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Tamil Nadu Core Team (TNCT) / CEDA TRUST, India
South Asian Dialogues on Ecological Democracy (SADED), India
National Adivasi Alliance (NAAlliance), India
Friends of Earth International (FoEI), (Forest and Biodiversity Program)
Friends of the Earth Finland
Coalition for Environment and Development

Wild Forests

Making Sense with People

On meanings of forests connected to Indian subcontinent

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Published by

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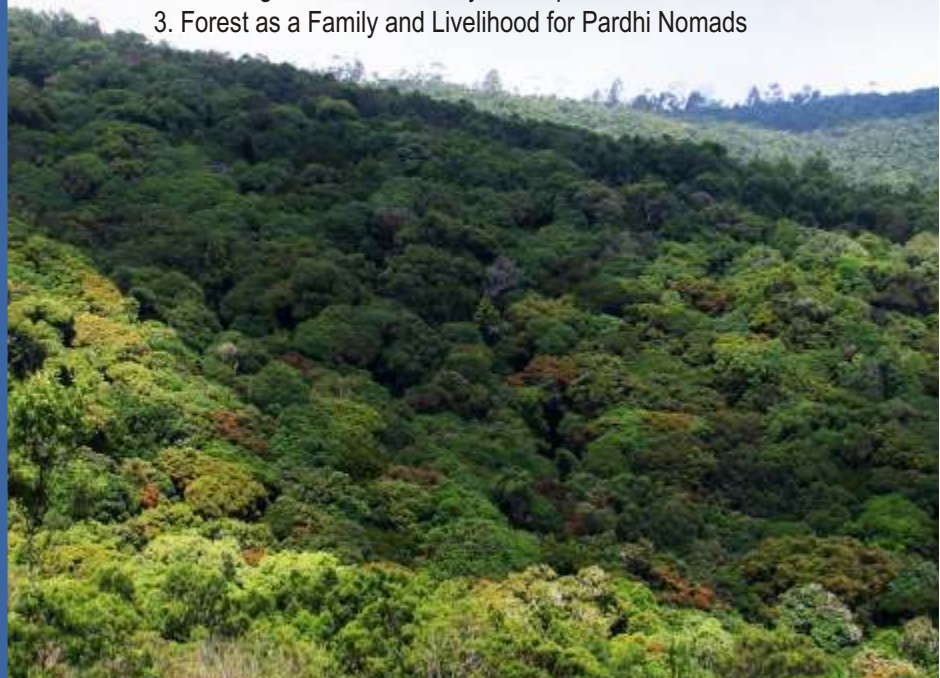
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Foreword

Forests mean most importantly one thing i.e. "Life". When we lose forests, we lose life; when we preserve forests, we protect life. We do not only protect biodiversity and carbon sinks but cultures of forest communities who have developed sustainable relations with forests. There is a competition for life. Especially, the capitalist mode of production envisages everything in terms of a commodity, which does not have life, but only profit. In the modern society, the competition is for profit and all meanings of the forests get reduced to economical or technological rationality.

The much advocated global issue of global warming is greatly accelerated due to the emission of green house gases, due to the industrial activities in the name of fulfilling human needs. On the one hand forest is seen as carbon sink, on the other, it faces threat of extinction and again for the profit of the Private Sector by Trans-National Corporations etc. The Clean Development Mechanisms and other mitigation measures seem not to challenge the core of the problem - the modern development paradigm. In the whole game, the multiple meanings of forests that are part of the sustainable forest relations are not given space. We should open our ears for the voices of Adivasis who see forests not only as a material resource but as living beings and as part of their culture and who don't believe in the myth of human mastery over nature.

In the context of Global South including South Asia, the meaning of forest drastically changed to fulfil the needs of the colonial imperialism. The money value of the forest came to the lime light, the wildlife and the Adivasis were seen as hindrance to the development process and many of them were completely alienated from their own Mother Nature. Even Free India, did not change its attitude towards looking at the forest and its people, be in these hill areas, be the forest in the plains or forest along the coast such as mangrove forests.

Nearly after 60 years, Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act 2006, recognises the injustice done to the Tribals by saying, "...and whereas the forest rights on ancestral lands and their

habitat were not adequately recognised in the consolidation of State forests during the colonial period as well as in independent India resulting in historical injustice to the forest dwelling Scheduled Tribes and other traditional forest dwellers who are integral to the very survival and sustainability of the forest ecosystem;...".

Mutuality and oneness of all living and non-living is part of existence of forests. On this planet only the indigenous people have understood this oneness. This is evident from their Vision of Creation. The fact that, unlike the many of the modern world, indigenous people, who regard themselves as part of nature have been custodians of life, mines, minerals and rivers. Most of us have been actively destroying forests since the time of Columbus. The process got accentuated with industrial revolution, age of revolution and modernization revolution. If we have to save forests, then we must de-learn some of the wrong teachings of these revolutions, decolonize our consciousness and restore the legitimacy of knowledge systems of different people. Recently Ecuador's Constitution recognizes the oneness of life with rivers, mountains and forests. Probably, this is the only modern constitution which is not in total control and colonised by the modern fundamentalist sensibility. If we have to save forests, combat global warming and save homo-sapiens then we need to learn from people living in forests and understand where we have gone wrong in relation to forests in particular and rest of the natural and social ecology in general.

In this context, the publication of "Wild Forests - Making Sense with People" is timely and meaningful. This will help develop a holistic perspective of forests and the people. It takes stock of the situation, analyses the issues, identifies the challenges and also highlights what is to be done.

We should strive that the publication reaches the policy makers, the Adivasis, Rights Activists and Nature Conservationists, and also those who turn a blind eye to the cause of Adivasis and people living and dependent on forest in the plains and along the coast and for the whole of humankind. The Editorial Team, the Authors, who have contributed and the Publishers deserve great appreciation from everyone for the timely contribution.



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South Asian Dialogues on

Ecological Democracy

Building equal dialogue on meanings of forest

For survival of life on Earth, we need to find more sustainable relationship between world's forest and human life. It is important to understand how different meanings of forest may help this or relate to it.

This publication presents articles on different meanings of forest in India from writers, whose work and vision we see to promote survival of such human life which is an integral and sustainable part of indigenous forest life. With over 90 million indigenous tribal people, India has world's largest indigenous population, most of whom have until recently been living in a relatively sustainable way in the wild forests or closely connected to them.

The way indigenous forest dwellers of India see and experience the life and its changes in the wilds where they live, deserves a place in a wider global dialogue. We need to understand better how different meanings of wild forest can help human life to minimally displace Earth's own, indigenous growth of trees, plants and all life.

In this publication forest is discussed mostly from the perspectives of the people who see it as their inalienable home. The reader is brought into the world of India's indigenous tribal people, mostly called 'Adivasis', 'people who live without beginning' in the areas they inhabit. Adivasis have lived from time immemorial

integral to wild forests, using them as a source of life. Local life of Adivasis has thus been well adapted to sustain these areas, which are however now taken away from their sustainable use - to be treated and governed as what is nowadays officially meant by 'forests'.

The wilderness of these areas has started to degrade rapidly after becoming governed as 'forest' in the modern literal sense. This meaning of forest, authorised by the modern law, science and governance, displaces the local indigenous life and meanings from sustaining the wilds, which have survived best in Adivasi areas:

Already around 30 million indigenous inhabitants have been displaced and 40 % destruction of the natural 'primary' forest has followed in India, as the tribal areas have been taken to be governed as 'forests' under the modern rules and meanings. To defend this unjust destruction, the Government and its arms like the Forest Department have been consistently pointing at the rows of teak or Acacia plantations calling and counting them as the woods, while the real wilderness is fast shrinking. Recognising the need to correct this "historical injustice" of displacing Adivasis from their ancestral forests, India made in 2006 a new Forest Rights Act (FRA).

The Forest Rights Act decrees the authority of traditional forest communities to initiate the determination of their rights to use and protect the wild forests as their home areas compliant to their traditional law and culture. This is to follow also the constitutional amendment on self-rule of tribal communities, the PESA Act 1996.

But to implement duly such indigenous rights of forest life of the communities and of the wild forests, the modern world would need to understand and respect meanings of the life that has adapted to wild forests through millennia. Now the actual meanings of wild forests for the life which has lived and sustained them, have however become superseded and misinterpreted by modern concepts. These have reduced forests into a mere resource, manageable by bio-geological, technical and administrative means for commercial life and consumption of the urbanites.

As even most basic things of modern life - its homes, cultivations or industrial production - displace wild forests through applying highly valued meanings of the science of 'nature', there is thus no need to romanticize that such values or meanings of 'nature' would guide people to sustain wild forest or its diversity of life.

To build sustainable meanings of wild forests, we have far more practical need to learn how we can live with and within the wilds without displacing them - while using the areas as home, cultivation or culture. What indigenous peoples can tell about their meanings of wild forest and about their life adapted to it, can help significantly to preserve the wilds in the most sustained manner also to address the global crisis of expanding biodiversity loss and climate change.

