

UNCULTIVATED FOODS

The World, Worldviews, Knowledge & Practices of Kondh community



“*Horu thasa* keeps the hills alive”



“We perform rituals and worships before going to the forests for shifting cultivation and collecting roots and tubers. Every ritual is an act of thanksgiving to the deities for providing us with food and for protecting our forests and lands. Without worshipping our dongor devi /forest deity, we do not go into the forest for plucking any fruits or digging any roots and tubers, even for medicines”: Landi Shikoka, Khalpadar

*“We do not cut, Harada (*Terminalia chebula*), Bahada (*Terminalia Bellerica*), Amla (*Phyllanthus emblica*), Mahua (*Madhuca indica*), Bar (*Ficus bengalensis*), Sargi (*Shorea Robusta*) and Neem (*Azadirachta indica*) and other trees that are very useful and sacred trees for Kondhs. This is one of our many rules and regulations that we follow while practicing **horu thasa**. The plants, which have some medicinal benefits or provide us with multiple benefits, we never cut those plants while preparing the hill slope land for horu thasa. Besides that, while cutting the trees, we take care that soil does not erode. The trunk and branches of the trees and plants that are cut are used as fuelwood. We have a rule not to cultivate the upper slopes of any hill or mountain because we leave the trees there for wood to make our ploughs and other agriculture implements. There are some hills and forests that are designated as **Kadubasa** or sacrificial lands which have religious significance for us, and which we do not cultivate or allow anyone to cultivate or cut trees”*: Suryamani Kadraka, Daragodi (v).

“Of the two mountain forests, Jargi Horu is the name of one of our forests and the other is a religious or sacred grove called Satarkoti and if anyone cuts any tree in this forest then they die from some illness or the other and misfortune befalls her or his family. Bees protect this forest. Only those who speak Kui can enter that forest to collect twigs, leaves, roots or tubers. Anyone who speaks Odia or is not a Kondh Adivasi will be attacked by thousands of bees. Even if we speak in Odia inside the forest the bees will attack us also. This has been happening since even before our grandparents”

- An elderly Kondh man, Bondichuan village



Traditional beliefs restrain over-exploitation of forests. Mundi (head) of Kanda (tuber) is left behind for regeneration, and for others

Kondhs view the earth with great respect and reverence. This can be seen through their relationship with the land, their belief in animism, and their origin stories. They believe that their relationship with nature is very sacred, and the earth needed to be treated with dignity and reverence. They recognize a unity in their physical and spiritual universes, the union of natural and supernatural. Their origin cycles, oral traditions, and cosmologies connected them with all animate and inanimate beings, past and present. Even rocks, mountains, and rivers are important components in everyday life.

The quality of the relationship between humans and land is the basis of subsistence, not surplus production, **because nature provides for life and not for exploitative extraction.** Land is not a commodity for the market, but the site where ancestors have been buried and the *raison d'être* of their homeland. Referring to this facet of human-nature relationship, merely as environmental sensitivity would be inadequate, as its roots go deep into existential philosophy of indigenous communities.



“How can we be alive and well if the land, forest and other beings are not? Our health is inseparable from the health of animals, other life forms, the land and forest” – a bejuni in a discussion on the Covid pandemic

COVID PANDEMIC and....

Forests – Past ~ Present ~ Future

“This pandemic needs us, humans, to push ourselves and change our mindset, question why we do what we do, and envision how we can live in coexistence with other species. It is not possible that some parties will not try and take an advantage of this crisis. We feel an immense threat of losing our land to companies. We heard that attempts are being made to snatch our forests from under our feet, taking advantage of the lockdowns. We will fight for our forest till our last dying breath. The forest is our child sometimes, and in other times, we are the child of the forest. We keep taking turns protecting each other, and that is the only way we understand to live. The fight to protect our forests is the fight to protect this ecological balance, it is the fight to protect our life” – a Kondh woman

“More than six months of the Coronavirus-Induced lockdown is over, and we are not facing a need to even go to the market. At home, we have our harvests of millets, sorghum, maize, paddy, pigeon pea, cowpea, rice bean, sesame, and flax seeds etc. We also go to the forests to collect leafy vegetables, roots berries and fruits. Hopefully, now my children might rediscover the ability resilience of our food system to sustain us during and after any crisis rather than yearn for food brought in from the market!”

