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# Leaf Litter

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## EDITORIAL

# Behind the rhetoric of hospitality

**“[the emperor] does not bring you liberty by casting you in prison, but treats you with respect within his palace and thus makes you his slave.”**

Charles Freeman (The Closing of the Western Mind)

We live in strange times. Of ever-changing laws and amendments that actually usurp the rights that have been granted to the marginalized peoples with the sole aim of correcting injustices, like the complete turnaround in Ghatbharra village, Chhattisgarh, which had received entitlement to its forests under the Forest Rights Act but which was cancelled when coal was discovered there; of the dilution of laws, like not requiring the consent of gram sabha for linear projects, that in the end defeat the purpose for which it was enacted; of *gram sabhas*, the village-based backbone of all legislations meant to keep land grabs and ecological destructions in check, over-ruled at will or brow-beaten into accepting the wishes of the corporate sector; and of a programme like ‘Make in India’ which is nothing but a euphemism for ‘come and do what you want, we won’t bother you too much if the money is right’, which Mr Modi himself went around selling in Seoul and Tokyo, and the lynch-pin of our ‘cordial’ relations with the USA and many other countries in the developed

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world, promising businessmen 'personal attention' and conducive 'conditions' to set up infrastructure projects. *Athithi devo bhava* indeed. For those who read between the lines it is all about human rights violations, often coupled with very blatant environmental destruction that leaves people dependent on their forests and fields completely in the lurch.

Within India, state after state – Telengana, Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Tamil Nadu and Odisha most vocal in recent times – vie with each other to invite FDIs, promising potential investors precious commodities like water, land and electricity, which our own people lack, at throwaway prices. Even stretches of rivers, like the Shivenath, have been privatized to accommodate and display our legendary hospitality. In fact, it is the lack of these very commodities that force vast armies of rural people to migrate to the cities and swap their once pristine lands for the slums that are a distant cry from the vision of *swachh bharath*.

When the appointed guardians of our nation are themselves the threat, who does one turn to? Isn't it time that someone narrated, again, the ageless fable of the goose that laid golden eggs to these leaders and representatives of our country? That left to itself, and shown some consideration, the goose will continue to oblige. But if pushed and forced beyond a point the poor bird will just suffer and die! If Aesop is read carefully we have all the lessons we need for living a life within the limits imposed upon us by nature. And surely Aesop is wiser than Modi and Obama and Putin. And even Trump!

It isn't difficult to see that we've quite slaughtered the goose in many parts of India. Polluted rivers flowing black with coal dust, vast hillsides stripped off all the green and cut up like a cake for the granite it holds, mountains of garbage and stench and sewage that guarantee us assorted diseases by 2020 or even earlier, and ever fewer voices that speak about

all this due to the fear of being declared an anti-national – which in practice converges to anti-Hindu – as the news from central and southern Chhattisgarh show. When the Reporters Without Borders (RWB) released the World Press Freedom Index in April this year, India was ranked a dismal 133<sup>rd</sup> among a total of 180 nations; we nestle cosily with Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh. But our leaders, so keen on hospitality, are least flustered by the lack of that pillar of democracy: freedom.

Sometime back we had a Government Order that intended to hand over all the degraded forests of the country to the corporate sector for reforestation: the forest department claimed that it was cash-strapped to take up reforestation at the scale required! There was no discussion about expertise or track records, or the suitability of handing over lands to a sector famous for destroying it. More recently, another threat looms large in the form of the Compensatory Afforestation Fund Management and Planning Authority (CAMPA or CAF) with a working capital of Rs 42,000 crores that has been distributed to the states, according to the amount of forest areas that were diverted for 'non-forestry purposes', in order to help them 'reforest' it again!! Again, considering the scale involved in these operations – number of plants, diversity and appropriateness of species, the areas required and identified to plant, the numbers of indigenous and rural people who may be affected – one would expect an open discussion initiated by the FD with all the stakeholders concerned. (For the record, India imports more than 70 % of its timber from Malaysia, Myanmar and New Zealand; in Malaysia the logs originate from forests in Sarawak and probably neighbouring Kalimantan, cleared for palm oil plantations, which lead to much disturbance in the lives of the nomadic Penan. Coincidentally, India is today the largest importer of palm oil in the world.) Perhaps the CAF would be used to actually grow the timber we need, preventing a chain reaction that affected countries justify in

their turn by claiming rising GDPs and little else. And if it can partner with the local communities in doing this it could be a wonderful collaboration.

One suspects that one of the results of the Compensatory Afforestation Fund will be to make the Forest Departments more swank, with state-of-the-art vehicles and rest-houses, equipment and training centres, and other unheard of frills meant to impress counterparts in other countries. One hopes, of course against all hope that better tools just might make better carpenters. Or should we put our trust in Tolstoy who once remarked that the worst prospect that mankind may ever have to face is a Genghis Khan with a telephone?

Wishing all a saner, less noisy, less anxious 2017.

MR, December 2016





*image source : lebbeuswoods.wordpress.com*

## At The Side of the Road

Some fifteen years ago on a visit to Brazil I was taken to a Terena community on the outskirts of Sao Paolo. My hosts were both the Terena and an NGO that was working with them. It was a day without formalities – visits with some families, a talk with an elder, then a lunch in the community dining room. The lunch was the beginning of a series of surprises.

A few hundred people were living in a tangle of shacks and huts not far from

a huge dual-carriageway that led into the city. A few new buildings stood out from much that was improvised and home-made. I was taken to see a school and the community hall, but they stood among homes that were minimal and were linked by dirt and gravel tracks. Across the dual-carriageway was an extensive park, where the forested hills sloped down towards a dense urban sprawl. Apart from looking out onto the park, the village appeared to be surrounded by concreted and noisy

modernity; an eccentric, half-formed suburb at the edges of the largest mass of people living anywhere in Brazil. A community that had managed to keep hold of at least this small space for itself within a conurbation of more than eleven million, a metropolis that has been designate ‘an alpha global city.’ What, in this setting, caught in such a maze of colonial and industrial history, could possibly remain of Indigenous culture and heritage?



One part of the answer was the language: those from the community I was introduced to spoke both Portuguese and their own Terena language. Then there was the lunch itself – not the food (a large bowl of chicken stew with rice and salad) but the social and political context of the dining room. Everyone ate here. Most of the houses did not have more than a minimal fire on which to boil water. Eating was communal. When I expressed my surprise, and asked how long this had been the arrangement, I was told that it had always been that way. People ate together. Why would each house prepare food in private? How could everyone share the resources if they did not combine to eat? This was the only real way to make sure that everyone was part of the community, and benefited from whatever the community could offer as sustenance. This was the basis of life – the body and the society, the health of each individual, one way of ensuring basic equality. Of course people were poor. There is very little income, minimal surplus, for those still living as Terena. But sharing defines the culture; so food must be shared. The dining room, the lunch I was eating – this was the people's heritage, alive at every meal.

After eating and in the communal kitchen, I was lucky to be able to spend time with community elders. I asked about how people lived, how the economy managed to keep going. To my surprise I learned that there was still some hunting and gathering possible in the park across the dual-carriageway, and into the forested hills beyond. Many looked for jobs in the city, but there were always some who went out onto the land. Was it a small group that did this local and traditional harvesting, I asked? Did some young people go, or was it mostly the older men and women, the ones who had held onto the crucial knowledge and skills? Of course I had in mind the way hunting and gathering

had narrowed and become specialised in the Canadian Inuit and First Nation societies where I had lived. The answer to my questions led to a description of how all decision making was made. This is what I was told:

Each morning, on waking, before having more than an early drink, everyone would gather in the large public building – the community hall or what, in many indigenous societies, would be called a Long House. The adults would all gather on the sides; boys and girls under the age of puberty would be at the centre. The young would then be asked to tell their dreams from which they had just woken. Those who had strong and memorable dreams would speak out; this could be a piece of narrative or, at times, just a song. Whatever had carried from their night-time dreaming into the morning mind. Elders listened to these. Then, using the dreams and songs they had heard from the young, they would offer interpretations of their meaning in order to decide what people should do that day. Sometimes, they said, it was evident from the dreams that the young should go out onto the land, to learn the knowledge of the elders and take part in hunting and gathering. On other mornings, the elders would conclude that the dreams they had heard meant the children should all go to ordinary school for the day. In this way, through this reliance on the dreams of the young, the elders could make sure that everyone learned all that they needed to learn. The language, values and skills of the ancestors on some days; the Portuguese, academic subjects and disciplines of mainstream Brazil on other days.

Did they do this every morning? Yes. Did everyone always come? No, but most do, and everyone would come sometimes. Could this continue into the future? They hoped so. Did the young marry or live with non-indigenous Brazilians? Yes, some did; but if so, they were always asked to set up their new home outside

the community. Of course they could visit, and spend time with their relatives here; but the fear of the outside was so great that the elders did all they could to keep the community as close to its indigenous identity as they could manage.

