

PADDY

SAVE OUR RICE CAMPAIGN

No. 33 January 2017



RICE DIVERSITY BLOCK- THE RAINBOW ON EARTH

While walking through the fresh mist drops on that December morning toward the rice diversity block in our Panavally rice diversity block, I was reminiscing about how far the Campaign has come. The Save Our Rice Campaign has completed 10 years from its origins in a gathering in Kumbalangi in 2006. The Campaign has tried, sometimes failed at other times succeeded in popularising traditional rice cultivation and consumption. Many of the success stories have organically evolved and surprised us with the responses from farmers and others. Rice diversity blocks were one such idea which has evolved in a way we did not even envisage.

RDBs began as a means to conserve multiple varieties in a small area by individual farmers or a small group of farmers. It began with small conservation plots, where a field day was celebrated when the grains were mature. Farmers from nearby and expert seed savers were invited to choose plants based on attributes and also personal preference. Slowly this led to many farmers becoming aware about these traditional varieties and adopting them in their fields and farms. Over the years RDBs have become a mandatory activity in all the campaign states.

It has led to re-discovery of lost varieties, by farmers leading to its revival and conservation. It has also led to the discovery of new seed saver farmers who ventured first to see the RDBs and then moved to starting their own RDBs. Thus

RDBs initially was a farmer led activity targeting farmers. From that we have taken a new direction with the Panavally RDB in Wayanad.

Right from inception the RDB in Kerala has attracted not only farmers but also scientists, politicians and bureaucrats. A progressive state with a strong organic farming policy the RDB which has been maintained since the last five years had attracted increasing interest from various sections of the society. Jayakumar, the founder of Thanal came up with the idea that our 5 year old RDB should be photographed from above to get an aerial view of the whole field, giving a snap shot of how the 200 odd varieties look at their peak.

Despite odds he persisted and commissioned Mithun, a photographer and designer to organise the aerial photography. The result was spectacular, the images clicked were absolutely stunning, and a poet friend called it "Rainbow on earth". When the RDB aerial view was shared it went viral. Our work came alive for many who otherwise could not comprehend what an RDB was and what we meant by agrobiodiversity conservation of paddy varieties.

As the adage goes, this beautiful image served the purpose of a thousand words. It has also inspired our many farmers who have their own RDBs and we hope that this image will further serve the cause of conservation of rice diversity!

PADDY Team



The rice diversity block at Panavally, Wayanad at the Thanal Agro-ecology Centre with 219 varieties
photographed in Nov 2016. *picture credit to Midhun R/Thanal*

LOST IN THE GREEN REVOLUTION, MANY-HUED VARIETIES OF PADDY ARE BEING REVIVED IN KERALA

Leneesh K & Sridhar R

Rice Diversity Blocks in Kerala and five other states preserve over 1,000 indigenous varieties of rice that were at risk of being lost.

In the Indian subcontinent, the birthplace of paddy, the colours of the crop's many varieties are as diverse as the land, its people, languages, cultures, costumes, dialects and so on. But most of that variety was lost, when farmers were asked to forgo indigenous varieties of paddy for a few high yielding varieties (HYVs) developed in labs.

This was 50 years ago, when the Green revolution saw India intensively push for replacing its more than 1.5 lakh heritage varieties with the new HYVs, simply to ensure better productivity.

Today, thanks to a few farmers, who refused to forgo their heritage seeds, and thanks to the efforts of scientists like Dr Richaria, and later Dr Debal Deb, as well as national campaigns like the Save our Rice Campaign (SoRC), more than 1,000 varieties are preserved and propagated every year in fields, and maintained in Rice Diversity Blocks (RDBs) and live seed banks across India.

Indigenous Rice Diversity Blocks are fields that maintain the various varieties of paddy across years, either as a collective effort by entities like the SoRC or by individual farmers. The Save our Rice campaign has facilitated the

maintenance of many RDBs across six states – Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, West Bengal, Chattisgarh and Jharkhand. Together, these RDBs conserve more than 1,000 indigenous varieties, which over 30,000 farmers have adopted.