This publication aims thus to bring out such sustainable perspectives of indigenous forest life, which are often left outside the public discussion. Apart from livelihood, the forest has since the birth of human kind had meanings of sensitivity, emotion and spirituality. These aspects are well known to Adivasis, whose whole existence has until today been intertwined with their natural environment.

The indigenous life and world views, which embody a comprehensive respect towards the environment, could enrich the global discussion on sustainable practices and futures. But their pertinent contributions on living with Earth's own growth and sustaining its regeneration without carbon emissions, are neglected and undermined - while corporate entities' profit-driven initiatives, just camouflaged as conservation or climate measures, are hailed and accorded Carbon Credit points. In the modern world the indigenous people, who are the original inhabitants of the forest and who see the forest as their home, often have very little say over its meanings or treatment. They are mostly illiterate and can not easily participate to decisions done with the meanings of 'forest' in a literal sense, imposed by the structures and laws of the modern society.

This publication however investigates the indigenous meanings of forests through articles written by indigenous forest dwellers and activists, by activists who work for Adivasis and by anthropologists and researchers. For them the wild forest has not been a conglomeration of scientific calculations or market values. The writers and the editors have tried to find ways to express Adivasi experiences. However, modern language does not often have the words nor grammar for expressing such meanings of wild forest, which are adapted to living within it.

We hope that the thoughts on these pages help in building a more democratic framework for the discussion on the meanings of wild forests. J.P. Raju, member

of the Jenukuruba honey collector tribe, summarizes the overall unequal conditions which Adivasis today are facing:

"We have the feeling that forest is our mother and mother will protect and provide everything. But today we are made to believe that forest does not belong to us and it belongs to the forest department."

V.S. Roy David,
Pauliina Tuominen,
J.P. Raju and Ville-Veikko Hirvelä



I

Saving wild forest as home, mother, cultivation & indigenous culture



1

Salutations to Mother Nature - life of Jenu Kuruba

J.P. Raju, Jenukuruba Adivasi, President of National adivasi Andolan, BKS (Karnataka)

2

Tribal people and forest

Dhansingh Majhi, Kandh Adivasi, Seba Jagat president (Orissa)

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Cultivated wild forest gardens of Kutia and Dongria Kandhs

Sabitri Patra, Gond Adivasi, President of Devote Trust (Orissa)

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Plea on Forest Life for Adivasi Youth

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How Adivasi women save the forest by their forest life and their movement

Interview of Save the Forest Movement Adivasi women Pushpa Toppo and Suryamani Bhagat, produced by Moushumi Basu (Jarkhand)

Saving wild forest as home, mother, cultivation & indigenous culture



As modern homes, cultivations, production and culture displace wild forests and cause thus a global crisis, we need to find a more sustainable relation between human life and Earth's own, indigenous growth of wild forest.

This first part of our publication tries thus to search for human possibilities to live with Earth's wild biodiversity without displacing it. Our focus lies in what the world could learn from the ways how the Adivasis observe, experience and treat the wild 'forest' as home, cultivation and as their indigenous culture. J.P. Raju, Jenukuruba Adivasi from Karnataka writes in the first article about how his tribe experiences, treats and protects the wild forest as their mother and home.

Dhansingh Majhi, Kandh Adivasi from Orissa writes on the indigenous relationship between people and forest as further practically sustained in habitation, food gathering, other production and social life. Adivasi woman activist Sabitri Patra writes about indigenous shifting cultivation, which has also been adapted to the regeneration of wild forest in Kutia and Dongria Kandh communities in Orissa. But now Dongria communities, life of their sacred Niyamgiri mountain and its unique biodiversity are threatened to become displaced by the Sterlite-Vedanta bauxite mining industry.

To be sustained, the wild forests need to be managed by life and meanings, which are indigenously adapted to these wilds, as part of their life. Indigenous communities need to find also options and self-respect for their sustainable forest life to continue among the Adivasi youth under the pressure created by the outside world. The article of Gond Adivasi Jaya Kashyap tells about this.

The intention and attitude of Adivasis' to save the forest and forest life is made into reality particularly in Adivasi women's daily activities, as described by Moushumi Basu's interview of Pushpa Toppo and Suryamani Bhagat of Save the Forest Movement.

Indigenous forest rights and customary justice realised in this Adivasi forest life, should guide the implementation of the modern laws over the forests. Otherwise the destruction of the wild forest just further accelerates as it has done over the past 15 years during the wide modern programs of nature conservation and eco-development. It has been illogically advocated that man and animal can not coexist in the natural habitat - even though they have adapted to live there together for millions of years. Many policy makers in connivance with sections of elite and quasi-environmentalists propagate that the forests are disturbed by presence of Adivasi life.

Thus those forms of human life which are most integral and most adapted to live with and within wild forests, are displaced. In today's India Adivasis are evicted from their home forests also by flushing into the country huge amounts of foreign funds. Even when the eviction is done in the name of 'Tigers' or 'Elephants', in practice the areas are often gradually opened for commercial purposes of eco-tourism, plantations or even mining, illegal logging etc. The impacts of the eviction thus affect negatively the wild forest biodiversity and the climate - as people whose life is most adapted to live within wild forests and their regeneration, are removed to live in cities or by commercial agri-business.



Salutations to Mother Nature - life of Jenu Kuruba

J.P. Raju

"Nanga Kadu Ajjayya... Nanga Kadina Jenu Ajjayya" Our forests are sacred... The honey from our forest is sacred. This is the philosophy that the Jenu Kuruba, honey collector Adivasi, follows right from his birth to death, striving hard to strike a balance between his existence and harmony with his forest, which is the only source of livelihood for him.

The advent of modernization and the growing greed and materialism of man is slowly threatening to erode his values, rendering a severe blow to him and the wilds. Jenu Kuruba and other indigenous tribes alike are facing the wrath of increasing demands of the modern society. These demands risk his very existence, putting his life, culture, tradition, rituals and practices all out of gear.

"All the nectar in the blooming, colorful flowers in the densest of the forest, where the sunrays too hesitate to penetrate, shall evaporate. All the shrills, the chirps, the roars and other sounds that echo in the woods, shall vanish. The spirits that protect the sanctity of the jungle shall shy away from the modern man who is eyeing the wealth of these forests to be exploited to his advantage. The age old traditions and customs of righteousness and humility will vanish in thin air with the onslaught of a new breed that is making inroads into the forests with huge machinery. Our temples will be replaced by resorts flocked by holiday seekers. Our tribes will be orphaned being pushed out of our motherland," The elders of the community fear viewing the changing scenario with every passing day.

For a Jenu Kuruba or his tribal brethren dwelling in the wild, forest or nature is a mother who nurtures her child without any aspirations or expectations. She has lots to give and asks for no returns. This very lesson she has taught the Adivasis, has driven them to strive to conserve and protect the nature we live with. Gathering the minor products from the forests, hunting to suffice hunger and exemplifying the perfect community living, the Adivasis render reverence to Mother Nature. Who else should we worship but the one who gives us everything that we need?

Extracting honey from the hives without destroying the habitats of the bees, hunting small animals without leaving its breeds to become extinct, gathering shoots and roots that regenerate themselves to give us more, invoking ancestors and the forces of nature to protect us and the resources around, is a way of life for us. Caring and sharing is the order of the day in Adivasi life. Caring for nature and sharing among our brethren has come naturally to us. Exploitation is not our motive as we believe in leading a contented life with whatever is available.

A hunted animal is shared not only between relatives and friends, but among the creatures around like cows, dogs, hens, pigs and others that form an integral part of our family. We do not pluck the bulb of a root (Yams, sweet potato) in full, but leave a portion for its replenishing. While extracting honey, we let portion of the hive for the bears and birds to enjoy. That is how we spread the fragrance and taste of honey across the expanse of the wild.

We sing and dance to the tunes of the natural melody of swaying Bamboos and d

the echo of the noises in the wild. Lightning or thunder, the gushing waterfalls, the flushing sounds of heavy monsoons, the roars of tigers are its accompaniment. There is a perfect orchestra which no opera hall in the modern world can offer. We do not understand the connotations of the modern society which talks in terms of hardship, civilized living, development and progress, as nature has abundance of resources that fulfills all our needs. A satiated stomach, peaceful co-existence and sound sleep are what we wish and the same is appropriately provided by our mother. Why crave for more?

As the time machine ticked forward and we were increasingly exposed to modern society which calls itself 'civilised', we started pondering, whether we would survive the onslaught of the outside world. We began understanding the lopsided definitions of modernization.

