion core area is the important zone of honey collection yield rather than buffer area.

The only wide smoke applied in honey collection. The smoke is generated from handmade bolen. The bolen made up by the dried and green helal leaves.¹ Green leaves use in outside position and dried leaves use in inside position. The handling and placement of bolen is not an easy matter. It depends on some basic scientific knowledge and technique. The smoke applies to drive away bees from the beehives and to resist re-entry of honey bees in honeycomb. They do not cut whole beehive because honey bees can be again return this original home and formed their another honeycomb. According to the mawalli opinion Garan, Geoya, Pasur are the store house of wild honey bees.

B) Traditional Knowledge of Honey Preservation: The Mawallis don't have any scientific method or process or commercial knowledge for preservation of wild honey. They use only traditional method or a local technique that is known as folk preservation. After the wild honey collection, the most important work is temporary preservation. At first the mawallis squeeze the honeycomb by their hand and separate unrefined wild honey from yellow wax. Then put it in a plastic container for fifteen days. The vernacular name of plastic container is *barrel*. After they return in home this wild honey keeps in mud pitcher. According to their observation the quality of honey will be protect for long time. They don't mix up anything with honey. They belief this honey is the gift of the forest God and Goddess. In this region they don't mix water or sugar but the mahajans use sugar and water with the honey when they sell it. Pure honey is completely destroyed by fire and it doesn't make any sound. Beside, a sweet scent emanates from it but the impure honey makes splitting sound. Another test is that when honey and calcium carbonate are mixed, it becomes very warm.²

Case Study- 1

Name: Binay Mandal

Age: 60 years

Occupation: Honey collection and fishing

Religion: Hindu

Cast: Pando Khatrio (S.C)

Address: Dayapur-3, Panchayet- Satjeliya, Block-Gosaba,
Dist.-South 24 Parganas



Binay Mandal is an experience mawalli of Gosaba block. Born in a poor family, he started his life as mawalli like his forefather at the early age. Recently he goes to Sundarban along with seven mawallis for honey collection. He has a horrified experience of honey collection from Sundarban. In the year of 1995, he went to Sundarban for honey collection and searching beehives by the country boat inside the forest. At a turning point of the river a Royal Bengal Tiger was hidden in bush of the forest. No sooner his boat came into the point the tiger attacked him. He tried to protect him. After one hour fighting he narrowly escaped from death but he was injured very much. He could never forget the incident. He family members are four but he is the only earning member in his family. He does not have any property to survive. In this circumstance, he decided to leave the profession of honey collection but it could not be possible for his poor economic condition. He had no good dream for future. From the June to January he has been engaged in fishing. His wife is a housewife and also

engaged in fishing. Their children's help to their house work. His house is constructed with mud (for wall), goran wood and khar (for roofing). His family income is Rs 3000.00 per month during the honey collection and fishing period. He is a member of BPL group. He does not get any financial support from Governments.

Case Study 2

Name: Phoni Bhusan Gain

Age: 79 years

Occupation: Honey collection and farming

Religion: Hindu

Caste: Pando Khatrio (S.C)

Address: Dayapur-3, Panchayet- Satjeliya, Block-Gosaba,
Dist- South 24 Parganas



Phoni Bhusan Gain is a famous bawalli of Satjeliya gram panchayet. He is born in Khulna District (Bangladesh) a poor family; he started his life as mawalli at the early age. After that he was also known as a bawalli. The last 4/5 years ago he went to Sundarban along with 9 mawallis for honey collection. According to him in the year 1984, 23rd June he went to Sundarban for honey collection and the Royal Bengal Tiger attacked him. He fights with tiger and protect himself. He could never forget the incident. He is a guardian of a mawalli team. He is a 'forest observer' and supervisor during the honey collection period. His function is mainly observing the Royal Bengal Tiger and tries to safe the other mawallis from tiger or other animals with the help of magical formula. His house is constructed with mud (for wall), goran wood and tali (for roofing). Recently he is an unemployed person. His family economical condition is very poor. He is being helped from forest department. Now a day he is a priest of the goddess Banobibi.

Conclusions: Above the discursion I conclude that the importance of traditional knowledge is essential for wild honey collection from Sundarban. It has huge significance in mangrove protection. This knowledge is not harmful for bio-diversity. It is deeply connected with family life and livelihood of resource collectors group. Honey collection and fishing are the main livelihoods of mawalli community in Sundarban. Now a day honey collection is a totally seasonal and short period job. So, they give only one opportunity of honey collection in a year. Therefore, in that situation traditional knowledge of honey collection makes a reliable mental condition of honey collectors. The person's who can able to properly applying to that knowledge in forest environment he gets extra benefit in quantity of honey collection. So, it is an important part of family economy of mawalli community and it links with on their family condition and economical status.

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Glossary:

Ari :	Big pan made up by cane
Kadu :	Hetal leaves
Katari :	Big knife
Hetal :	Phoenix Paludosa
Gamcha :	Napkin
Mahajans:	Money Lender
Tali:	Tile

Goran:	Ceriops Decandra
Bawalli:	A gurdian team met of honey collector team
Mawalli :	A honey collector groups
Khar:	Straw
Banobibi:	A guardian forest Goddess
Dakhin Roy:	A forest God
Bolen:	A fire stick made up by dried and green <i>hetal</i> leaves