The village where I was standing, having this surprising conversation, had been finding ways of holding onto its cultural identity for several hundred years. Sao Paolo was first created as a centre of European and Catholic influence in the sixteenth century. Its original purpose was the conversion of the various Guainas peoples, of whom the Terena are just one group, to the Roman Catholicism of the Conquistadors. By the seventeenth century, however, the new city began to grow – as a centre for slave-traders, murderous adventurers and all those who found in the New World and its peoples ways of achieving brutal profits and grim personal satisfactions. The fate of multitudes of indigenous peoples at the hands of these *bandeirantes* is all too well known. All the more astonishing that within the urban sprawl of modern Sao Paolo, after a whole era of destruction aimed at people like them, the community where I was visiting still spoke its language, had maintained its system of communal eating, and began each day by paying close and creative attention to the dreams and songs of the children.

A powerful force within the colonial mind-set is the often stated prediction that the indigenous peoples, the “native tribes”, the Aboriginal cultures, the Adivasi of any and every particular colonial setting, are doomed. A prophecy again and again comes into the language of imperialism: the people who were ‘discovered’ by European explorers, adventurers, settlers and missionaries have no place in the future that these relative newcomers are creating. In the minds of some imperialists, this disappearance of the

tribal world is as appropriate as it is inevitable. The “traditional” life of the Adivasi is something to escape from; “development” is what everyone needs. Another kind of imperialism is warmer, less ruthless, and can appreciate the beauty of the people and ways of life that are being displaced and destroyed. They lament this loss, and feel great sadness for the world as it clears the forests and paves over the history of an ‘original humanity.’

For all that they have different tones, both these voices are saying the same thing, delivering the same verdict: the future belongs to a thing called modernity, or something represented as inevitable progress. The land itself, the relevant ways of knowing and using all that is within and beneath the land, the form of work as well of daily life, along with the religious systems that offer links to the divine, the very meaning of the word meaning – all this, everything that is the human project, is being defined, and must be defined, by people and corporations and nation-states that live by conquest.

Every indigenous community, every tribal or Adivasi society has felt the brutal consequences of this verdict, this prediction, this resolve to overwhelm, absorb or destroy their way of being in the world. Every individual who has lived in societies that are not part of the imperial project has felt a sense of loss and the fear of further losses. At the same time, many of the fatal predictions have turned out not to be true. Colonial powers have been saying that tribal societies were about to disappear since colonists first arrived at their many frontiers. And many of these condemned tribes have failed to disappear. Despite all kinds of attack and dispossession, indigenous peoples live on and, if they can, defy the fatalists.

More and more ‘development’ turns out to be both destructive and self-destructive. Fewer and fewer can trust the governments of the world to take care of the world. Inequality becomes

ever more gross, with the wealth of the wealthy spiraling into mega fortunes and the poverty of the poor descending into the hell of urban destitution.

Never has it been more important, for each tribal or Adivasi group and for all of humanity, that alternative ways of seeing, knowing and taking care of the world are alive and well. Nor could it be a more important moment in modern history for us to look at ways in which human societies have often been built on a deep commitment to equality. Economic and social systems that destroy the environment and create vast social and economic divides are not some kind of inevitable norm. Ideas of progress and development that insist upon every increasing levels of consumption, that disguise greed and rapaciousness under false theories of human nature, are the enemies of wellbeing. The advocates of industrial progress insist that it is ‘natural’ for people to struggle for domination over one another, that inequality and relentless competition are just how the world works. All these ideas of what is natural are in fact concoctions of one kind of society; they are the myths the colonists use to justify the damage they cause. The longer and deeper history of humanity, and the lessons on offer from many parts of the tribal world, show that there are other and healthier ways to live. They can show us what it means to live with and within the landscape; and the wisdom of social systems where all resources are shared.

I stood at the entrance-way to a tiny, home-made hut where an old Terena man lived, and where he made crafts to sell to tourists. He was working on a set of carved animals – an owl, a parrot, two monkeys and a jaguar. He was gluing the birds and monkeys onto the branches of a miniature tree that he had shaped from a fork of thick, polished twigs. The jaguar was to be fixed to the base of the tree. The feathers, markings and spots on the animals had been burnt onto the wood. Of course I wanted to buy it from him. It’s not finished, he said, the

owl was not yet fixed in its place. I said I was happy to do it myself, if he showed me where he wanted the bird to be. I carried the tree and its animals away with me, tourist that I was, delighted by its beauty and its evocation of that surprising place.

To drive back into Sao Paulo we had to take a track from the village onto a narrow paved road, and then follow this down to a link to the dual-carriageway. Heavy traffic flowed in both directions; it was close to the end of the day. Once we were among the traffic, the Terena community and its cluster of shacks seemed to disappear into a remote distance. Out of sight, tiny and marginal, so utterly obscured by the crowd and force and noise and immensity of the city. But it is there, always there, on the other side of the dual-carriageway. And our very lives may, in the end, depend on it.

Inequality is the greatest social danger of our times. As it increases, so do the risks of violence and war. Gross inequality is what progress and development have come to mean; and they lead to their very opposite: breakdown and destitution. Alongside these failures of progress, the natural world is itself revealing the damage that is being done. Biologists now predict that by 2020 two-thirds of the world’s wild creatures will be extinct. This double disaster – of human inequity and natural destruction – is the challenge of our moment in history. Now, more than ever, with increasing urgency, we need to look for other ways of being human, other models of development, a different measure of human nature. We need to look long and hard at what has long been known, and is still sustained, on the other side of the dual-carriageway.

**Hugh Brody**  
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This is known to the Koitors from their detailed knowledge of different life-cycles, from birth to dissolution, of human beings, their *penu* (spirits), plants and animals. Several cycles of time occur simultaneously, each following its own course from birth to dissolution, the weeds, the flowers, the fruit, and the almost “generational” cycles of bamboo, the knowledge of which is the basis of all food gathering. This knowledge of several cycles of varying duration is the basis for the reverence for the variety and abundance of life. It conjures up a universe of the forest founded in the self activity of nature. This forest universe is internalized by the Koitors.

In the forest the Koitors experience a living space between the earth and the sky adorned and ornamented by life processes as they unfold in the light and shade of the sun and the moon. Here the time of regeneration is the basis for seamless space. This living space is Shringar Bhum.

The Koitors of the Nuruttee clan say that they came down the hills of Jagdalpur to Neygameta and from there to Kokameta. They recollect that several generations ago when their men returned home from work their bodies were covered with a sweet smelling pollen dust. Their women, on seeing this, insisted on shifting their settlement to this land of flowers. Though the men initially refused to move the women persisted; finally the men agreed and this new place was Kokameta.

Kokometa was a good place - there was water, the soil was good and there was a variety of plants and animals. However, the Nurutte Kaitor had to take permission from the non-human inhabitants of this space and perform a ritual: un-husked rice grains were kept overnight with an invocation to living beings that inhabited the forest space, requesting them express their view. In the morning the elders and the *leski* (a ritual specialist) read the sign, in the

## Reverence for Life and Democracy

Words are like seeds. As an entire plant is within a seed, within words there is an entire cosmology, a world view, an institutional system and a material culture. As with seeds, these in appropriate conditions of climate and soil strike root, open-up and bring in life.

Without words and seeds there would be no life.

To illustrate, ‘Shringar Bhum’ and ‘Abujhmarh’ describe the same geographical space in North Bastar; yet they represent two different and irreconcilable cosmologies and political economies.

Not many people know that the people who live here identify themselves as Koitors and their dwellings as Shringar Bhum, literally meaning a *beautiful, decorated place*: a forest civilization.

The Koitors say the creation of Shringar Bhum is the work of Talurmutte, the mother earth, and her consort Kanga; and the making of settlements is the work of their progeny, the ancestors known as *paror-paditors*. Their origin myth begins with a description of Talurmuttee sitting atop a hill crying as she looks at the waters which submerge the earth. The story goes on to describe how different beings of the forest - the crow, the wild boar, the snails, the millipedes, the earthworms,...- reclaim the earth with all its flora and fauna and distribute the water in the rivers and lakes. We hear about how Kanga learns from Talurmutte the different skills necessary live in the forest: these range from making a home, celebrating festivals, cultivating food and performing rites’ for the dead.

The Shringar Bhum forest regenerates itself on account of its own self activity.

• Some parts of this essay were written for a souvenir dedicated to R C V P Noronha-ICS (1916-1982). He was appointed deputy commissioner Bastar in 1949. It is published by the Noronha Foundaton, Bhopal, May 2016.

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change of pattern of grains, that 'the non-human beings were happy to have them'.

The village elders point to a tree which was planted by their ancestors on Neygameta hill to mark their arrival. The name of the tree is 'in the process of being said', never in fact to be uttered (*poriovehkal*, say your name). Except for this tree, the Nuruttee elders say, there are no traces, no residues of their ancestors who lived on this hill (*lesna*, to lose track of).

This ritual divination highlights a very important aspect of the forest civilizations, namely mutual recognition of the Koitors presence and of the presence of 'universe of the forest'. Embedded in the ritual is a perception that human settlements are grounded in 'that which is not the product of human labour'. This constitutes nature's labour or the work of nature. It includes the entire world of non-human nature. Nature is self-regenerative of its own labour. The ritual is the labour of the Koitors, its teleology is not to encroach into spaces where nature is on its own and in its own space. Implicit in this ritual is also self-regulation that is, to not take that which is not a product of ones own labor. Its boundaries are drawn by the diverse time cycles in nature. The labour of Koitors is inter-dependent with the labour of nature. The ritual describes the reciprocity and communion between Koitors and the forest universe. This shapes the self-regulatory Koitor identity (*poriovehkal*) in nature's own time and space in the forest (*lesna*). Reverence for that which is not a product of ones own labour is the principle of creation. An expression of this principle is that a Koitor's personal belongings are no more than can be carried.