Amidst the thick forests, our fore fathers taught us how to locate a herb that could bring to life a man who fell flat after a snake bite. But today, we can not do so. In the name of national parks and reserve sanctuaries, the Government has redefined and re-invented forests that are not in synchronization with the norms of nature. We see around us only Acacia, Teak or Eucalyptus. This is not the model that nature has shown us, nor can such mono cropping be conducive for the sustenance of wild life. The first casualty in such a situation is the Jenu Kuruba whose means of livelihood get destroyed. Since our childhood, we grew up listening following kinds of tales that glorify humane principles of life;

"There was a happy family of seven Jenu Kuruba brothers. The youngest one was the most competent of all, may it be extracting honey, climbing trees, or hunting. He was blue eyed boy of the family, much to the envy of the others. Walking through the woods to extract honey, the six elders conspired to kill their youngest brother. As he climbed up a huge trunk with the makeshift bamboo ladder, the others cut the creeping ladder, leaving the younger helpless brother atop amidst the dreaded bees. Back home, the news was flashed that their brother had left the others choosing his own way. The worried wife rushed to the woods in search of her beloved, only to be traced at a precarious position hanging amidst the slender branches atop a huge tree. She sincerely prayed for his safety as she heard him advising her to walk home without looking back. He strongly believed that the tree would bend down to drop him to safety as a result of the prayers. Unable to control herself due to sheer love for her husband, the lady turned back to see him

safely land. With the advice not followed, the young man breathed his last breath and died"

The tale has been passed on from generations and illustrates the values of ethics, mutual wellbeing and close proximity with nature. Stories such as these have been a great source of inspiration and teachings having enabled the tribal communities to understand the real meanings of life and mutual co-existence with nature. But now there seems to be a sudden turmoil in the life and rich culture of a Jenu Kuruba. Forcing him to leave the kingdom that he once ruled, the honey atop the friendly trees is now out of reach. The modern concept of bee keeping has rendered honey devoid of its taste and flavor.

The forests no longer seem to haunt or maintain their sanctity without the asymmetrical natural growth of woods that helped man and animals sustain their living in harmony. National parks may be the concept of the modern man who is in pursuit of making each of his moves profitable, but has rendered a severe blow to the rich traditions of the forest dwellers whose motherland has been invaded and conquered.

With the Jenu Kuruba, there was honey in the wilds. There were numerous creatures replenishing their breed without fear of extinction. Trees stood tall and strong. Rivers danced as they worked their way in a serpentine flow. Birds chirped their way as animals roared and established their rights over their mother land. Soon, we shall have to bear the stark reality of modernization

The Jenu Kuruba shall be an extinct tribe and with him there will be an extinction of a full bloomed civilization that flourished with all grandeur in the densest of the forests, living in perfect harmony with nature. Should we lose our identity to be part of the main stream? What is main stream in the true sense?

Why should we be deprived our rights over the resources that our motherland has to offer? How can some one else dictate our way of life? There are questions galore, but is anyone listening? ■

The author, J.P. Raju is a Jenu Kuruba Adivasi living in the forest area of Kodagu District in Karnataka. He is an activist and the president of the National Adivasi Andolan -coalition and Budakattu Krishigara Sangham Adivasi organization. He has also worked as the head of LAMPS, a co-operative of Adivasis gathering minor forest produce (e.g. honey, soap nut, tree mass etc).



The tribal people & forest

Dhansingh Majhi



The tribal abode lies in dense forest and hill areas, which are the main source for economy and livelihood of the tribals. In earlier times they used to fully depend on the forest. There they collect various types of roots, tubers, leaves, flowers and wood in several seasons of the year.

Tribal food available in the forest includes fruits and flowers from mahua and various other trees (chanhar, kendu, Ghuli, Antia, Bhalia, Sial, Tangen, Kusuma and Bela), wild vegetables (like Kankada, Kundur and Karadi) and varieties of green leaf (Barada, Bahal, Kunjer, Ganja choli etc.) and of Kanda roots (Dioscorea sp. - such as Bhata, Ladaka, Pita, Kashsa, Cheranga, Sing and Jirika Kanda). Tribals get also different types of mushroom from forest in different seasons and use them as food. Salseed is important source of their family livelihood economy for 2 months a year. Paste they produce from different trees.

Medicines tribals process traditionally from fruits & roots like Harida, Bahada (Terminalia chebula & belerica) and Amala. They find also herbal plants like Ganga suli, Patal Garud, Bag bel, bhuin keruna, khri kanchan, Khirikakuli, khadi siju, shugandhi, jasti Madhu, chaul dhua, Baidanka, Tamarind, Bhuin lima, Gari Ainala, Jarasandha, Mahajal, Muturi, Satabari, Hidimichi etc. Forest is thus a suitable place for tribal beju and bejuni, the traditional healers, to collect herbs from their medicinal trees several times of the year. While they collect medicine from the trees, first they worship the tree.

Valuable trees which are sources for the diverse foods and medicines available in the tribal area at Kalahandi district, are Sal trees, Piasal, Sisui, Sahaja, Karla, Mango, Tamarind, Dhaman, Pipal, Garuda, Bamboo, Karanja, Bahada, Harida, Amla, Kandu, Kusum, Jhuna, Mahua etc. Woods are used for fuel and to prepare their house. They also prepared their dress from the cover of the tree. Thousands of trees are related to the tribal life. The Adivasis also fully implicate with wild

animals. An important part of their life is hunting. Hunting is done by individuals as well as in groups in times of festivals.

Valuable stones and minerals are available in the forest. Tribals make metals, stone chips and bolders to prepare their house and also to sell for construction work. They make ropes from different trees like Gondul, Sial, Banasula, Antia, Bareng, merbahal, Jamut laha, Thapalaha, budel Laha, Masala laha etc. Different types of brooms are used by them like Hill Broom, Kanta badun, Khadika Badun, Bena buta, Khajur badun etc ..

Shifting cultivation practiced in the forest is another economic source for tribal people. Before cultivation, they clean the land by burning it. They continue to cultivate that place for two to three years. Then they shift to another place for cultivation. In shifting cultivation, they generally cultivate various types cereals like paddy, raggy, suan etc. After using various above mentioned forest produce for their own needs, the Adivasis also exchange some of them in the nearest market for their livelihood.

Tribal social and spiritual practices also have their source in forest. As the tribals live in dense forests, they expense maximum time there. It is also a suitable place for love negotiation of tribal dhangada (Boys) and dhangidis (Girls). In leisure time the tribal young boys and girls were going to forest and frank discussions were taken among them. In their spiritual life, the tribals also depend on the forest. They observe various festivals in various seasons of the year. They worship the forest deity in every festival. They believe that if the forest deity was happy, their village would not face any problem during the year. While they worship the forest deity, they pray safety to the people of their villages. Song, dance and wine are also crucial in the festival.

Those are our lives in the forest. ■

Dhansing Majhi, Tribal Leader, Seba Jagat, Kalahandi, Orissa



Cultivated wild forest gardens

Sabitri Patra

I. Adivasi forest life and Orissa

India is a vast country with diverse geographical zones. Every geographical zone has its own characteristics and they affect the life style of the people of that area. Many social groups in different parts of India live far away from the mainstream, like tribal or ethnic groups, some of whom are called 'primitive'. Usually they live in forested hills and naturally isolated regions of India, with little exposure to the so called 'modern' or educated society.

The economy of Adivasi communities springs from this natural environment of high altitude and biodiversity. Gathering, hunting, fishing, herding and indigenous agriculture with shifting cultivation have developed in forest and grassland environments like the Dandakaranya area of Orissa, Chhattisgarh and Andhra Pradesh. Having lived closely associated with forests, even today many Adivasis are called forest dwellers, spending greater part of their lives in proximity of trees and streams.

The overall Adivasi life and economy are adjusted to climate, soil, rainfall, flora and fauna of the hill forests where they live. The forests which surround the Adivasis all through their life, they regard as their home, which provide them with food, water, building materials, fuel, fodder, etc. As preservation of the woods they have relied on for many needs has been in their interest, the ecological balance was well maintained as long as there was no interference by the 'advanced' population.

The Kandhs

The Kandh tribal culture blooms in the isolated high lands and forests of Orissa. They have a love of freedom and self-identity. To Kandhs belong some of the most indigenous tribes of India, having their own languages, culture and life style. Their name is derived from the Oriya word Kondh which means an arrow. In Boudh-Kandhamal district the whole population belongs to the scheduled tribes and scheduled casts as classified by the Indian legislation. There are as many as 29 tribes on the area, which lies on the Northeast fringe of the Eastern Ghats. Kandhs alone constitute 89.11% of the total tribal population.

Kandhs have also many sub-divisions due to the difference of their living places and the slight variations in their rituals and ceremonies. The majority of these customs extends to all the sub-tribes of the Kandhs, including Desia, Malua, Panga, Kutia and Dongria Kandhs.

II. On Kutia forest life and cultivation

The "Kutia" are classified as one of the most secluded tribes of the Kandh population in the tribal-sub-plan area of the Boudh-Kandhamals district. They do shifting cultivation on hilly forest slopes, are most timid by nature and are called primitive.