One such RDB at the Thanal Agro-ecology Centre (TAEC) in Panavally in Wayanad district of Kerala has grabbed wider public attention this year. This RDB has 219 indigenous rice varieties, of which 164 are native to Kerala. This is the largest live collection of paddy varieties in the state.

The campaign started its RDB work in Kerala in 2010. The first RDB was trialed at Kammana in Edavaka gram panchayat in Wayanad district. It was maintained on the paddy field of an indigenous farmer called Cheruvayal Raman. It had 22 indigenous rice varieties, all local to the Wayanad district. Cheruvayal Raman, later went on to become an icon of his own, as a conserver of seeds.

This RDB attracted a lot of attention especially among farmers and students. Dr Leena Kumari, then Professor and head, Regional Agriculture Research Station (RARS) (expansion), Mankombu and Sri Krishnaprasad, the seed consultant with the Campaign, provided the technical support, training RDB curators and field organisers in Kerala in maintaining RDB and seed purity.



Leneesh and Saneesh, the guardians of the RDB amidst the fully grown paddy plants

Rajesh and Reena, two nature enthusiasts gave their paddy land to Thanal, a voluntary organisation with its Agro-Ecology Centre at Panavelly, Wyanad for maintaining the RDB. This helped SoRC increase the number of varieties and scientifically manage its own RDB. The Campaign had, by then, collected 64 indigenous rice varieties. Nearly half of the varieties in this RDB were local to Wayanad.

In 2011-12 SoRC conducted seed exploration trips in Kerala. In February 2013, it also ran a seed caravan from Kasargod to Thrissur for sensitising the public about the importance of conserving indigenous seeds. Both helped SoRC increase its collection of indigenous rice seeds.

There were many issues in maintaining so many varieties of paddy in one block. The wide difference in duration of the varieties was the main challenge. The flowering of the different rice plants needed to be asynchronised (made not to coincide), to avoid cross pollination and ensure each variety remained pure. It took 3 years to stabilise the functioning of this RDB. In 2013, the team managed to establish the asynchrony in the RDB and built it up as a rice learning centre.

The RDB was not maintained merely as a field where diverse rice seeds are grown. It soon grew into a centre for knowledge sharing. The first rice field days event, a residential workshop for a growing group of seed savers from different parts of Kerala, was conducted at the RDB at Panavelly in November 2013. At the event, knowledge about the diverse varieties was shared, and this motivated them to take more efforts to conserve indigenous rice varieties.

Compared to 2010, there is a passion among farmers today for traditional seeds, and many have adopted them in their cultivation. Interestingly, the Agriculture Department is now interested in promoting these varieties. This development is seen in the other rice campaign states of West Bengal, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu as well. This is indeed a welcome development. It is now also seen that many of these varieties also compete well with the HYVs, show a better resistance to pests and diseases, and most importantly adapt well to local climatic conditions. Some of them have excellent stress tolerance properties, and are highly suitable for

changing climate conditions. The collection includes varieties that are scented, medicinal, palatable for different culinary purposes, recipes and so on.

In April 2014, the RDB Panavelly launched its seed distribution programme. Following this, C Vijayan, a farmer from Kannur district, established an RDB in his village Alappadamba with the rice seeds he collected from Panavelly.

Owing to increased interest among large sections of people, especially farmers and schools, the field days turned into a field week programme in 2014. After visiting the RDB, a few inspired minds started similar RDBs in other parts of the state, including one in Kasargod by Prabhakaran, a school teacher and farmer, and another in Wayanad by T Unnikrishnan, a farmer.

Thanal along with the SoRC conducted its first seed festival in the region in April 2015 at the LP school in Panavelly. It was a one-day seed festival featuring events such as seed exhibition, seed exchange, a food festival and sessions on various topics related to seed conservation, agro-ecology and so on.

The year 2016, was an exciting one for paddy seed conservation in Kerala. Five seed festivals were conducted, which drew visitors from across the state. 13 RDBs now exist across the state, having spread to the districts of Kasaragod, Kannur, Wyanad, Thrissur, Malappuram and Palakkad.