This cosmology is rendered null and void by the term Abujhmarh.

Abujhmarh literally means unidentified hills (*abujh*, cannot be identified; *marh*, hill). This region is part of the Left Wing Extremism (LWE) affected States in India which include Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Odisha, Bihar, West Bengal, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh, in varying degrees. Abujhmarh spreads across the districts of Bijapur, Narayanpur and Dantewada of the erstwhile Bastar in Chattisgarh and covers approximately 3900 sq km. Here the Government of India and the Left Wing Extremism of the Maoists are in confrontation; the Maoists have made it the hub of their activities.

The LWE have made an agenda for the Koitors:

*In the primitive economy of Abujmarh, the Left ultras have even designed small irrigational projects. Maoists are referred to as dadas by the tribes who carry out slash and burn cultivation. People's courts or jan adalats are justice delivery systems and Mao Zedong's red book is the sacred text.*

*Revenue management is a serious part of the alternative establishment which propagates planned development through land sharing, cooperative farming and banking foodgrains and seeds. Abujmarh is Janatana Sarkar, the liberated place, which in Maoist parlance would be the model for replication across rural India....<sup>1</sup>*

The Government of India wants to bring to the people the benefits of development programs and it is expected that PESA 1996 and FRA 2006 will mainstream them. These legislations are not designed to restrain the capital intensive economy that extracts natural resources at a rate several times faster than the pace at which nature can regenerate. On the contrary, it is an integral part of it. For both the Government of India and the LWE Shringar Bhum is non-existent. For both Abujhmarh determines their

orientation and there is no possibility for the Koitors to live with the cosmology of Shringar Bhum. They are compelled to take sides: whichever they choose the other is an enemy, trapping them in a cross fire.

There is a political economy of words, intelligible in the way in which they constitute world views, open or close frames of knowledge, justify practices, legitimise institutions, promote ways of life, and create illusions and deceptions. Word clusters and the semantic field of terms draw attention to some aspects this political economy.

Abujhmarh is a political construct that describes the place and the people as tabula rasa, with no substance of their own. It destroys by silencing Talurmutte's words and seeds which hold the Shringar Bhum forest. In Abujhmarh there are only hardships.

Abujhmarh is legitimised by the vocabulary of contemporary modernization which includes both development and resistance. Some of the terms of this vocabulary are culture, sustainability, development, labour, self rule, autonomy, decentralization, progress, science, innovation, experiment, experience, technology, secularism, human rights, societal transformations, nature, indigenous, civil society, peace, participation, democracy, ecology, conservation, non-violence, accountability, freedom, liberty, equality and justice.

It is worth examining the contribution of this vocabulary to legitimizing genocide and undermining the reverence for life!

This vocabulary gives flesh and blood to a political democracy where it not possible to not engage with an either/or politics. This makes it difficult to appreciate the significance of Shringar Bhum in contemporary times. From the standpoint of Shringar Bhum there is

<sup>1</sup> <http://indiatoday.intoday.in/story/Red+terror/1/4146.html>



a notion of social democracy grounded in the notion of reverence for life, for that which is not the product of human labor.

This understanding of the notion is different from, and add a new dimension to, the one developed by Albert Schweitzer who received the Nobel Prize in 1952 for his philosophy of 'reverence for life', which he developed in the course of making and sustaining a hospital in West Central Africa. Schweitzer drew upon Christian theology and European philosophy. He demonstrated through his work that reverence for life is the basis for alleviating human suffering.

Today efforts are being made to bring reverence for life in a 'foundational position' of the modern world view. These efforts draw upon the world view and struggles of the 'first peoples' across the world to hold back the industrial technology from destroying the work of nature and the diversity of (that which is not the product of human labor)<sup>2</sup>.

In 2011 the Supreme Court of India upheld the right to worship the deity Niyam Raja. Niyam Raja represents the landscape and all the life process that constitute it. In both these instances, reverence for life is in the center. Life is in time that which is not the product of human labour but is its basis. Conversely, irreverence for 'this time' is the basis for irreverence for human labor. For this reason it is worthy of reverence.

The irreconcilability of 'Shringar Bhum' and 'Abujmarh' is an instance of this basis for the intractable conflicts



between the forest dwellers and the rest of the people in other part of India and perhaps in other countries across the world. The intractability is demonstrated from the violence and loss of life forms.

Progressive policy, forward looking legislation and radical mass movements have not been able to address it. On the contrary these have contributed to the 'intractability' for their thinking is structured by the contemporary vocabulary of modernization.

It is time to contemplate ways to decommission Abujmarh and clear the ground for Shringar Bhum in our modern world view. The labor of such an endeavour will become the basis for social democracy - a mode of being in the world shaped along the time contours of life processes inclusive of the human.

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<sup>2</sup> On September 28th 2008 'Rights for Nature' were given constitutional recognition in Ecuador. [Chapter 7 th: Rights for Nature Art. 71. Nature or Pachamama, where life is reproduced and exists, has the right to exist, persist, maintain and regenerate its vital cycles, structure, functions and its processes in evolution. Every person, people, community or nationality, will be able to demand the recognitions of rights for nature before the public organisms. The application and interpretation of these rights will follow the related principles established in the Constitution. The State will motivate natural and juridical persons as well as collectives to protect nature; it will promote respect towards all the elements that form an ecosystem. Art. 72. Nature has the right to restoration. This integral restoration is independent of the obligation on natural and juridical persons or the State to indemnify the people and the collectives that depend on the natural systems. In the cases of severe or permanent environmental impact, including the ones caused by the exploitation on non renewable natural resources, the State will establish the most efficient mechanisms for the restoration, and will adopt the adequate measures to eliminate or mitigate the harmful environmental consequences. Art. 73. The State will apply precaution and restriction measures in all the activities that can lead to the extinction of species, the destruction of the ecosystems or the permanent alteration of the natural cycles. The introduction of organisms and organic and inorganic material that can alter in a definitive way the national genetic patrimony is prohibited. Art. 74. The persons, people, communities and nationalities will have the right to benefit from the environment and form natural wealth that will allow wellbeing. The environmental services are cannot be appropriated; its production, provision, use and exploitation, will be regulated by the State.]



## FPIC needs to move beyond an end of the line solution

‘Free prior and informed consent’ (FPIC), is the principle recognizing that a community has the right to give or withhold its consent to proposed projects that may affect the lands they customarily own, occupy or otherwise use.<sup>1</sup> Usually, such projects are not proposed by local communities; instead, they are meticulously designed by project developers that operate from within the globalized financial sector. Investors need the development of such projects to ensure the sustained extraction of the handsome financial returns they are used to. For such projects

to materialise a price has to be paid by the local communities and the natural environment on which their livelihoods depend. The general narrative is that, though unfortunate, this is the price to be paid (usually by often indigenous and minority communities) for the greater good.

A good example of such a project is the various economic corridors that are planned in India. These projects are to match the vast “One belt, One road”-plan of China.<sup>2</sup> One of the largest infrastructure projects that are planned

<sup>1</sup> Forest People’s Programme, <http://www.forestpeoples.org/guiding-principles/free-prior-and-informed-consent-fpic>

<sup>2</sup> See e.g.: <https://www.clsa.com/special/onebeltoneroad/>



in India is the Delhi-Mumbai Industrial Corridor (DMIC).<sup>3</sup> This corridor is set to run through six states, covering a distance of 1.500 km and the total cost expected to exceed US\$ 100 billion. It is planned to develop new industrial cities that will be established as new manufacturing zones, to be connected by infrastructure linkages like a freight corridor, power plants, water supply, high capacity transportation and logistics facilities. The program is driven by a cooperation agreement between the Government of India and the Government of Japan, and is meant to attract significant private investments. The Dutch government is actively informing Dutch companies about the opportunities provided under this programme.<sup>4</sup> One wonders whether the millions of people in the band of 150-200 km on both sides of the planned freight corridor have been informed about the details of the plans formulated so far or, better, whether their aspirations have been taken on board.

The introduction of the FPIC is the result of many struggles from across the world of local communities who found themselves at the end of the line of project developers. These communities, in particular indigenous peoples, backed up by NGOs who did not agree to the idea of a trade-off for the greater good, obtained the right to negotiate a fair price and ultimately also the right to say no. It is interesting today to see many development practitioners from the financial sector, consultants and policy makers struggling with making the FPIC work better on the ground. Though there is an increased awareness about the deplorable fate of the indigenous peoples due to the ongoing land-grabs, the resistance of the affected communities, apart from being a reputational risk, also threatens the very sustainability of the business ventures. In response to these

threats private companies around the world came up with a wide range of initiatives to establish shared standards, such as the UN Global Compact, the ILO Core Labour Standards, the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, or the UN Principles for Responsible Investment.