The area is full of wooded hills inter-sected by hill streams and dotted with small habitats of Kutias and Gonds here and there. Two rivers named Utey and Chauldhua have originated from this belt, and there is also a number of perennial hill streams around the area. The average annual rainfall is 1680 mm.

The Burlubaru village in Belghar and Jhirpani Panchayat of the area is situated at about 2,500 to 3,000 feet above sea level at the border of the tribal districts of Koraput and Kalahandi. It consists of wooded hill tracts of high anthropological significance, having a sizeable concentration of indigenous Kutia population.

Kutia women and forest

In Burlubaru the Kutia Adivasi women live in close dependence on their forest environment. Forest to them is like water to the fish. There is a saying among them:

"Where there is jungle, there is Adivasi". There is a close link between the forest and Adivasis, whose life has allowed the regeneration of the jungle, where they live. The Kutias live in the deep interiors of the forests and their tribal life and forests are holistically interrelated. When not roaming in the jungle they feel unhappy and cannot plan for future.

Adivasi sustains the forest and creates it with her life and livelihood as integral to the forest.. Their life and primary activity consists of the day to day search for living foods such as roots, honey or salafa, also liquid, green vegetables, ripe



fruits and other forest produce from the jungle. They also hunt, catch stream fish, collect bamboo plants, mushrooms etc. for their own needs and honey, lakh, sialy leaf, ripe bamboo, wood log, and broomstick for exchange. The hills are covered by northern tropical ever green and deciduous vegetation with predominant species like sal, piasal, jamu, dhaudas, mango and kobi among other trees and shrubs. Harida, bahada, amla, sunari, bamboo, broomstick are there, as well as wild animals like elephants, tigers, bears, wild pigs, deer, wild dogs, sambar, kutra, birds like picklock, parrot etc.

Shifting cultivation of the wild forest

The Kutias practice shifting cultivation, called also podu cultivation, done by indigenous methods by which they have traditionally survived sustainably. From the shifting cultivation they collect over 60 varieties of crops they cannot get from other places. The main crop is turmeric; beside it they also grow millets and other oilseeds. Before shifting cultivation is begun, the area is selected by the village heads "patmajhi" and "jani".

Before cultivation the villagers also go to the "Dharani", worshipping places to perform rituals. The Dharani are places where only the inhabitants of the specific village can go. In the ritual all the villagers are present to divide the Podu fields among themselves. This is followed by worship, cutting the trees and beginning the actual cultivation.

When the Adivasi cuts the jungle, he/she obeys the rate for cutting the tree from 0,5 to 1,5 meters height and the wood is used for making a Kutia house. After being cut, the trees and their undergrowth are burned and the area is cultivated for 2-3 years. As being then left for 5 to 7 years without cultivation, the forest will regenerate again itself. But if podu is done to 15th year old forest, the jungle does not regenerate easily because new tree creation power is lost.

Each phase of the year cycle has its own celebration to acknowledge the season - like when the trees flower, when they bear fruit and during the sowing season -, to protect the domestic animals, to secure good harvests, please the Gods, to have a peaceful life in the village and to avoid threats of disease, hunger and starvation.

Kutias are frank, arduous, pleasant and hospitable but remain isolated and neglected, weaker section of the community. They courageously face wild animals, but are extremely timid and shy before officials and strangers. Still they are not reticent but love to talk about their multi faced existence and observe a number of festivals around the year, linked with the forest and cultivation.

In the photo you can see Kutia woman with her ax and basket at the shifting cultivation. Basically Dongria Kandhs who live nearby in the borders of Kalahandi and Koraput district, do not have much difference with Kutias. Both do podu cultivation on hilly forest slopes.

III. Dongria forest life sustains Niyamgiri hill

Niyamgiri mountains of West Orissa are known as the land of Dongria Kandhs, whose name is derived from 'Dongar'; a forest hill slope under shifting cultivation.



Each dongar is inhabited by an ancestor spirit, who help the dongar to grow its crops in accordance with the quality of the hill

The Dongrias enjoy symbiotic relation with the Niyamgiri forests, which are the only home area of Dongria life. Their economy and livelihood sources, mode of living, indigenous skills, heritage, cultural patterns and social relations are directly related with Niyamgiri forests.

They grow fruit crops like pineapple under the thick forests and gather Siali leaves, Myrobalans, Amla, etc. for exchange. Turmeric and varieties of millet (mandia, kasala, johna and suan) are grown, as well as ginger and chilly.

Women labour is preferred in carrying out transplantation and weeding. Clearing of forests, hoeing and sowings are done by men and harvesting and thrashing by both men and women together. In construction of a new house men, women and even children contribute their labour. Dongrias have developed orchads in the hill slopes, which range from 1500 ft to 4500 ft above the sea level.

Each Dongria village is located in the center of a chain of hills. They live in nuclear, as well as extended type of families. Dongrias build also wide common huts, where many families can stay inside.

There is much cooperation among Dongrias, who organise themselves to tribal lineages and clans. Exchange of labour in agricultural and horticultural operations is found very common. According to the census for 2001, there is only 7987

Dongrias, including 3458 males and 4529 females (which contrasts to women being the minority among the mainstream population in India). In addition Niyamgiri is home also to some Kutia and Jharnia Kondhs.

Niyamgiri's mineral-rich dense forests have abundant biodiversity with diverse wild animals such as tiger, leopards, sloth bear, elephant, pangolin, palm civet, giant squirrel, mouse deer, langur and sambhar. There are many rare endangered or high altitude plant species.

Niyamgiri is also a home for Adivasis' spiritual worship to sustain these plants, fruits, roots, animals and the whole life of Niyamgiri. The Dongrias believe being descendants of Niyam Raja Penu deity to whom the hill area belongs.

Niyamgiri Dongar cries under bauxite mining threat

Open cast mining of bauxite has been planned to take over the sacred hill top of the Niyam Donger (1150 m) by Sterlite/Vedanta corporation, which has already started the production of Aluminium in Lanjigarh, below the mountain. The trees would be cut down for road, conveyer and mining.

The planned production of 3 million tons of bauxite and 1 million ton of aluminium annually would damage the biosphere, destroy the dense forest and threaten by extinction the various unique and valuable plant and animal species (mammals, birds and snakes) living there.

The industry ignores and neglects the sustainable livelihoods of the Dongrias who

Photo : Jason Taylor





live there. It violates the rights and authority of the local village community meeting, the Gram Sabha, to decide about the minor forest produce of its area. It violates thus the constitutional rights of the Adivasis (Vth Schedule and PESA Act), the new Forest Rights Act and damages the emotional, spiritual and cultural ties of Dongrias and other Adivasis.

Mining leads also to soil erosion, pollution of air and water, damage to the agricultural land, grass lands, wild fruits, roots, flowers on which Adivasi economy depends. The mine would also affect the 31 streams, which originate from Niyamgiri as sources of two big rivers Bansidhara and Nagabali, which are the only hope of water for hundreds of thousands of people of Kalahandi and Rayagada districts in Orissa and Srikakulam district in Andhra Pradesh. The corporation has got Niyamgiri into its use for 23 years.

Sterlite-Vedanta bauxite mining and aluminium refinery will displace five times more people from the area than what they may employ. In addition, much wider population's livelihoods and access to pure water will be negatively affected and the resulting drought and diseases will further displace Adivasis. Displacement of tribals to Vedanta colony leads to miserable and arrested life. They lose their freedom and are not allowed even to meet freely people from outside. Dongrias say that they will not voluntarily give their sacred ancestral lands to become destroyed by Sterlite/Vedanta mining and industries.

We appeal the world community to think and take action to protect Niyamgiri mountain of Dongrias from Sterlite/Vedanta mining and lands of Kutias from other mining/industrial projects and to press on the mega companies not to destroy the dense forest and Adivasi livelihood.

Dongrias' Niyamgiri Surakhya Samiti movement has protested against Sterlite bauxite mining of the sacred Niyamgiri mountain. Now plans of other types of mining are threatening also Kutia areas, which have lived so far quite isolated.

IV. Problems and isolation of Kutia

Burlubaru village for example stays cut off from the rest of the district due to poor communication systems. The village area is practically closed from all sides by a series of hill ranges, the remaining part of the district staying cut off from the modern civilization for about 6 months in a year. There is only one arterial road that runs from Tumudibandha to Belghar. This Road passes through steep hill ranges and is cut off during the rainy season by swift flowing rivers.

The language spoken by the Kutia is "Kui" and most of them do not understand Oriya, which is the official language of the Orissa state. This isolation has lead the culture and Kutias' way of life of to stay somewhat indigenous and devout to the past.

The barter system still prevails in their region and the traditional village weekly market is of great economic importance in the life of these people. In modern commercial trade, however, they get easily very low price for their produce due to inadequate transport and unequal marketing facilities. Their innocence enables the local merchants and higher class tribals to exploit them. The majority of Kutia still works on land but are landless and the produce left for them is not enough.

