

MARIKODU – a typical village

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Marikodu is a tribal village located in the Nilgiris Biosphere Reserve, South India. The name *Marikodu* means *Mari* - cattle and *kodu* - boundary. The villagers are hesitant and shy and do not talk much with strangers. They belong to the *Kurumba* tribal communities found in Nilgiris. The *Kurumbas* are excellent honey hunters. Marikodu has an area of 40 acres of landholding, surrounded by the forest which is rich in diversity. They have a sacred grove in their village where outsiders are not permitted to enter. The people collect medicinal plants from the vicinity of the sacred grove.

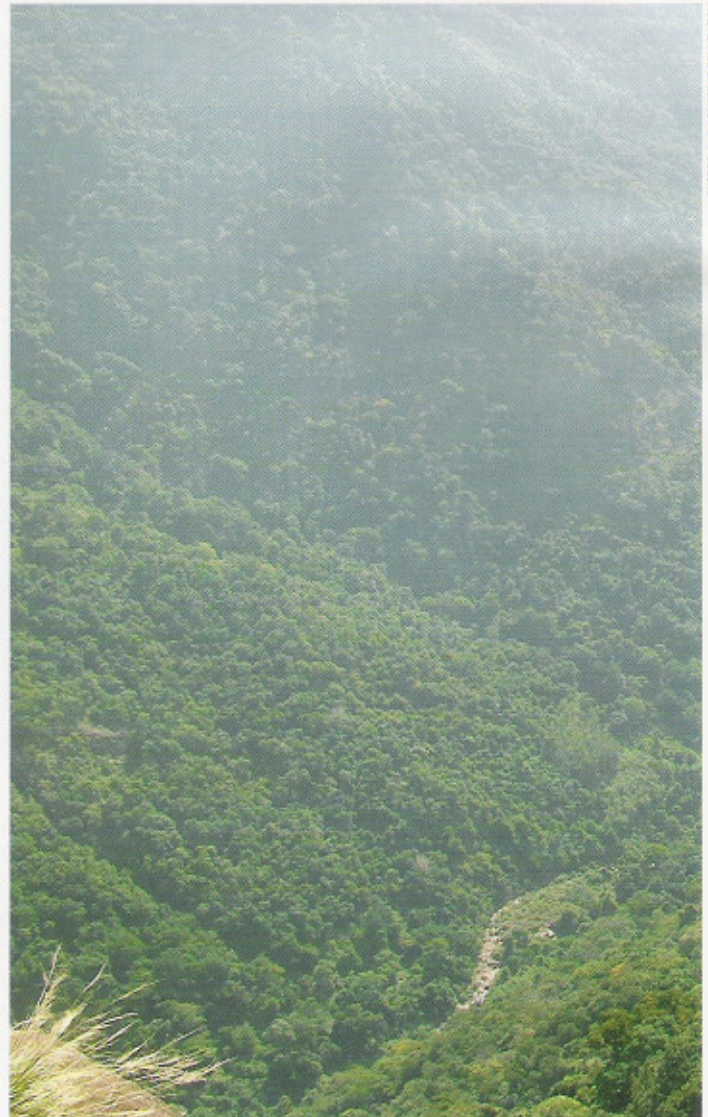


An elderly lady in front of her house in Marikodu

The people who live in this village are all related to each other. Forty years ago there were 70 families, whereas now there are only five families living in the village. It is said that the decline in the number of villagers was due to the outbreak of cholera. The villagers do not have brick built houses - they live in thatched houses that they construct themselves.

The main occupations for most of the families are involvement in honey hunting and millet cultivation. The men collect honey during April to July. They collect honey from *Apis cerana*, *Apis dorsata* and *Apis florea* honey bees. During the honey harvest from *Apis dorsata*, the men in the village form groups and live in the forest for two to three days before returning with the honey harvest. People also collect firewood, green leaves and medicinal plants from the forest for their household consumption. Men and women are involved in the collection of non timber forest products (NTFPs) from the forest. Due to wildlife conflicts in their village, most villagers are not involved in agricultural practices, except for one family. The crops are organically grown. The rest of the villagers have waged work in nearby tea estates.

The issue faced by the villagers is the transformation of the forest areas that surround the village into tea estates. Due to lack of education and awareness, the village people are ignorant of their rights.



Forested valley in Marikodu

In the author's experience, observing the village during the last year, Marikodu is a typical tribal village, devoid of much conflict from outsiders.



Priya, author of this article