At present FPIC is embedded in a number of international intergovernmental treaties and conventions<sup>5</sup> that need to be transposed within the national rules and regulations meant to enhance the chances of FPIC actually being implemented. It is often suggested that the implementation of FPIC is hampered by weak legislation in host countries and, more specifically, by weak enforcement mechanisms of any legislation that may be in place there. This then is used as a justification for the many conferences aimed at improvements at the end of the line, while allowing the financial sector to carry on in its business-as-usual manner. In these circumstances the focus of FPIC remains on voluntary efforts to enhance its implementation through multi-stakeholder dialogues. Though meaningful, it takes significant energy without much guarantee of effectively enhancing the protection of local livelihoods.

To advance possibilities of local communities from around the world to exercise the right to recourse in courts of industrialised countries, it probably is necessary to make sure that the principles behind FPIC within the international conventions to which most of these countries have signed up are transposed into effective national legislation in industrialised countries too. Many project developers in the globalized financial sector are registered in such countries – including in my country, the Netherlands. One wonders whether legislation could be put in place

here to ensure that local communities affected by their projects could obtain recourse in Dutch courts in case projects are going ahead in their back gardens without an FPIC.

In this way Dutch legislation – and legislations in other industrialised countries – could then ensure that indigenous peoples and local communities from around the world could sue all project developers for any violations of the fundamental community rights as laid out in FPIC. As many foreign companies have a legal presence in the Netherlands – it qualifies as a tax haven – even the introduction of such a legislation in the Netherlands alone could be powerful. Many local communities could be offered an effective legal recourse to ensure that foreign investors take FPIC seriously.

Within Both ENDS we will explore whether elements of such a legislation already exists, and whether this is ready for use or needs improvements. If no such legislation exists it is time to develop one. In any case it is necessary to explore how such a legislation can be made operational and be effectively put to use. In the absence of sufficient legal expertise amongst ourselves we will have to consult with legal experts. More important, one needs to ensure that such specific laws can be practically enforced, and made accessible to local communities worldwide. As soon as we have been able to work all this out we will be happy to share further updates on this.

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<sup>3</sup> See the project website at: <http://www.dmicdc.com/>

<sup>4</sup> See: <http://www.rvo.nl/sites/default/files/Smart%20Cities%20India.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> - Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention, 1989 (No. 169), International Labour Organisation (ILO), [http://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO::P12100\\_ILO\\_CODE:C169](http://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO::P12100_ILO_CODE:C169)

- United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), [http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/DRIPS\\_en.pdf](http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/DRIPS_en.pdf)

- World Bank, IFC Performance Standard 7, and Environmental and Social Framework, <http://www.worldbank.org>



## Folk stories from the Nilgiris

### Mathimaram

The *mathimaram* is a smooth and glossy tree. In the olden days, the fruits of the *mathimaram* were considered to be tasty and people used to gather in large numbers to collect and eat them. Because the tree was smooth, no one was able to climb the tree; many people who attempted to do so have fallen and been injured, some people have also died. Slowly the population in this region began to decline due to the number of casualties from trying to climb the tree.

God, on seeing the declining population in this region told the tree, "It is only because your fruits are so tasty that so

many people have been injured or have passed away. Henceforth your fruits will not be so tasty." God took a fruit in his five fingers and squeezed it. "No one shall come and eat your fruits from now on", said God to the tree. The Irula people in the Pillur region believe that this is the reason why the fruits of the *mathimaram* look like they have been squeezed between five fingers.

(Abhishek, R. Chandran, Nellimarathur)

### Kaarathi

Many, many, years ago the *kaarathi* bird was found abundantly in Karnataka, Kerala and Tamil Nadu.



This bird was believed to be quite big and that it ate only humans. If anyone had hung out washed clothes to dry, the *kaarathi* would take the clothes and go call the owner. When the person to whom the clothes belonged to came out the bird would carry away and eat the person. This was a regular happening, but all of a sudden there was a decline in the population of the *kaarathi*.

Finally, there were only two *kaarathi* left around the Attapadi region, a female and a male. An old grandfather was clearing bushes and setting fire to them, preparing the land for cultivation. Though the *kaarathi* usually came in pairs, on that day they approached the old man one-by-one. As the first bird approached, the grandfather was frightened and wondered whether the *kaarathi* would eat him that day. He stood in fear as the female *kaarathi* came and inquired about her husband. Afraid that the bird would make a meal out of him the old man replied, "I don't know why, but your husband hurriedly flew into the fire." Hearing this, the female *kaarathi* thought, since my husband has gone into the fire, I shall also do so, and she flew into the fire.

After a while, the male *kaarathi* came to the grandfather and asked him if he had seen his wife. The old grandfather replied, "I don't know why, but I saw your wife hurriedly fly into the fire." On hearing this the male *kaarathi* also flew into the fire.

The Irula people of the Kerala region believe that this is how *kaarathi* became extinct.

## Dhanapaaten

In the olden days a man called Dhanapaaten lived in Baralikadu village in the Pillur region. He belonged to the *Kupliga* clan of the Irula community and was the headman of Baralikadu. Dhanapaaten was a cattle-herder by profession. Dhanapaaten also played the straight flute of the Irula

people, the *koghal*, extremely well. It is the flute used extensively in Irula musical performances. When Dhanapaaten took the cattle out to graze he carried his *koghal* along and a lot of children would accompany him.

Everytime he took the cattle to graze Dhanapaaten would sit on one particular rock and play his *koghal*. The children were entranced by the music and used to dance to it. This was a daily occurrence. But one day, as soon as he sat on the rock to play his *koghal* the rock began to shake. Seeing the rock shake he asked it why it was shaking. In response, the rock shook again. Dhanapaaten then told the rock, "After I die, I want you to be on my grave." He wanted to bear the rock which had borne him for so many years.

On returning to the village Dhanapaaten told the children and the rest of the people that after he died he wanted the rock to be on his grave. On hearing this, everyone began to laugh at him.

A few years later Dhanapaaten passed away. Following tradition, the villagers all gathered and danced and buried Dhanapaaten. Then they talked amongst themselves, "He is dead, is that rock really going to come and be on his

grave?" Saying thus, they made fun and took three steps.

All of a sudden, the rock came rumbling and rolling down the hillside, breaking trees and plants on its way, and came to a halt at the grave. Everyone was astonished to see the rock which had come rolling down. Now his grave is considered a holy site, and a lot of people worship it.

Even today Irula people from the Pillur region claim that as you pass the grave you can hear Dhanapaaten calling out to passers-by, asking for chewing tobacco. A lot of people leave tobacco as an offering on the grave. More recently, when a metalled road was being laid to the Pillur dam, someone tried to break the rock in order to lay the road. It is believed he lost his sight.

### Abhishek

Additional Coordinator, Conservation,  
Keystone Foundation



Looking into the landscape of Irula stories – The Pillur region; Photo courtest – A Meena





*Canarium strictum* foliage

# Conversations with resin collectors

During the course of intensive observations and collecting data on resin trees, their harvests and ecology, my time with the collectors of resin remained as notes in various field note books. Today as I look at those notes I see some of the conversations as reminders that there is much more to the harvest of non timber forest products that go beyond the tangible.

Karian, a Kattunayaka, showed me how resin is harvested from the *Canarium strictum* trees which are left standing, like sentinels of a lost forest, in the

coffee estates. He made a cone out of the coffee leaves and starts to chip away at the resin which has gathered on the surface of one of the trees. After he finished he made random cuts into the bark with his knife. Then he looked at me and said “The tree doesn’t make resin for me alone. I have to prepare the tree for whoever comes after me, otherwise they will have to go home empty handed”. And to think I was just beginning to label that video which I took of him harvesting resin as ‘brutal incisions’ or something along those



lines. A reminder that non timber forest products are not only about incomes and livelihoods or ecology and sustainable harvests but equally about the values that adivasi communities hold on to.

I remember Panapuzha Chathan, leader of the Cholanaiken people, looking at me with a twinkle in his eye, when I asked him if there were separate male and female trees of the *Canarium strictum*. Chathan just said “I haven’t seen any trees with breasts!” The Cholanaikan body humour was not something new to me, and I should have seen this coming. Anyway, not to be distracted I persisted and told him that I had heard from resin collectors in the Nilgiris that there are separate male and female trees. He scoffed with a mouth full of betel juice and reminded me that if one used fire to harvest resin, any *Canarium* tree yields resin. He persisted with his point that “*a nayakan will only collect using fire*”. Again, a reminder: the harvest technique of an NTFP was a part of collector’s identity.

Lingan, a young Kurumba said “When my relatives come to visit I bring them to this forest and they can harvest as much resin as they want to take back with them. This forest has the best resin trees”. He was standing on a makeshift tree ladder chipping away with the blunt edge of his forest knife, collecting resin pieces that had formed on the tree. For the forest dweller the bounties of the forest are also important items of gifting. This is an idea that I would like to pursue more detail. For instance, what kind of gifts do forest dwellers give each other?

Suddenly forest resources were more than livelihoods, food, medicine, etc. The resin collectors were telling me that embedded in the harvests of forest products were identities, values and a prosperity that allowed one to share and gift.