Kutia forest life and rule of modern governance

Already thousand years ago the Adivasi were doing Podu cultivation. Till now the jungle is not lost. When the Government sanctions the code of rule for Adivasis, the government rule has no validity for Adivasi.

Adivasi view is different from the Government rule and resolutions, which do not support Adivasi livelihood. (Like when the government forbids or prevents food gathering of Adivasis on their own ancestral lands or forces them to gather only for being marketed through middle men)

Kutia Adivasis prefer to live as independents. As they are now deprived from their

sustainable use of lands and forests, the Kutias suffer from malnutrition and their average life expectancy is far below that of the others.

The geographical and linguistic barriers have also kept Kutias aloof from the benefits of the different Governmental development programmes during the last two decades. By government efforts in the Burlubaru village two deep tubes and a well are dug but the water in these is degraded and the villagers still depend on the nearby streams for their drinking water. Diseases like malaria and leprosy are widespread. Death rate is high and Kutia population did not increase much between 1961, -71 and -81. Literacy is as low as 2% among the Kutia against the district average of 19.81% and state average of 23.2%. This is because the Kutia children are very often engaged in agriculture and collection of forest products. The school timing imposed upon them has to be changed to suit their needs.

V. Conclusion

The Adivasi tradition of forest life is strong in the life of Kutia and Dongria Kandh tribals as they live in hilly and isolated areas. Little communication with other communities makes their cultural customs stay alive and safeguards their traditions from being mingled with the influence from the outside. The remote location may help the survival of this tribal culture in spite of the modern governance. ■

Sabitri Patra is the President of the Devote Trust, a nonprofit voluntary association formed by local tribals. It has been active at Mundigada and Belghar Panchayat under Tumudibandha Block of Kandhamal since 2002. It works for the upliftment of tribal and other down trodden people, based on the need and support of the local people - to establish a just, sustainable, collective and participatory society. It promotes dignity and self respect of everyone by people's utilisation of the locally available natural resources.



Plea on Forest Life for Adivasi Youth

Jaya Kashyap



Tribal peoples have been an indigenous part of the nature and natural forests. The land, plants and trees have all been closely related to tribal people and nature has kept them with great love. Tribals grow up on the lap of land and forest, as ignorant to the outer world. They see forest as their home where they feel more proud and safe.

They love their land as their mother and plants as their brothers. Every part of the forest matters a lot to them which results in love and care for it. Their life is incomplete without forest. For centuries tribals have lived in the forest and preserved it. Their morning starts with brushing their teeth with datun, a fibrous twig from a tree or bush like Neem, Babul, Khair etc., which keeps the teeth in good condition. From birth to death all their social activity depends on forest. Agriculture of many Gond tribes depends on a plough made of wood. Bridges and boats for crossing the river are made of wood.

Tribal youth and the future of the forests

To live with self-respect, the young generation finds a way for earning their livelihood. For some tribals living in natural forest, forest produce brings self-sufficiency and for some it supplements their income to meet their survival needs. Different types of medicines are found in the forest and many types of handlooms are made out of forest goods. Roots of bamboo plants referred to as Karil are eaten as vegetables. These kind of forest products are the sources of their income. Any of their festivals or celebrations is incomplete without plants, being

needed for example for making stages in marriage ceremonies.

Tribal Young people have a need to unite to save the forest which has given them everything but only needs a little protection in return. Leaves, wood and stems have a lot of value for them in every stage of their life. For cooking food they also need wood for the fire. Without nature no one can survive on this Earth. Man has always taken from nature, but in the modern context he gives nothing in return. People living in the forests of India are treated now like nomadic people, without official addresses, and are thus deprived of diverse basic rights and constitutionally sanctioned entitlements. Thus they are leaving forests and roaming to towns.

Earlier, forests were guarded by tribals but now they are forced to leave the forests. This results into loss of forest and wild animals, since these are now being destroyed by outsiders. Nowadays very few forests are found and the existence of forests is in danger. If the forests are not taken care of, the whole world will become a desert.

Today, when most of the world is overusing and thus destroying the nature in some way, the tribal people are still saving the forest. The tribal young people love their environment, where birds and animals roam freely around. They follow the policy of "Live and let live and do not harm anybody without a reason". By living around waterfalls, trees and mountains, they share their sorrows and happiness with each other.



Forests are incomplete without tribals and the life of tribals cannot be thought of without forest. They place their goddesses under the trees and worship them. If the forest dwellers fall ill, they treat themselves with medicines which they receive from the forest. The villagers are treated with various natural herbs by traditional healers such as Gunia, Vaid or Baigas.

But forest has now become a business for state authorities and middlemen. For a little profit the rights to forest resources are sold by government and consequently allopathic medicines need to be purchased to replace medicinal herbs. Access to medicinal herbs has become difficult as large tracts of forest are declared as reserves or protected. Forced conversion of natural forest into commercial forest also reduces the existence and access to the traditional minor forest produce. Some middlemen and timber mafia also sell the forest resources for their own profit, deceiving the innocent tribal people.

World's future linked to the forests

This results into loss not only for the tribals but to the whole human kind, since for our coming generation saving the forest is of utmost importance. We should tell the new generation about the importance of forest resources.

From trees we get pure air which we breath. Forests are also the reason for good rain as the roots of the trees hold the water in the ground. Thus also the modern society needs to strive along with the tribal people to save our environment. Every human being has to plant at least 5 plants, safeguard them and treat them as his/her parents. In return the plants will give life to us.

Jaya Kashyap.

Jaya Kashyap, the author of this article, is an Adivasi woman who has grown up in Dantewada area of South Bastar, which is today seriously affected by civil war.

She was elected and served as the village head (sarpanch) for one year. Jaya's dream and mission of life is as follows: "A Dream to make an end to the evil around the tribal society. And to save the tribal culture and the progress of their society"

Jaya works as a feature writer and researcher journalist in Adiwasi Awaz news agency of a tribal women led organisation Adiwasi Samta Manch (ASM). By its Adivasi news agency, ASM brings to the public the Adivasi reality of what happens in the life of tribal forest areas.

"We used to respect all kinds of lives". "We had laws neither for ourselves, nor for the animals. We and all forms of life were free to roam the forests and to sustain ourselves, but now ... we are destroying the very basis, that is freedom of the existence". (Indu Netam, Gond Adivasi woman, president of Adiwasi Samta Manch).

"Earlier there was no government, yet everything belonged to us", "the entire forest was the property. Even the word property is wrong, it is an outside word. It was a value with us". How their home forests are indigenously own to Adivasis, differs crucially from the modern ownership: A land is their land as they belong to that land not for having capacity to control, exchange or trade it.

"We know that we are born in this land, we are part of it. This forest... is part of our life". "We see through the eyes and we live through the land... Just as we can not sell away our eyes, our heads or hands, similarly we can not sell away the very basis of our existence"; land or forest "Why we are told not to enter the forest as wider world's environment has to be saved ?... Does not the wider world have its own environment" (to be saved) ? (Indu Netam, president of Adiwasi Samta Manch). ■





How Adivasi Women Save the Forest

Moushumi Basu's interview of **Pushpa Toppo and Suryamani Bhagat**, Adivasis of Save the Forest Movement. Interview's questions on Adivasi forest life and its justice were proposed by Siemenpuu India group.

'Jharkhand', meaning the land of natural forest, is a state of tribal origin in Eastern India. However, the lush green forest with which the Adivasi population has shared a sustainable life for centuries and which still forms basis of their livelihood and culture is getting rapidly depleted to satisfy the greed of the consumerist society.

What started as a small movement in 1999, the Jharkhand Jangal Bachao Andolan (JJBA, Save the Forest Movement), has become a mass campaign of the indigenous population in the state today. This movement thinks that the indigenous forest communities are best experienced to save the forests, to which their life has adapted itself. The movement has tribal women in its forefront, realizing the deep bond they share with the forests. Following is an interview with two such women, Pushpa Toppo and Suryamani Bhagat, who play a pioneer role in leading the movement in the villages today.

1. How does an Adivasi woman's experience on meanings of forest life and its justice differ from how the prevailing modern world understands forest and justice?

Pushpa Toppo: "Jungle hai to jaan hai, jaan hai to jungle hai" (With forest there is life and with life there is forest). Adivasi woman is most aware of this as

she has to run the house for the constant needs of the household and the family. Forest is an answer to all her wants and problems.

Can you name anything in our house, where the touch of the forest is missing ?

Adivasi woman collects diverse forest products, wild vegetables, fruit, rugra mushrooms etc. which she cooks for the family. If somebody is not well in the house, the forest provides her with the Jari butis (medicinal plants) for treatment. Even the broom she uses for cleaning the house is obtained from the forest.