The icing on the cake came when photographer Midhun Raveendranath and his team, used a helicam over the Rice Diversity Block in Panavelly and gave the world a bird's-eye view of the RDB. With such photographic evidence, the world came to see a paddy diversity field, in all the various hues and colours of nature.

With interest in indigenous rice varieties growing among scientists, farmers and policy makers, and thanks to the growing popularity of RDBs, the future looks brighter for the preservation of the diverse varieties of paddy, in all their natural glory.

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JOURNEY TO THE HEART OF RICE DIVERSITY

East India and Dr Richharia are in the hearts of every person who works on rice diversity. I have heard and read a lot about the region and the person several years back and have recently begun travelling there. I am also meeting and hearing about rice from many of my friends who work on agro biodiversity in eastern India. We have also begun hearing about the erosion of agro biodiversity from east India and it is critical to stop this erosion.

In the last two years the Save Our Rice campaign could join hands with some of them. Our friend and colleague Soumik Banerjee, already working with tribal communities in Jharkhand could easily identify the villages and communities where we could start working on rice biodiversity conservation. The recent understanding globally about climate change, sustainability and food security warrants this intervention at all levels, wherever possible. So we were happy when we could start some work here with indigenous people and seeds.

By November end my colleague Sridhar and I travelled to Jharkhand and Chattisgarh villages where they have started rice diversity blocks(RDB) and seed banks(SB). The first place we visited was Sundar Pahadi in Jharkhand where Soumik has been living and working for several years. Here, Sagar village, mainly peopled by the Santal community is where Hemlal Murmi has joined with the rice campaign to start a beautiful rice diversity block(RDB). This is the first time a RDB is created in this village. Other farmers in this village are watching his work as well as the



Usha, The national coordinator of the Save Our Rice Campaign in Chhattisgarh with women farmers and seed savers

varieties. Soumik and Hemlal conducted a field day for other farmers to come and see and choose their varieties of preference. The whole field looked beautiful with huge trees surrounding the field and a yellow flower carpet of a herb around the trees. Hemlal enthusiastically showed us his field with different varieties of rice with panicles. He knows the name and main characteristics of every variety.

The second village where we visited was of Pahadi community. They live in the hills and practice a kind of mixed cropping of maize, pumpkin and long beans. They also do silk worm rearing in the forest seasonally. The whole family will live in the forest during this work. There are around 100 villages of Pahadi community. When we went there in the morning we could see a festival like mood where men, women and children moving here and there, anxious, some making food etc. They welcomed us in the traditional way. They washed our feet with water, dried it using a cloth and put some oil. Women came forward to put garlands made with local flowers. Then we all sat together and talked about rice campaign, indigenous seeds, pesticides etc. There were panchayath members in this meeting from other villages also. There were discussions on how

panchayaths can take an active role in preventing the use of pesticides and promoting traditional agriculture . Both men and women spoke . After that we had lunch cooked with different varieties of millets and wild leaves .

On the same day evening we left Sundar Pahadi for Ambikapur in Chhattisgarh. It was a long journey by train through the heartland of mineral rich Orissa, Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh. On the second day morning we reached Ambikapur. We got down at a beautiful clean railway station which looked like a heritage area. . Bhupendra Singh of Sangata, an organization working on rural development came to pick us up.

They have initiated a rice RDB, it is located in a place called Lalithpur which is few kilometers away from Ambikapur. We had a meeting with the local farmers from around seven villages about the rice campaign and the need to conserve indigenous varieties of crops. That belt is rich in scented rice varieties . One of them is called Jeera Phool. Some high yielding varieties (HYVs) are also popular among farmers . They also have black and red varieties of rice. Karhani, a black rice variety is supposed to have many medicinal properties.

Another oil seed plant Niger is also grown in this region. The oil from this plant is said to have high omega 3 and 6. The area is like a plateau with sal trees and in between farmers cultivate rice, niger and some pulses. We visited the RDB with around 50 different varieties of rice and the seed bank , which is in the final stages of completion. Paras Nath , working with Sangata manages the RDB. We had a discussion with the women farmers who came for the meeting . Sangata is working many villages in

this area to develop sustainable agriculture and they said that marketing is an issue .