Anita  
Botanist, Keystone Foundation



*Canarium strictum* foliage



*Canarium strictum* seeds





Flowers, right side up and upside down, and young fruit, on a dried leaf

## Serendipity, science and chance in plant identification

Some weeks ago I was in the forests of Adukkam in Tamil Nadu and came across a flower on the rock I was sitting on. A small flower, foetid-smelling, purple-streaked, with only the calyx and without petals, of 5 thick parts, which made me look up and find the tree to which it belonged. The tree was a pale-barked one and more than a meter in girth and shot out of the hillside, most of its trunk overlooking the valley, making me think twice before attempting to climb it. Instead, I broke a low twig, noticing how strong the bark fibre was and difficult to break, and brought it home, hoping to examine it through a lens at leisure. The leaves and the petiole were both softly hairy all over, the lowest nerves of the leaves beginning at the base. Before I left the rock I stared at the tree a long time, telling myself (and the tree) that I'd find out who it is before long. I looked once more at the

flower and memorized its face, then left for home.

Over the next days, between chores, I looked at the leaves a few times, now pressed and drying between the pages of a thick book. In time the flower I'd

seen and which had put me on this trail faded out of memory; the leaves without the flower made my search difficult and I soon knew I was barking up the wrong tree with my guesses. I gave the pursuit a break.

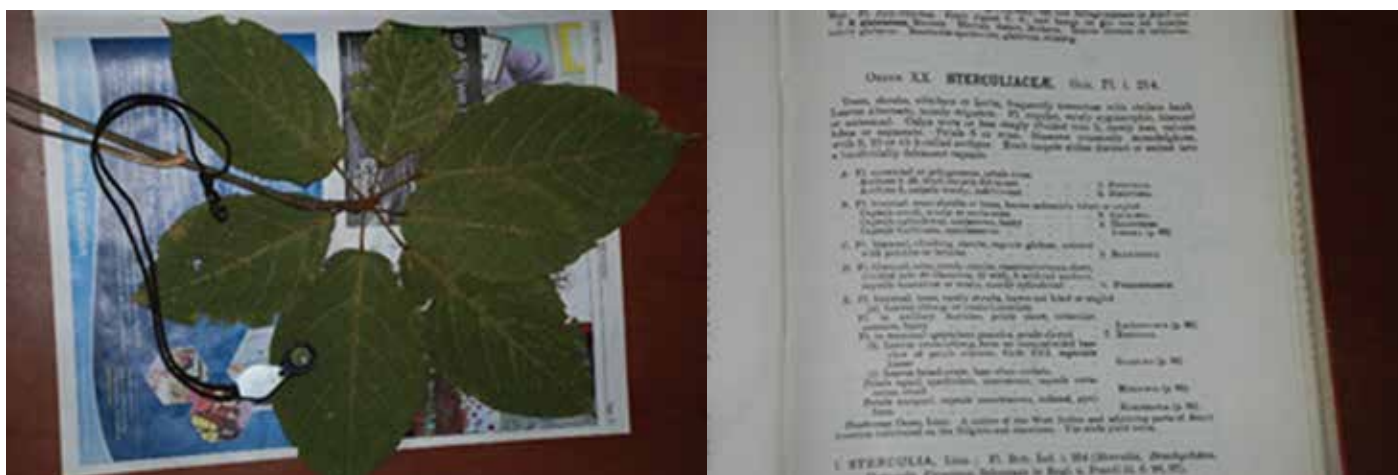
More than a week passed and I found myself in the forests of Nedumgayam in Kerala. On a walk I was delighted to come across the same flower I'd seen in Adukkam on the ground. I was excited as I was in adivasi country: I certainly hoped to find guidance and clues to identify the tree. I looked up saw that the first fruit were forming among the flowers. I took a picture or two and waited.

A man walked towards me from a distance. He was a Kattunaikan man and he stopped when he saw that I wanted to know something. I asked whether he knew the tree, whether he used it, what the fruit were like, and a host of other questions. He said that he knew the tree, they called it *chotta* in their language; that the fruit was fairly big and red with a hard shell (he used the word *odu*), that the shell opened by itself when mature, and it had black seeds inside. While we spoke another man came up – he was a Paniyar person – and joined our little conversation. He confirmed what the Kattunaicken man had said, only adding that the Paniyar people roasted the seeds and ate them. The Paniyar name for the tree was the same as in Malayalam, *thalanthatta*. I



Leaves, flower and young fruit; notice lowest secondary nerves are basal





Pursuit with lens and a botanical text

could barely contain my excitement as I took a few more pictures, thanked them both and moved on.

I returned home a few days later and hurried to the leaves I'd pressed, armed with the lens and Brandis' book of *Indian Trees*. The examination of the leaves and the information I'd garnered from the two adivasi gentlemen could be summarized and analysed as follows:

- The tree was a familiar one to adivasi people and its range in the Western Ghats spanned both Tamil Nadu and Kerala
- The *odu* (shell) most likely meant 'follicles' and the fact that it opened by itself meant that it was 'dehiscent'
- Red follicles and black seeds that can be eaten roasted reminded me of the genus *Sterculia* (the seeds of *S. foetida* as well as *S. urens* were eaten thus)
- The lens showed that the underside of the leaves were covered with 'stellate' hairs, (hairs that spread from a point in a star-shaped manner), a characteristic of many *Sterculiaceae*
- The absence of petals and the woody carpels/follicles definitely pointed towards *Sterculia* and that is where I opened the book by Brandis, page 79

- The dehiscent carpels confirmed the genus, *Sterculia* in one stroke
- Among the several *Sterculia* listed we have those that have digitate leaves (*S. foetida*); those that have simple and palmately lobed leaves (*S. urens*, *S. villosa*, *S. ornata*); and simple, entire leaves (*S. guttata*, *S. alata*, *S. coccinea*, *S. balanghas*); other *Sterculia*'s listed have follicles that are not woody, about which we needn't bother
- Narrowing down the descriptions, the range of occurrence of the tree, etc., it was easy to come to the conclusion that our tree is none other than *Sterculia guttata* Roxb.

As I am not a trained botanist I often tend to collect all sorts of secondary information in my quest to identify plants. Local terms for the plant, the uses they are put to, especially by adivasi people, the smell of the flower (in the above case quite foetid) and the crushed leaves, are usually the first steps towards my knowing a plant. It is rather odd that smell and taste seldom figure in classical taxonomy, as these are not factors that can be "exactly" described. The 'use' of the plant too falls outside the scope of taxonomy: that is *ethnobotany*, and considered useless in matters of identification. Language gets similarly ignored even though local languages often describe specific characteristics of

the plant in question, on par with the *species* name in botanical nomenclature.

In my personal involvement with the plant world chance and serendipity have played a crucial role and each discovered fact or observation led imperceptibly towards another level of understanding in ways impossible to predict, making clear that there is little in the manner of a linear and logical progression. In this particular case cited above the experience pertains to a sequence of several events coming to a head, beginning with a fallen flower on a rock that I sat on, coming across it again in another forest several days later, a couple of adivasi men chancing to be there to help me with a few facts that narrowed my search to a few pages of Brandis' book, the lens finally confirming what I had gradually come to suspect.

Of course, the search could have been purely academic and successful too, confined to myself, the plant, a few books and a lens. I could have stayed with Linnaeus alone and spoken to nobody else. I would have figured out the name of the tree but I would have had no story to tell.

Madhu Ramnath  
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(Source of Images/Illustrations: Wikipedia)

## False Nutmeg

*Myristica fragrans* belongs to the Moluccas and is now widely cultivated especially in Malaysia and the West Indies. It is also cultivated in Kerala; the red aril is Mace, and the fruit are the 'true' nutmeg, used to flavour fish and other food, especially puddings. Nutmeg is considered a strong herb and is used in moderation. Large doses of it can be toxic and cause delirium.

False Nutmeg or the Bombay Mace Tree is *Myristica malabarica* and found in the wet evergreen rainforest across the Nilambur region in Malapuram, Kerala. It is also found in similar forests

across the south and central Western Ghats, and is a medium sized tree known locally as *kattujathikka* or *pathiri poov* in Malayalam. The tree has dense foliage and can be found in myristica swamps which are freshwater swamps in the forest that are dominated by species of *Myrsitica*. In India there are two such areas, one in Karnataka and the other in Kerala.

The seed and the aril of wild nutmeg are almost odourless and tasteless and used both as a condiment and for medicinal purposes, but serves as an adulterant of the products of *M. fragrans*. The seed is used in external application for ulcers and crude fat from the seed is analgesic and used in rheumatism and gangrene.

NTFP collection is one of the main livelihood sources for the Cholanaickens and Kattunaicken communities in forests of Nilambur and *kattujathikka* is collected by them between December-January and sold by the Vana Samrakshana Samiti. Long poles with bill hooks are used to harvest this fruit, after which the pericarp is cut open and the aril and seed separated. This is usually done in the village and dried well before being sold. *M. malabarica* is declared 'vulnerable' in the IUCN Red Data List.<sup>1</sup> This is mainly due to loss of the swamp habitats which have been drained for agriculture. Other reasons are the lack of pollination and the low availability of seeds.

Sneh  
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<sup>1</sup> CAMP Workshops on Medicinal Plants, India (January 1997) 1998. *Myristica malabarica*. The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species. Version 2014.3. <[www.iucnredlist.org](http://www.iucnredlist.org)>. Downloaded on 14 April 2015.