During the "Tendu season" or otherwise, she supplements her family income by gathering and selling Tendu leaves and other forest produce. An Adivasi man on the other hand is busier in the fields, ploughing and cultivating.

We, tribal women, are able to identify each plant and recognize its value. This precious knowledge of tradition is passed from one generation to another. So, you understand why the forest is so close to our hearts!

Suryamani Bhagat: Forests save us from famines and starvation too. On occasions of drought, the trees are benevolent enough to provide us with such fruit and flowers that help us to sustain ourselves. Look at Mahua, (Madhuca Latifolia) for instance - every part of it has some use or the other. The flowers boiled with the seeds of Imli (Tamarindus Indicus) which is a rich source of calcium, are very nutritious, enabling us to survive. An Adivasi woman is conversant with the nutritious values of each part of the plants and trees in the forest, thereby putting it to best use. Each tree has a kind of blood relation to our

lives. Even the names of our lineage as Kujur, Lakra etc. are after the name of some plant or the other.

Pushpa Toppo: Forest has become a source of big money to the modern world. Just fell the trees indiscriminately and sell the timber. This way the jungles are denuded. The Forest Department is supposed to be the official protector of the jungles, but see the rapid rate at which the forest cover disappears!. The protection of forests is however almost an inborn instinct in the indigenous population. Unfortunately, this age old relation of the forests with the Adivasis is being snapped.

Suryamani Bhagat: Does the modern world understand the language of a tree? Do you know that forests speak? You need to have the sensitivity to understand their tongue. When a tree is cut, we see the sap oozing out; it is like the blood of a human being... But who cares, tree continues to be silent.

2. How and why do Adivasi women's practices of forest life & justice sustain forest better than the prevailing practices of modern administration and understanding of forest?

Pushpa: An Adivasi woman understands the ways and manners of the trees, as she does those of her own children. When she goes in the forest to collect firewood, she does not break the branches at random but picks up parts of the dead wood that she piles up and carries on her head back home. For her the trees cannot be cut any time of the year. The trees can withstand chopping with less damage only during a specific time, amavasya (period of no moon) in the winter,

when they prepare themselves for renewal of tissues. Then the Kaar- Baans or Kandi (shafts of wood used for roofing of their homes) are chopped. As also the white ants do not attack the wood cut (making the wood fragile) at this time, it is preserved and we do not have to cut wood repeatedly.

In spring the trees are clothed by new greenery and new tissues are being formed. They are in a state of growth and rapid multiplication. Then it is a taboo for us to even break a leaf from the tree. If we have to pluck out a branch in sheer urgency, we express our remorse before the plant, use the minimum part of the branch and plant the rest back in the forest. Likewise, when we see a tree laden with fruit, we do not grab them all, but only take as much as we need. So our life is tuned to save the forest.

Suryamani: My village in Kothari had been stripped off forests. But during the last seven-eight years, we motivated the villagers to plant trees with multifarious uses like Mahua, Sakhua (Shorea Robusta), Karaunj, (Pongamia Pinnata) Neem (Azadiracta Indica), Kathal (Hallocarpus Indicus) etc.. They are boon for the ecosystem and in sharp contrast to the trees (Acacia or Eucalyptus) planted by the forest department or the coal companies here in the name of afforestation, having neither nitrogen-fixing capacity nor the quality to act as natural fertilisers of the soil. Even birds seldom sit on such trees; thereby the soil beneath is deprived of even their droppings. But as these trees grow fast and look green round the year, one gets easily duped by the spreading greenery of plantations.

The Forest Department has planted tree monocultures also illegally on the pelling





agricultural fields, and dug trenches around the forests with an ulterior motive of expelling the forest dwellers from the forest. We often hear that thousands of varied saplings have been planted in the name of afforestation. But how many of them eventually survive? It is just not enough to plant and water them for a couple of days. They need to be nurtured, protected and cared for as your children.

Pushpa: On many occasions, women assume leading roles and confront the officials more vigorously than men. Women also protect men as it is harder for the police to use violence against the former. Further, the tribal women are much more firm and assertive than their men, considering that they are not usually prone to vices as drinking and appear thus more in command of the situation.

3. How can the Adivasi meanings and justice of forest be supported by:

a) The work of Save the Forest Movement (JJBA) ?

Pushpa: Our work is centered on four pillars. Our first effort is to re- strengthen and empower the Gaon Sabha, i.e. village committees, across the state for the restoration of traditional forest rights. Such committees are headed by conventional Chiefs like Manki-Munda (for Munda tribes), Manjhi Harram (for Santhal tribes) or Pahan (for Oraons), and governed by self-rule. Men, women and children have equal say in the Gaon Sabhas. Any dispute of the village is decided through consensus and not on the basis of majority, as is done elsewhere. Even if there is one voice of disagreement, the final decision cannot be taken, unless it is sorted out.

Suryamani: The second pillar is to bring about complete participation of village men and women in Van Palan - forest protection and management. This would be done through the constitution of Samudayik Van Suraksha Samiti i.e. Community Forest Protection Committee. We will not allow any members from the forest department in the committee but it will have just representation of the Gaon Sabha.

The third pillar is setting up women's cooperatives in many tribal villages. Bigger villages have more than one. In the meetings women discuss on health, medicinal plants and environmental issues and pool also together small amounts of money from each other, which may be used for common social needs in case of adversity.

Women are major collectors of forest produce like Granchi (Piar), Kendu leaves to make bidis (tobacco), Chiraunji etc. JJBA has decided to market these products

for the economic empowerment of women, who earn more without involving middlemen.

Pushpa: The fourth pillar is Bal Akhras, gatherings of children, who are our future. One challenge confronting the JJBA today is their alienation from the traditions related to the forests, which are disappearing so fast. The children are gradually moving towards city life. We try to revert them back to the forests, by acquainting them with various trees, plants and their values. Van bhoj, i.e. picnics, trips, music, dance, poetry recitation etc. are organised in the forest to customise them with the jungles.

b) The implementation of the Forest Rights Act (FRA) ?

Suryamani: Forest Rights Act implementation can develop amongst the villagers a sense of ownership for the forests. It is now more of a paraya rishta or alien relation for them, with the forest department calling the shots in the management and protection of the forests. The forests are however better protected in the Khuntkhatti villages, where they traditionally belong under the hold of indigenous Munda settlements. It is essential to inculcate this sense of belonging amongst our people.

Pushpa: The forest villages or the non-agricultural villages would also greatly benefit by the implementation of the FRA. The land owners there would be given pattas or title deeds for their land. The inhabitants were neglected for long, bereft of even the basic rights of voting, welfare, education etc. By the FRA implementation, such erstwhile non existent villages can be declared into revenue villages in the districts of West Singhbhum, Palamau and Hazaribagh.

c) The on-going JJBA March for Forest Rights (Vanadhikar Yatra)?

Pushpa: Vanadhikar Yatra or March for Forest rights, organized by the JJBA across 200 villages in the state is a campaign with a difference. By the march we press for the implementation of the Forest Rights Act in the state.

Our march has a splash of color, tribal rhythm, music, poetry etc, to convey its message to the villagers. It has also an overwhelming leadership of women. It began a month ago in September and has already passed more than 100 villages in over 20 blocks across the length and breadth of the forested parts of the state. With 50 members of the JJBA in it, the event has threefold objectives. One is to mobilize the villagers for mounting pressure on the State government for the





implementation of the FRA. Second is to create awareness on the provisions of this Act and third is to galvanize them for demanding community participation in its implementation.

Suryamani: Accompanied by the beats of traditional tribal musical instruments like Mandar, Dholak, Bansur and Kartaal, we begin by singing: "Jari, Booti Sikhenge, Yehi To Swasthya Rakshak Hai" (We will learn and teach herbal medicines, these are safeguards of health) The idea is to draw the villagers in joining our cause. Soon they join, donning colourful costumes and flowers. We thus manage to bring out the participation of the whole village community on the occasion to hear our message.

d) The Annual Convention of the JJBA from 17th to 19th of November 2008?

Pushpa: The theme for the forthcoming annual convention of the JJBA is "Jal, Vayu Parivartan", i.e. the climate change. The convention will throw light on how the depletion of forest cover is responsible for the ensuing adverse environmental changes globally. We would also submit memorandum to the Governor voicing for the FRA implementation. There would be a workshop addressed by the various experts of the forest movement. A number of public centred activities would be organised on the occasion to create interest and spread awareness on forest rights.

Suryamani: Even the State Government today seems to have woken up to our demands. In a recent convention organised by the JJBA, both the State tribal minister, Joba Manjhi, and the State Minister for Revenue, Dulal Bhuiyan, have accepted our five point demands:

- * The government of Jharkhand must recognize that the root of the 'historical Injustice' that the FRA aims to remove, lies in the fact of dispossession of Adivasis' ownership and management rights over their ancestral forests.
- * The Govt. must recognize the forest land recorded in the record of rights of each village as the 'community forest resource' that is enshrined in the FRA 2006.