Babulal and his colleague from Madhyapradesh also joined us. Babulal is a writer and cultural activist from Madhyapradesh who is working on conservation . He also maintains a RDB now as part of the rice campaign and also conserving wheat varieties . He also interacted with the farmers and shared his views on agri-culture.

Next day we visited a hill station Mainpat where there are Tibetan settlements. We were fortunate to see the village market, a feast to the eyes with lots of agro biodiversity. The market took me to the description about Vavilov's trips in Gary Paul Nabhan's book Where our food comes from. Vavilov's exploratory trips involved first visiting the village markets to understand about diversity. We bought some seeds of small potato , buck wheat, chilly etc directly from farmers in the market. After that we visited an organic processing unit run by a society. They also run a shop for local organic products. In addition they also supply to Bangalore organic shops. They said that climate change and increasing drought is impacting their production.

Although we could see only a small part of Eastern India , it revealed to us how rich this region is . But the region and people face threats from mining companies and other development projects. The hopeful fact is that the Chhattisgarh government is keen on developing organic agriculture in the state. We hope that they also realize the need to protect the agro biodiversity and its holders.

Usha , national Coordinator, Save Our Rice Campaign

RDB IN THE NEWS

The SOR Campaign lead organisation Sahaja Samrudha featured in news... "Starting with nine farmers in 2000, the movement called 'Sahaja Samrudha' (Bountiful Nature) has grown into a network of small farmers that shares practices and exchanges knowledge about sustainable agriculture....Till date, the farmers of Sahaja Samrudha have conserved and revived over 700 traditional paddy varieties including Diana rice, which is great for diabetics, and Black Burma rice, indigenous to northeast India. They have also facilitated the growth and conservation of more than 68 varieties of millets , ancient Indian grains that are hardy, drought resistant, and extremely nutritious."

Read the full article at : <http://www.thebetterindia.com/81830/traditional-farming-organic-food-sahaja-samruddha-karnataka/>

ULLURAVU- ARANGOTTUKARA AGRICULTURE FESTIVAL

Drought is real now. People perceive it. Farmers experience it. Even governments realize the problem.

From 20-22nd January 2017

Seed and harvest festivals have come back to Kerala in the last one decade as part of the organic farming –sustainable agriculture movement in the state. The slow death of agri-culture that was happening in Kerala in the 1980s and 1990s resulted in sidelining traditional wisdom and loss of livelihoods especially in food production. The two festivals of Kerala, Onam and Vishu, both were traditionally harvest festivals. Now these have also become market oriented commercial events where people buy everything instead of producing from their own land or in their own homes. And the younger generation does not see the connection between these festivals and agriculture and food production.

In the last 10 years this scenario has changed. Many groups and organizations joined the rice festivals, brinjal festivals and seed festivals and seed caravans which became a rallying point for not only farmers but also students, social and environmental activists, SHGs, local self governments, cultural groups and citizens at large.

The harvest festival at Arangottukara, a small village in Thrissur district was initiated by a theatre-art group called Patasala, which began organizing people around environment, agriculture and food safety issues some 10 years back. They joined the campaign to keep Bt Brinjal out of our farms and plates and also the 20 state Kisan Swaraj Yathra. They used these events and campaigns to further raise awareness about biodiversity in their locality . Their organic farming initiative motivated them to form the Krishi patasala(meaning farm school). This is a collective of farmers, mostly women farmers who are into organic production, value addition and marketing. They have been organizing the harvest festival in the last 4-5 years. This is a 2-3 days festival where the days and nights are packed with cultural performances, harvesting and winnowing of paddy, seminars and discussions on different aspects of society , women , children , environment and sustainability.

This year due to the drought there was virtually nothing to harvest. So the team decided to still conduct the festival and made climate change the focal theme. Drought is real now. People perceive it. Farmers experience it. Even governments realize the problem. In this village many farmers could not start even cultivation this season. The Krishi patasala collective began cultivation and for the first time in a decade they had to irrigate the crop to save at least part of their crop. Fortunately they have a good water source.