*Pterocarpus marsupium*

# The Indian Kino Tree

This tree is the *Pterocarpus marsupium*, also known as Malabar Kino, or *vengai* in Tamil. It is native to India, Nepal, and Sri Lanka, and is widely distributed in central, western and southern regions of India: Uttar Pradesh, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, Odisha, Karnataka, Tamilnadu and Kerala.

*Pterocarpus marsupium* belongs to the legume family of Fabaceae. It is a medium to large, semi evergreen tree and grows upto 30 metres in good conditions. The tree is commonly found in moist and dry deciduous forests as well as in the plains, even in dry and fully exposed habitats. The tree is easily recognizable by the bark which has fissures, often exposing the inner layer that exudes a copious resin which dries into solid blocks, dark red in colour. The leaves are compound with 5-7 odd-pinnate leaflets. The leaflets are oblong or elliptical, with rounded or obtuse or retuse ends. The leaves are shiny above (upper surface of leaf), glaucous and sparsely haired on the nerves beneath (lower surface of the leaf). The yellow flowers bloom between June and August in showy terminal panicles, visible from long distances. The flowers are supposedly edible and provide good forage for bees. The fruit form between

March and July and are orbicular pods with broad wings, green when young and turning brown on maturity. This species has a symbiotic relationship with certain soil bacteria, which form nodules on the roots and fix atmospheric nitrogen. Some of this nitrogen is utilized by the growing plant but some can also be used by other plants growing nearby.

The leaves are an excellent fodder. In fact, in many parts of India the twigs and small branches are lopped for the purpose, often to the detriment of the tree. The wood provides an excellent timber that is used in furniture, for construction and in agricultural implements. It is grown as a shade tree in coffee plantations, and often cultivated as a multipurpose tree in home gardens and as component of agro-forestry systems. The resin, known as the Malabar Kino, contains 70% of tannic acid and is used as an astringent in Indian Pharmacopoeia. Ayurvedic practitioners often use a cup made from the heartwood of *Pterocarpus* in their treatment of certain ailments; the cup is filled with water and kept overnight for the volatile oils in the wood to leach into the water, turning it blue. This water is consumed the following day. The conditions commonly treated by *Pterocarpus* in the Ayurvedic system include diabetes, inflammation and

bleeding. The bark is also used for bleeding (gums) and toothaches. The leaves are applied externally as a remedy for skin diseases.

The resin is extracted by tapping; a fish-bone shaped blaze is made on the main trunk (composing a vertical incision with a number of parallel cuts to expose the wood). The incisions are made in the evening and the resin is collected the following morning. In the Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve (NBR) the indigenous peoples do not trade in the resin; in fact it is considered sacred and applied on the forehead as a "pottu" to ensure safe journey, when in forest, especially on children to ward off the evil spirits. The tree is considered holy and not used as firewood. The bark are used traditional medicine.

In Central India, the bark is used in ceremonial during the first hunt of the season. The leaves are rubbed on ropes for traps for the greenish tinge. The resin is used in fixing arrow-heads to the shaft and also in plugging leaks in earthen vessels. Roots are hollowed out to fashion horns.

The species is under threat as there is over exploitation for its timber, its medicinal bark and resin, causing a decline in the population of the species.

## Shiny

Programme Coordinator, Conservation, Keystone Foundation

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# Notes from Rayalseema

## Personal impressions

### History

The Rayalseema region was the part of the great Vijayanagara kingdom of present day Andhra Pradesh, spread over about 67,000 sq kms, which included many small and large hilly tracts of the Eastern Ghats. The districts of Chittoor, Cuddapah, Anantpur and Kurnool in southern Andhra Pradesh are collectively known as Rayalseema ('raya' denotes a yadava king of the Vijaynagar; 'seema' simply means border). Last year I was invited by a couple of Spanish friends who support the Rural Development Trust in Anantpur to visit the area. The Trust was founded by the Late Father Vincent Ferrer and Annie Perry, a British journalist.

### Grim realities

Anantpur is known as one of the backward districts in the country. It is a semi-arid zone with an annual rainfall of about 500 mm. A report published by the M.S.Swaminathan Foundation (Designing Rural Technology Delivery System) mentions the critical agrarian crisis. Formerly, the region was famous for the many water tanks used for irrigation, initiated by the Vijayanagar kings. In 1960-61 there were a total of 40,344 tanks used for irrigation and fed water to about 39% of the land; by 2005-06, there were only 3259 tanks

that irrigated a meagre 2.83% of the land. Bore-wells are the last resort for many farmers and crop diversity declined; only cotton dominates the landscape. Simultaneously, grasses and other fodder species too declined and led to the collapse of livestock diversity: more than 30,000 head of cattle are sold in the markets of Anantpur each year. There is no support left for the agricultural system any more.

### Migration

Anantpur district is also known for the phenomenon of women migrating to cities as sex workers. The Rural Development Trust is working actively working to mitigate this: data from 16 villages convey the tragedy of agrarian women, as it reveals that 1777 young women were trapped by the lobby of the flesh trade. The situation prevails in neighbouring regions as well.

### Work of the Rural Development Trust

In 1970 Father Vincent and Annie Perry established the Trust for rural development in Anantpur district. They opened 3 multi-speciality & 14 rural hospitals across Rayalseema and helped build 30,000 homes and 1700 schools, to cater to the Dalit communities. At present the Trust serves 6 districts in

southern Andhra Pradesh. This includes the protection of children's rights and a Quality Education project which supports 1,16,000 school children. The donors for these activities are ordinary Spanish people. A curious condition is that all the staff of the Trust, from a driver to the director, speak Spanish. English is used as a secondary language and serves the purpose of international communication.

A large banyan tree is found in the Kadiri block of Anantpur district. It is a 650 year old tree and occupies 19 square metres and known as Thimamma Marrimanu, who was a virtuous woman. The state forest department has fenced the tree to protect it.

### A hope

I hope that I have communicated the situation of Rayalseema. What can be done to restore the natural resources, create a positive atmosphere among the youth in the farming communities, to implement good government policies and pro-people legislations? We need to think and work together towards a solution to save Rayalseema.

Vijay Sambare

Lok Panchayat, Maharashtra





photo source : paleyphoto.photoshelter.com

# In Our Own Hands

## Food – Culture - Language - Ecosystems

The loss of biodiversity is a source of worry, the loss of knowledge about biodiversity is cause for equal concern. Languages are the couriers of know how about all flora and fauna and their uses; the disappearance of languages heralds an erosion of culture and knowledge. Such losses need to be addressed with priority.

To keep lesser known languages alive is a terrain of immense potential collaboration between scientists, NGOs and local communities. Linguists, sociologists, forest experts and botanists work with indigenous communities in all corners of the world – in Canada, Mexico, the Philippines, Surinam, India and elsewhere – recording and transcribing languages without script, documenting the peoples vast understanding of their environment, patterns of pollination of trees, shrubs and plants, their many possible uses, e.g. in medicine, or as food, or for shelter and other cultural purposes.

For outsiders to play a meaningful role in any collaboration with such indigenous communities', to help preserve and revitalise local know how, requires much time and attention to build trust. It also implies that the visitors are committed and ensure that the community itself benefits from such efforts. In other words, the 'outsider' is there not merely

to extract 'knowledge' and leave, but also with a genuine drive to strengthen the communities' own capacity to hold on to such knowledge and pass it on to future generations.

An example of such commitment is the work of the ethno-botanists Frederik van Oudenhoven and Jamila Haider who, for over a decade, worked the people of the Pamir mountains in Afghanistan and Tajikistan. Frederik, being interested in traditional crop varieties, set off on a journey in the Pamir mountains many years ago. There he met Jamila whose interest was local cuisines, many of which were developed over centuries in the homesteads of the people inhabiting the isolated valleys of the Pamir mountains on the Tajik-Afghan border. The two travellers combined their efforts and worked with people who shared with them the wealth of knowledge, 'hidden' in their languages, of local crops, fruits and tree products, and recipes. They found over 400 varieties of apples, 300 apricots and 150 varieties of wheat.

This knowledge was handed down orally from one generation to the next. Now with many youngsters leaving their homes in search for education, jobs and a 'modern life' in the cities, the transfer of such know how is at risk and becoming seriously disrupted. This concern

became very manifest when women asked Jamila to help them to record their traditional recipes; they feared that their recipes will be lost forever. To achieve this, Frederik and Jamila embarked on an intensive and systematic collection of information with these experts to record both annual and perennial food crops – cultivated and harvested from the wild - and their recipes. They encountered ancient ingenious systems of cultivation, collection and livestock rearing collecting and cooking methods, encompassing local grains, legumes, fruits, medicinal plants, milk, butter, cheese and meat.

Many of such encounters, and the stories told, have been compiled in a book entitled 'With Our Own Hands. A Celebration of Food and Life in the Pamir Mountains of Afghanistan and Tajikistan'. The tome weighs about 2.7 kg, with nearly 700 pages, and describes the food cuisines in Dari-Persian, Tajik and English. It is a holistic book about identity, showing how our food is inextricably linked to landscapes, seasons, customs, and our history. The book, amply illustrated, begins with a Preface by Prince Charles. To the authors' surprise they were nominated for the prestigious Gourmand Cookbook Award for 2016.