- * The state should not interfere in the functioning of the Gaon Sabha constituted under the Panchayatiraj Extension in Scheduled Areas (PESA) 1996.
- * The Forest Rights Committee formed by the Gaon Sabha should be recognized by the Govt. under the FRA
- * At every level of implementation of the FRA, from State level Committee to the Subdivision level Committees, the Govt. must enable the participation of the activists of the forest rights movement in the state.

4. How is the voice of all living beings/spirits of the forest taken into account in Adivasi women's life or decisions?

Pushpa: You must recognize the fact that forest to us is not just a conglomeration of trees, but we look up to it as Jangal Devta (Forest God)... there is an aspect of divinity attached to our emotions in this connection. Before entering the jungle for the first time in the day, we offer a twig or stone as a mark of obeisance and pray: 'Jungle Devta, protect us'.

We have an unsaid communication with the animals and birds. They portend omens and even signal dangers in the forest. For instance, if there is a snake in the vicinity, there will invariably be sudden twittering of flocks of sparrows. We are instantly alerted. While certain trees have symbolic significance in our cultural and social functions, certain flowers herald the approach of our festivals.

Suryamani: After every harvest, the grains are at first worshipped. No seed is plucked out before ripening fully, as we believe that every seed has the right to mature. There are certain birds that call in the forest, just before the onset of rains. Thus the forest has its own unique style of communicating with us, at every stage of our life. ■

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II

Modern forest rules vs. Indigenous living with wild forest



1

Deforestation and alienation of forest dwellers in India.

By A. Renganathan, convener of TAFSC (Tribal Association for Fifth Schedule Campaign, a right based campaign for the tribal issues in Tamilnadu, South India.)

2

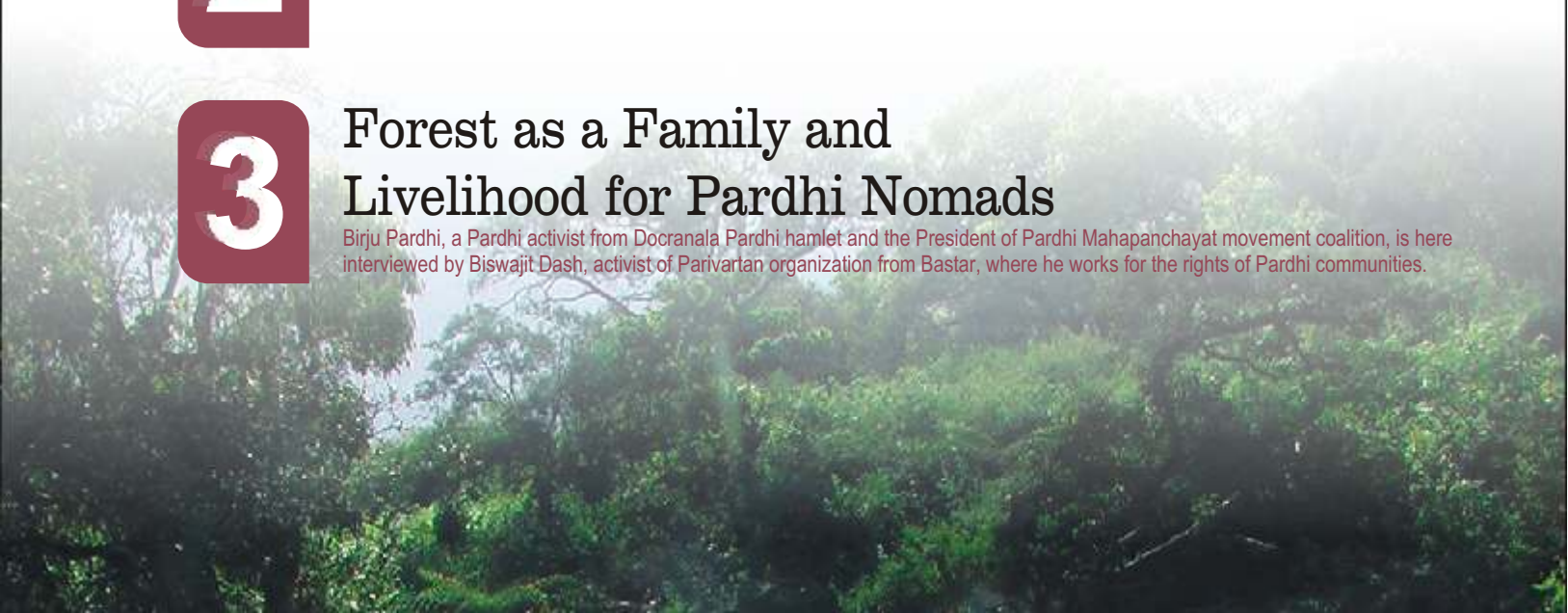
Meanings of Forest for Paliyan People

Varthini, activist from Tamil Nadu

3

Forest as a Family and Livelihood for Pardhi Nomads

Birju Pardhi, a Pardhi activist from Docranala Pardhi hamlet and the President of Pardhi Mahapanchayat movement coalition, is here interviewed by Biswajit Dash, activist of Parivartan organization from Bastar, where he works for the rights of Pardhi communities.



Modern forest rules vs. Indigenous living with wild forest

India's Tribal Forest Rights Act provides for the indigenous forest communities the rights to live in forests and to use, own, manage and protect the forests, which they have traditionally used, occupied or protected. Such rights are required to be implemented also by the international community's commitments on forests and indigenous peoples, such as the UN Declaration on Rights of Indigenous Peoples, UN Convention on Biological Diversity and the main UN human rights covenants.

Forest Rights Act was achieved as a result of continued work and protests of the movements of forest dwellers against the injustices, they had faced.

On 29.11.2006 around 60 000 people participated to demonstration in cities and tribal areas of India, including in Delhi near the Parliament to demand the Act to be passed.

But even though the Act formally confirms the rights of Adivasis to their forest life, its implementation in accordance to the modern meanings of the forest still tends to deprive Adivasis of their basic rights to their own means of subsistence.

Adivasis continue being evicted for mines, dams, plantations, eco-tourism, etc. and their community rights are neglected by the officers, who act in the name of thus administered 'forest' to restrict the realisation of the indigenous rights.

Adivasi share of mining in soil of their own ancestral lands is to gather from the ground the pieces of ore dropping from the mining trucks which drive by, filled with that soil.

But in reality it has been widely the areas where these indigenous user-rights have prevailed, where the wilds have survived rather than in the areas under modern

ownership or administration

Thus this second part of our publication deals with the ways in which the modern forest law and governance displace, deprive or affect the sustainable indigenous ways to understand, treat and live the wilds through gathering, hunting, roaming etc.

The article by Renganathan describes India's on-going deforestation and alienation of forest dwellers through industries, plantations, environmental degradation, etc. in the context of the experiences of Adivasis in South India, where they are deprived of their constitutional rights of having specific tribal rights set up for them in specific tribal areas (rights of the so called Vth Schedule of the Constitution).

Varthini reflects how this all affects the meaning of forest for the roaming Paliyan hunter-gatherers in Tamil Nadu. Paliyans are displaced also due to the sanctuaries and plantations established in their ancestral lands. They are not allowed to gather minor forest produce for their own use but only for being sold through middle men. Some Paliyans are not recorded even as citizens of India.

Similarly the Pardhi hunter-gatherers and bamboo workers in Chhattisgarh and other nomadic/mobile tribes around India have been treated as homeless outlaws or criminals from their birth - not recorded as settled to any permanent address or living place. The interview of Birju Pardhi by Biswajit Dash, presents how for Pardhis the wild forest has been their family, home and safety place from the violent attacks, which the society and modern forest administration wage against them.



Photo : Herkko Eskelinen

Deforestation and alienation of forest dwellers in India

By A. Renganathan

Introduction:

Scientists say that there must be 33% of forests in a country for its development. In practice however, these statements are interpreted as legitimizing the replacement of rich natural forests by monoculture tree plantations. According to satellite pictures, a mere 11% of India's forests are rich natural forests. These forests don't only protect the forest-dependent hill tribes, but also the people who live on the plains and coastal areas. Rivers originating from the hills first make the plains fertile, transforming the life of the people living there prosperous. Afterwards they converge in the sea, thus enabling a peaceful livelihood for the fisher folk.

In this framework the importance of forests can easily be understood by anyone. However, due to lack of sufficient knowledge, the destruction of hills and forests continues unabatedly. Followed by the destruction of the forest, the tribals depending on it are also facing extinction.

Alienating the Forest Dwellers:

In the middle of the 19th century, when the British started to lay railway tracks for commercial purpose by destroying the forests, the tribals vehemently opposed it. Under the pretext of scientific management of forests, the Britons exiled the tribals from their home lands over night by nationalizing the forests. In addition, they forbade the natives to enter the forests, their source of life.