This year, ten children of this collective started rice biodiversity conservation with 10 different varieties of rice. Each child took charge of one variety. Before the festival began this team of children walked around their village and documented all the water resources and their history. They made a video of this and it was screened during the second day of the festival . Jayakumar (founder of Thanal) and I interacted with them on the issue of climate change and its impact on agriculture . On the same day there was another session on climate change which was anchored by me with panelists including Suchithra(journalist and activist), Jayakumar(Thanal), Bindu(District Soil Conservation officer) and few practioners also joined. At the end of the discussion everyone strongly felt the need to start some local action urgently to address the issue of water.

As usual there was exhibition of seeds, agriculture produce, crafts ,paintings , seminar and discussion, drama , songs , video , etc during this 3 day event . Thanal's stall had different varieties of paddy seeds which attracted attention of not only farmers, but children , panchayath members, writers etc. On the second day morning all the participants came together to repair a pond in this village. In the previous years the second day morning is reserved for paddy harvest. The organizers wanted to bring the message home the message that there will be no food to harvest unless we begin harvesting water first. These festivals are not just celebrations, but also an opportunity to make people think and take home a new message. On the third day morning people harvested some paddy (the very little that survived the drought) and enjoyed the music along with harvest.

All the three days people were served with organic food, produced locally. Simple, pure food. That is another unique feature of this event. Sreeja, Narayanan , Bappu, Savithri, Ashitha, Bindu, Sashi,many more names, who bring us all together every year to this beautiful event. A group of people who are part of this collective, seeking sustainable , secure ways of lives and livelihoods and spaces for creative thinking and action .

S. Usha, national Coordintor, Save Our Rice Campaign

WAYANAD SOR RICE DIVERSITY BLOCK BECOMES FAMOUS!

The rice diversity block(RDB) maintained by Thanal as part of the Save Our Rice (SOR) Campaign in Panavally has featured in three articles in Malayalam and English. The now famous ariel image of the RDB with 219 varieties has been featured in the SOR calendar this year, to remind people throughout the year of the beautiful, colourful tapestry of paddy. It has also found greater fame through articles featuring the image and the work.

The first article appeared in The Hindu on Nov 28, 2016, saying, “ *Wayanad is turning into a hub of rice diversity in the country. As many as 219 traditional varieties of paddy are being cultivated at the Rice Diversity Block (RDB) established at Panavelly under the Save Our Rice campaign involving farmers, environmental activists and voluntary organisations. The first aerial photographs of the RDB have been released by Thanal, an environmental and advocacy research group based in Kerala that coordinates the campaign in South India, Bengal, Odisha and Chhattisgarh.*” Read the full article here at: <http://www.thehindu.com/news/cities/Thiruvananthapuram/Rich-paddy-palette-in-Wayanad/article16726163.ece?ref=sliderNews>

Then just before Pongal, an article written by Devi, who is part of the SOR Campaign, on traditional rices and rice conservation appeared in the Coimbatore edition of the Hindu Metro. Read the full article here at: <http://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-features/tp-metroplus/Rice-to-the-occasion/article17016515.ece>

“The fully polished white rice that we get in the market is not the paddy rice our forefathers ate. They ate the flavourful, hand pounded rices grown locally during season. What we need to do is to welcome these back into our homes and diets.”

Again the RDB was featured by a Hindu columnist, Shonali Muthalaly, “Most of us are guilty of an abbreviated rice vocabulary, limited to basmati, ponni and fried, even though we live in a country rich with traditional, not to mention delicious, versions of this staple. Let’s make this the year of rice. About 50 years ago, India replaced more than 1.5 lakh heritage varieties with high-yielding strains of rice. However, thanks to national movements such as the Save our Rice Campaign (SoRC), there’s an alternative to this homogeneity of taste.”

<http://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-features/tp-metroplus/Lose-weight-eat-rice-find-love.../article17032834.ece>

The articles in PADDY may be used (as is or translated) for educational, awareness creation and non-commercial purposes with due acknowledgement

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