Books like these are important as they help boost local people's awareness of the importance of their own food culture, encouraging them to critically examine external influences that undermine their culture. In the case of Pamir the introduction of European wheat, though offering more volume for area, is considered less tasty; yet, it may undermine local agro-biodiversity and reduce local resilience and food security in the face of changing climatic conditions. On the whole it is prudent to preserve knowledge about regional agro-biodiversity which is threatened with youngsters migrating elsewhere to seek better opportunities. Which brings us to the question: How can we get young people to understand and appreciate the vital role of ecosystems,

for our food and health and overall well-being? And, how can they, equipped with such an understanding ensure a livelihood for them and their families? How can essential services – health, education, transport – be tailored to the needs of young people?

Time and again we see that acknowledging the vital role of peoples languages is key for young people to develop a sense of pride, identity, confidence and belonging, which in turn are major ingredients of a their generation's, and their communities' well-being. Arguably, this, by itself, does not create jobs and access to basic services. However, it does add to a people's ability to claim their rights, to lead, to be entrepreneurs, and to create or grasp new opportunities.

To conclude, the emergence of coalitions, between scientists and practitioners who work with elders and youth to ensure cross-generational learning, definitely needs more attention. What are process and approaches adopted? Do local communities appreciate such endeavours? In what manner do people see their families and communities benefit? What are lessons we can learn? What approaches are successful and why? And, if we assume that cross-generational learning and lesser known languages are important, what more can be done to assist such processes? Where do we see a demand and opportunity for such work, and which initiatives can we already identify and, when required, support?

**Paul**

Both Ends, The Netherlands

For more information refer to:

<http://www.IMPublishers.nl/shop/featured/with-our-own-hands/>

See film: <http://www.stockholmresilience.org/research/research-news/2015-11-23-with-our-own-hands-comes-home.html>

<http://www.stockholmresilience.org/news--events/general-news/2016-05-30-winner-of-the-gourmand-world-cookbook-award-2016.html>

<http://www.michielbussink.nl/artikelen.php?id=8&aid=195>

See also Rutu Foundation – Advancing Mother Tongue Education : <http://www.rutufoundation.org/>



## Villages of Similipal that show an alternative perspective

### Background to Similipal

India's present economic and political model has brought inequalities and ecological damage to the whole country and resulted in the loss of livelihoods, cultural collapse and has forced peoples' migration to the cities. In the central and eastern parts of India, where adivasi peoples of the forest fringe constitute a significant population, the marginalization is most obvious.

Similipal is the largest contiguous forest landscape in the eastern part of the country and is known for its incredible biodiversity. It's life supporting services cater to a population of about 20 million. This is the landscape of Mayurbhanj district in northern Odisha which

habours a 60% adivasi population. Of the 3945 villages in Mayurbhanj district, 1200 belong to the Similipal Biosphere Reserve. These villages are located in foot hills and forest valleys where mainstream adivasi lifestyle is still alive and struggling to sustain itself.

Chakdi Kocha is one such valley in the Bangriposhi Block of Mayurbhanj district where 400 households live in the cluster of 13 villages. Most of the people are Santhal; there are also a few Kol and some honey hunting Khadia people.

About three decades ago, logging and the theft of commercial timber degraded the hills, and depleted the forest foods and other NTFPs in the



region. When the people realized the impact of forest loss they embarked on a mission to restore and nurture their forest and ecosystem. After a long democratic struggle and hard work a pristine forest is now a clearly visible outcome. The revitalized ecosystem provides forest produce and generates water that merges with the biggest river in the region, the Budhabalanga, which passes through the valley and provides water to about 4 million people.

In 11 villages an area of 4214 ha of Community Forest Resources (CFR) is recognized under India's 2006 Forest Rights Act (FRA); in addition, two villages process are in the process of having their forest rights recognized, one of which is in the final stage. After the recognition of their rights, the villagers are intending to prepare a sustainable forest management plan for the area.

It is not the forest alone that the villagers started protecting since 1994. They tried to check the illicit tree felling in the beginning; the tussle with timber smugglers continued for 4-5 years, the people eventually winning the battle in the community managed forest. By 1998 the villages stepped up fire protection which was slowly reduced; at presently it is a very rare incident. In 2004 the villagers ventured to stop poaching and ritual hunting. With the help of their priests and other cultural institutions ritual hunting was reduced to symbolic level; at a later stage aqua-biodiversity was also conserved by banning of poison fishing and observing fishing holidays. Now the villagers are talking about stopping the use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides to conserve the soil, water and the agro biodiversity.

### Nature's gift

The rain that falls on the farms in the foothills, it carries with it nutrient-rich humus from the forest, enriching the soil and adding to the bounty of forest crops and wild foods. In Simlipal, about 120 types of NTFPs are available in the forests, which generate a major

portion of the cash inflow of the adivasi families; the chief NTFPs are mahua flowers and seeds, kusum seeds, char seeds, various plant fibers and medicinal plants, siali and sal leaves. The honey hunting Khadia people earn their livelihood by collecting honey from the trees and stone cliffs. There are also about 8 species of edible mushrooms, 10 species of tubers and yams, 20 species of leafy greens, 12 species of seasonal fruits, and many varieties of fish and crab that contribute to the food basket of the households. In addition, there are found 20 varieties of indigenous paddy, 2 of millet, one of maize, 2 types of horse gram, one each of green gram and black gram, one of mustard, 2 each of gourd and pumpkin, 2 each of cowpeas and Indian bean: all these are cultivated in the valley.

### Village institutions and the way ahead

With every new scheme of the government a new village institution is formed. The Forest Department forms an Eco-development Committee, the Education Department forms a School Management Committees, the Watershed Department forms a Watershed Committees and OTELP (Odisha Tribal Empowerment and Livelihoods Programme) project forms Village Development Committee. This plethora of committees confuses the villagers, especially when the same person represents different committees. The villagers are now gearing up to concentrate on only one institution:



the Gram Sabha. As Mayurbhanj district comes within the 5th Schedule of the constitution, the Panchayat Extension to Scheduled Area (PESA) is applied to these villages where Gram Sabha is supreme and constitutionally sanctioned. Biodiversity conservation is based on simple yet binding rules set by the Gram Sabha. For instance, villagers are allowed to collect dry fuel wood, fodder and edible products sustainably, based on need; however, felling trees, usually for construction, or for weddings or funeral pyres, requires the permission of the village council.

The whole world is looking for alternatives and people's initiatives that are fundamentally different from the dominant model of development. The process of the Chakdi valley, based on the rich adivasi culture of collective living, is a ray of hope in the midst of despair and unsettling inequalities. A bottom-up decision making, as with the village council, that takes into account local forests and biodiversity, is one of the answers.

Deepak Pani  
Gram Swaraj, Odisha



# Draft National Forest Policy, 2016, misses the Forest Rights Act

The forestry sector in India was abuzz with a lot of excitement when, on 16<sup>th</sup> June 2016 the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change (MoEFCC) uploaded the draft National Forest Policy, 2016 on its website. Added was an office memorandum, soliciting comments. The draft was a result of a 'dialogic' process facilitated by the Indian Institute of Forest Management (IIFM) Bhopal, which was assigned the task of reviewing and revising the existing National Forest Policy by the MoEFCC. The exercise was funded by UNDP.

Within two days of uploading the draft there was a dramatic development. A formal statement was issued by the Ministry and attributed to Mr. S.S. Negi, Director-General Forest and Special Secretary, MoEFCC. It read *"As Director-General Forest, I would like to clarify that this document is not the Draft Forest Policy, The Ministry has not issued any draft Notification on National Forest Policy. What has been uploaded on the website was a study done by Indian Institute of Forest Management, Bhopal. The study has not been evaluated by the Ministry. The Ministry has not taken any decision on Draft Forest Policy. The study report prepared by IIFM, Bhopal was inadvertently uploaded as Draft Forest Policy on the website"*. This long-winded and hasty retreat by the Ministry was attributed by many to the possible brickbats across the country, as the FRA

had been completely overlooked in this draft national forest policy, 2016.

Examining the draft uploaded on the ministry's website shows that the FRA is nowhere mentioned. A policy document articulates the intention of the government in form of goals or objectives, including a course of action to achieve them. Though it lacks any legal backing it does have the power to reshape laws. More importantly, the draft policy does not have the authority to ignore the existing legal framework within the subject domain for which the policy directions are being articulated: instead, the policy needs to comply with the existing laws. Even if one assumes that this document is not a policy directive but just a study, as clarified by the ministry, it remains criminally negligent of ignoring the FRA which is

a national law governing the recognition of rights of Scheduled Tribes (ST) and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (OTFD). The FRA further legally recognizes the Gram Sabha as an authority mandated with management, regeneration and conservation of forest resources wherever the forest rights of ST and OTFDs are recognized.

Adding insult to injury, the draft policy or study document attempts to bring in a national Community Forest Management (CFM) Mission. This is actually the old Joint Forest Management wine in a new CFM bottle. And talking about forest management, one should not forget that the FRA, which is a national legislation, institutionalizes the management and conservation of forest resources to the Gram Sabha. The latter village-level institution is the authority to prepare management plans through a committee formed under its control. The conflict created by the draft policy or study document is due to its opposition to the democratization of forest governance which has been legally mandated with the passage of FRA. This is a classic example that goes beyond the adage of the left hand not knowing what the right hand does: now the left hand does not even know that the right hand exists!