- Radika, an elderly Kondh man and a talented craftsman, Tikarpada (Rayagada dist.)

ISSUES THAT ARE A CAUSE FOR DEEP CONCERN

- Projection of Adivasi food systems as backward
- Yield-centric intensive agriculture and commercial plantations – external dependence
- Lack of recognition of multiple values of diverse, traditionally consumed forest foods by the mainstream model of food and farming
- Legal right to food not insisting on locally produced food, nor inclusion of uncultivated foods from commons – therefore, protection of these commons is threatened in pursuit of mainstream notions of food security, intensive farming, industrialization and infrastructure projects and commodification of forests
- Policy making in silos (forestry, agriculture, nutrition, education, tribal welfare, housing ,health and climate crisis etc.)
- No recognition and inclusion of world views of the local forest communities .



WHAT NEEDS TO CHANGE?



India's forest policies have to be re-aligned with food security objectives

Sustainable forest management is about multi-functionality of forests (not timber alone)

Forest clearance procedures for dams, mines, highways, etc. must also factor in loss to forest foods.

Re-evaluating “safeguarding of food security” and food areas

- No valuation of forests as food sources now, when diverted for ‘non-forest purposes’.
- LARR 2013 - Special provision to safeguard food security regards only ‘irrigated multi-cropped land’ as a source of food – this needs to encompass more

Recognising Forest People

- Many of the Scheduled Tribes (STs) listed in the Constitution (Scheduled Tribes) Order, 1950 are forest-based.
- Focus cannot be singularly on forest foods! The people whose food cultures are intrinsically linked to forests also need to be duly recognised
- The *National Forest Policy, 1988* acknowledges the symbiotic relationship between tribals and forests – this is not seen in action however
- Ministry of Tribal Affairs will need to consider the high-level committee reports & in proposed *National Tribal Policy*, which remain on the shelves.

WHAT SHOULD BE DONE

Focus on Women

- Women have to be recognized as food gatherers and seed keepers – invaluable knowledge and skills
- If women and their guaranteed access to forest landscapes is threatened it could have adverse impacts on their household nutritional security
- Intimate relationship between forests, commons and women's empowerment should be expressly recognised



Ensure Access to Forest-foods

- FRA 2006 – land and forest tenure still to be secured

Re-prioritise agricultural policies for forest communities

- Climate crisis – As cultivation itself becomes vulnerable, Uncultivated foods need to be encouraged as a long-term adaptation strategy
- Wrong technologies in farming which destroy biodiversity can imperil food systems of forest communities

KEY PRINCIPLES TO UPHOLD

- Food sovereignty not nurtured as an organising principle of local communities (especially those who live with forests) could affect sovereignty of the state as a whole.
- Food and nutrition are too important an area to be left to markets to deliver on. Our natural sense of basic interdependence with other beings are utterly destroyed and replaced with an addictive focus on personal short-term 'profit'.



It is in conversation with the Kondhs that we realise the possibility of another imagination even in the present times.....

RE-BUILDING AND REVIVING

- Rebuilding an entire range of different and appropriate institutions, including traditional “Kutumbs”, for relocalisation of food production, distribution, storage and consumption
- Reviving knowledge – engaging the younger generation in dialogues, knowledge sharing and learning – taking them along to forests and *horu thasa* lands.
- The other strategy is to practice vernacular architecture by appropriate integration of local science, technology and vernacular architects as strategy towards habitation construction that strengthens resilient internal solidarity, communal autonomy and ecological consciousness.
- The community healers have been working with the interested youth to recognize and use herbs in the form of fresh drugs, crushed juice, decoction, and powdered medicine for oral intake to treat fever, cold and cough, and strengthening immunity.





Elders working with youth and children to build their homes using locally available materials .



Purushottam telling stories . Vill:Hatipotta



Sharing of knowledge and skills between traditional healers and a modern doctor



Forest trip: children climbing trees and having fun
Vill: Gorlagudi



Thank you for listening to us