Krishna Srinivasan  
NTFP India



image source : [www.vivacepanorama.com](http://www.vivacepanorama.com)





## Using weeds for nutrition

Many weeds that inhabit farm crops like paddy, millets, groundnut, black and green gram, are edible. These greens are not consciously cultivated but they are dispersed widely in farm lands. Some of them harm the crop but many of them are used as food plants. Though farmers find it necessary to remove these weeds from the fields they are often allowed to grow on the bunds, and collected by the people on their way home after a day's work. Such weeds are also used as cattle feed; if they remain on the bunds they decompose and the various worms and insects that feed on them attract birds that help as bio-pesticides and protect the crop.

In urban areas people do not give much importance to these lesser known greens; in rural areas the farmers as well as their domestic animals consume them. Such uncultivated food provides plenty of calcium and various minerals. Many of these greens are disappearing from farms due to the massive use of weedicides. Though the weeds are controlled other species of pests crop up; also, many farmer friendly species like earthworms, snails, frogs, crabs, spiders, lizards, snakes, dragonflies, etc., have become scarce. This has affected the bird population around fields.

A quick survey of some of the plant foods around fields and forests yielded these results:

**A quick survey of some of the plant foods around fields and forests yielded these results  
(plant names are in Odiya):**

Sl.No	Name of the leafy Vegetable	Farm	Common land	Forest	Water sources	Harvesting Season	Status
1	Sirel	✓	✓			Monsoon	Plenty
2.	Kanjer			✓		All seasons	Low
3.	Kuler			✓		Summer	Threatened
4.	Sunsunia				✓	All seasons	Threatened
5.	Kalmo				✓	All seasons	Threatened
6.	Gadhopurni	✓	✓			Monsoon & winter	Low
7.	Jhar Kankdo			✓		Monsoon	Low
8.	Kena	✓	✓			Monsoon	Threatened
9.	Budhalalta	✓				Monsoon	Low
10.	Bahal			✓		Summer	Threatened
11.	Nunu	✓	✓			Monsoon	Threatened
12.	Phandi			✓		Summer & Monsoon	Threatened
13.	Ghikuanri	✓	✓			Monsoon	Threatened
14.	Chakada		✓	✓		Monsoon	Low
15.	Guvi		✓			Monsoon	Low
16.	Gais		✓			Monsoon	Low
17.	Chati	✓	✓			Winter	Low
18.	Gandhri	✓	✓			Winter	Threatened
19.	Neem			✓		Summer	Threatened
20.	Bhadel			✓		Summer	Threatened
21.	Munga	✓				All seasons	Low

Amar Gouda  
RCDC, Odisha



# The Avalgaon Gramsabha Forest Management Plan: glimmers of hope

The village of Avalgaon lies 21 kms to the south of Maregaon Taluka. The Forest Department records say that the village is in the Umari Range and in the 5th Scheduled area, and surrounded by forest. The elders of the village say that they have settled here since 1951 and at that time there were many “avla”<sup>1</sup> trees near the village, hence the name Avalgaon.

As the village was in the forest the people were dependent on the Forest Department for employment. Between 1951 and 1970 as they were “under” the FD the people had to go wherever they were sent off on work. In 1971, the FD gave each family 15 acres of land to farm; since then the people stopped working as before.

After 1971 the livelihood of the people was dependent on the forest as well as agriculture. Avalgaon fell within the gram panchayat of Sarathi and there were two members of the gram panchayat in the village. As there was much forest around the village the people were attached to it. There was often talk about the ways to protect their forest and how they could stay close to it.

In 1999 the programme of community forest management came into force; a new instrument was available to make the people of Avalgaon stronger. The people of the village formed a committee and began the work of forest management.

To make the village samiti more able and sensitive Gramin Samasya Mukti Trust (GSMT), an NGO working in the region, and the Department took them to various places for training programmes and exposure. The people began to work with these schemes and the better management of the forest increased their livelihood options. The experiences that people had gained from different places were used for the benefit of the village.

While these developments were taking place the Avalgaon Gram Sabha applied for the title of its community forest under the Forest Rights Act, 2006, in compartment numbers 70,71 and 72, totalling 956.28 hectares. On 11th December, 2013, these rights were handed over to the Gram Sabha by the government.

To make the implement of management plans good in this forest region a Community Forest Rights Committee was formed. The Committee, along with the Gram Sabha, made a forest management plan in which the forest area was divided into 7 zones; these zones were then mapped for their “stocks” and also given their earlier traditional names.

The Committee surveyed the entire forest region within their jurisdiction and made a management plan which was then approved by the Gram Sabha. To fulfil all the planned activities and ensure the protection and management

of the forest the Gram Sabha made applications addressed to the concerned departments. The applications mentioned the specific activities as well as the costs to be incurred in completing them. This helped in improving relations with the different government departments and in the activities themselves: the many officials at the district-level and also some members of the concerned departments visited Avalgaon to discuss the management plans with the Gram Sabha. It all resulted in the people and the officials becoming familiar with each other, the work at hand as well as the capability of the people.

With these activities the Gram Sabha of Avalgaon made their livelihood options more secure, including the collection and marketing of NTFPs, and successfully kept middlemen out of the business.

“In Delhi and Mumbai it’s our government, in our village we are the government” became a clarion call that was taken up by the people in their efforts to strengthen the village; the gram sabha, with the sarpanch, the secretary as well as the concerned government officials together helped develop the village programmes. A farmers group was formed and sent to various training programmes to help them understand the concepts of sustainable agriculture. 15 farmers learned about low external input agriculture from LEISA, which reduced the percentage of inputs required in farming; it also reduced the number of people going in search of work outside the village. Simultaneously, the forest regeneration has improved and the gram sabha has begun discussions about the time when out-migration will completely stop, and they can all work for the betterment of their village life and forest.

Kishore Moghe  
Gramin Samasya Mukti Trust

<sup>1</sup> Amla, *Emblica officinalis*



## Sustainable livelihoods through promotion of NTFPS in tribal lands

Farmers in tribal area of Visakhapatnam District of Andhra Pradesh depend on agriculture, the wages from MNREGA and the dwindling incomes from NTFPs such as hill broom, adda leaves, etc., for their livelihood.

Letting cattle free for grazing after harvest of their rain-fed crops is a common practice in tribal area of Visakhapatnam. Due to this reason, agriculture is limited to single crop and communities cultivation in difficult terrain with limited manure are

constrained by this factor. Much of the community lands are thus left fallow.

As part of creating a sustainable livelihood programme, bio-fencing with agave (*Agave tequilana*) and wild thorny plants are promoted around plots to protect crops from cattle as well as to create income to farmers. The fibre extracted from agave is sold in the global market by traders. About 1500 acres of plots is covered with bio-fencing with locally available agave. Farmers are raising crops such as mango, sapota, amla, lemon etc., as the main crops and





custard apple and teak as the boundary plants; vegetables, pulses and millets are the inter-crops; wild variety of banana in the trenches are planted to conserve soil moisture. Hill broom (*Thysanolaena* sp.) is planted over the moisture conservation bunds. With this farming technique the farmers are getting some income throughout the calendar year.

Agave, hill broom and banana are doing well in the project area, and able to withstand adverse weather conditions. In addition there is no loss of crop due to pest attack. These crops do not require farmer's attendance in terms of inputs (irrigation, maintenance) and have a good market demand. Seeing the success in the farmers' lands, especially in protection of land, soil moisture conservation and also creating income, surrounding farmers are replicating this model.

Farmers are able to earn Rs. 22,500 to Rs.25,000 /- from 400 to 500 bundles of hill broom annually; and an amount of Rs. 15, 000 to Rs. 20, 000 as bi-annual income from agave on a one acre of plot. In addition, they get about Rs. 50, 000/- from core, boundary and inter crops. The traders from neighbouring districts are engaging women from nearby villages for harvesting of agave around the plots. They pay a wage of Rs. 12,500/- for harvesting agave around a one acre of plot.

Some farmers are raising nurseries of agave and hill broom plants and getting an income of Rs. 50,000 to Rs.75, 000 in 6 to 8 months; it is an indicator of success of NTFP introduction in fallow lands. Agave fencing around plots plays a key role in conversion of fallow lands into productive lands. Farmers formerly engaged in shifting cultivation are now focusing on settled cultivation on their own lands and reducing the pressure on the forest. Improved income from diversified agriculture, horticulture and NTFP species has improved the standard of living of the community as well as improved the bio-diversity in the area.

Farmers are marketing their brooms in local shandies but face resistance from the forest department when they market outside their area to get a better price. This issue needs to be addressed through Community Forest Resource (CFR) rights embedded within the Forest Rights Act.

Vikasa is an NGO working for the development of tribal people and the environment in the Visakhapatnam Agency area. It is promoting NTFP species as part of the WADI programme implemented across 3000 families in the Araku valley and Dumbriguda mandals.

At present another 100 families are being supported under the People and Nature Fund (PNF) in the area to replicate the model described above to rejuvenate bio-diversity as well as women development through sustainable livelihoods.

Agave and hill broom brings us from shifting cultivation to settled agriculture

Wadi / Maathota farmers.

Srinivas  
(VIKASA, Andhra Pradesh)







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