The tribals who were till then living and depending on forests and the nature were evicted from the forests. Besides, the precious teakwood, rosewood and spear trees etc., were looted for laying the rail roads, constructing shipyards and residences for British people.

The spices like Cardamom (Aromatic) and pepper were plundered.

The totality of the forest and its minor produces had gone out the hands of the tribal people. They were made bonded slaves in the farms and estates by the rulers, pushing them to the brink of their life.

Mega Projects:

Even after attaining Independence, the Indian governmental Forest Department has but threatened and abused the Adivasis, also continued to destroy the forest rich in flora and fauna. Using "coup" contracts to go on with deforestation, the Indian government announced forest policies which were only based on the forest laws enacted by the British rulers.

Thus the conservation of forest (as done in the pre-colonial times) has been replaced with destruction. As a result of globalisation in the changing world environment, the new Indian Environment policy provides the transfer of forests to private parties, like corporations and companies or to public partnerships. The tribal are thrown away from the forests also under the ruse of development and different "mega projects" including the establishment of national parks, wild life sanctuaries, power projects, mining and dams.

In the name of development projects, millions of people get displaced. 85.39 lakh ("lakh" = 100 000) tribals were officially displaced in India already by 1990, but the actual amount of the de-facto displaced or those whom development projects have forced to migrate, is much higher

Among all displaced of India, 55 % are tribals. The Mudumalai and Indira Gandhi Wild Life Sanctuaries and Kalakkadu Tiger sanctuaries are being expanded with scant respect to the people who have lived for generations in the involved forests. The Forest Department is resorting arm-twisting policies to vacate the forests by offering the native dwellers Rs. 10 lakhs, even after the enactment of the



Scheduled tribes and Other Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act 2006.

Tribals and Forests:

Ten million tribal people are depending mainly on the forests in India. According to government estimation around 725,861 hectares of land are being utilized by them. Mr. Balan, from the Kanikkaran settlement of Kanyakumari forests says: "Our life and wealth is the forest. If there is no forest we cease to exist. But the forest department allows aliens into our lands. It is a painful that they chase us away."

The collection and marketing of minor forest produce (MFP) is a major source of livelihood for most tribal families contributing around 70% of their total income. Despite the transfer of ownership control and management of MFP to the tribals through the constitutional extension (PESA Act 1996), the collection and trade of MFP is largely monopolized by the corporations of the States' Forest Departments at least in case of high value products. (according to National Tribal policy).

Endorsing this, Mr. Nagapandi from Pulaiyar community,

Kodaikanal, says: "A majority of Pulaiyar and Paliyar community people living in this hill utilize as their livelihood minor forest products such as Kadukkai, Pasam and honey. But the forest department obstructs us to collect and sell them. However, outsiders are permitted to do this, and to exploit us. Our life is pushed to poverty."

Voices from the communities:

Mrs. Leelavathi from Paliyar community, Mulaiyar village: "It is a matter of distress that the rights ensured to the tribals (ST people) for collecting the forest produce according to the PESAACT 1996 are only applicable to the scheduled tribal areas and not to Tamilnadu, due to Non-Scheduling of Indian Constitution Article 244(1)".

Mr. Narayanan from Kallar, Valparai: "We were born, we crawled and we grew in the forest only. Without forests we are like fish out of water. They are livelihood for the tribal people, other species and wild life. But the forest department chases us out of the forest under the ruse of establishing sanctuaries by luring us with the offer of Rs. 10 lakhs for resettlement".

Mr. Ganesamurthy from Mailarkani settlement in Tirunelveli: "It is our ancestors

who preserved these forests. We treat them as Gods. But the statement of the wild life warden was that the forest belongs the Forest Department and he has been ordered to vacate the tribals. He issued stern warning that if we would not obey, false cases would be foisted against us, which would annihilate our community itself".

Tiruvallur Mr. Gunasekaran: "The traditional profession of the Irula tribals is hunting and gathering food. First the English rule exiled us, then Indian Government enacted the Protection of Wild Life Act 1972, forbidding our traditional profession of hunting and exiled our people from the forests forcing us to move in urban areas making us bonded labourers in rice mills and farms".

Mr. Jegannathan, President of TAAK, Salem: "The life of the tribal people is forest. It is only they who protected the forests in the past and who would protect it now. But the forest department makes the tribals scapegoat whenever forests are destroyed. The Forest Survey Report 2003 (by the Ministry of Environment) is a testimony to how false these statements are in this regard. Of the total forest cover in India about 63% lies in 187 tribal districts, though the geographical area of these districts is just 33.6% of the whole India. Out of those 58 districts which have more than 67% of their area under forest cover, 51 are tribal districts. Mr.Nagamani from Amaravathy: "We have migrated three times as government had formed a crocodile farm. The Government does not give the same importance to the lives of forest dwellers as it gives to crocodiles."

Voices on Climate Change and Forests

Mr. Alphonse Raj from Ooty Kothagiri Island Trust: "In India, 18,7 % of the major emissions leading to climate change could have been avoided by ceasing degradation and deforestation processes. Due to climate changes, erratic rainfalls have appeared: these heavy rains can trigger landslides and cause floods during a single day. In Ooty, the crops were withered away due to unseasonal rain. Thus the people could survive only when the forests are allowed to remain as forests and are properly conserved."

Mr.Sathyaraj of Tamilnadu Tribal Welfare Board from Ooty Thodar Community: "Since the forest department has adopted mono crop systems in Ooty with plants like Eucalyptus and Pine trees, the natural fertility of the soil has come down and the climate also is fast changing. Major water sources here have been utilized by these Eucalyptus trees, which has led to cracks in the land."

Forests and water resources

Mr. Ramasamy, secretary of Tamilzha Adivasi Iyakkam (Tamilnadu Tribal Association) in Thevanoor, Kollimalai, states: "As far my knowledge goes, in our childhood it would rain for six months in a year. Water fountains emerged in various places in the entire hills, and became rivers as the Swetha and Ayyaru. They made the plains fertile and then converged with the river Cauvery. Majority of the rivers,





originating from the Western and Eastern Ghats helped the granary of Tamilnadu. But as the forests and river catchment areas are destroyed, the rain has also become scarce. Today the people who plunder forest and river wealth have created a pathetic condition. People are toiling for even drinking water”.

Forests and Minerals:

The major mineral wealth is in the forests of India. This wealth is also looted by multi national companies and corporates. States like Orissa, Chattisgarh, and Jharkand are being looted, and the tribals who oppose it are fired upon (Kalinga village-Orissa).

Mr. Chinnayan of Yercaud recounts that the entire Shevarayan Temple area, where the tribals celebrated their festivals has completely been mined by Malco Company. Not less than 100 lorry loads of mined ore are being taken down the hill in a day for processing. Consequent to this the roads to the habitations of the tribal people are getting damaged. In the Kolli Hills, bauxite ore is quarried daily, which leads to denuding the forest covers

Forest and Tourism:

The forest department has been destroying the forest and the culture of the tribal people by making outsiders visit the forest areas and to stay with the ST people in the name of eco tourism.

Mr. Sakthivel, President of the Irular community in Nellithurai Panchayat, says: “The basic resource of the tribal people is forest. But it is painful that this forest, which is the life source of tribals, has changed and is recklessly encroached by others. Electricity

is generated in the Pilloor Dam of our area, but there is no electricity for our villages. This illustrates the plight of our people”.

Conclusion:

Only the forests have made the tribal people live independently. When the forests are destroyed or transferred to others, it amounts to refusing these people their legitimate and fundamental rights.

If the forest wealth of the tribal people is protected, not only their livelihood would be saved but the climate change and the after effects would also disappear. The plains, the natural resources of the sea and the whole environment would be saved. The forest is not only the life of the tribal, but also of the nation and the universe. Every one has the responsibility to protect the forest and natural resources. The State and national government should thus develop and enact people-based policies to protect the forest and natural resources instead of the prevailing MNC and market based policies which exploit them. ▢

The author, Mr. Renganathan, has worked for the rights of the Adivasi in Tamilnadu for the past 20 years and has campaigned for the application of the constitutional provision of 5th schedule to support the cultural autonomy of the tribals in Tamilnadu.



Meanings of Forest for Paliyan People

Varthini



Paliyan Tribes in search of their lands and traditions

Paliyans are indigenous tribes who live in small hamlets scattered in the hills of Coimbatore, Madurai, Theni, Dindigul, Virudhunagar and Thirunelveli districts of Tamilnadu in the Western Ghat mountain regions (in Topslip, Palani Hills, Kodaikanal, Sirumalai, Agamalai, etc.). The origins of the Paliyan hunter-gatherer Adivasis is considered to be Poolavadi Puliampatti in the Palani hills of Western Ghats where Palar dam is built now.

Around 6000 Paliyan families live scattered over Western Ghats and are in search of their lost identity, livelihood, healthy food habits, rich traditional heritage and access to herbal medicines and minor forest produce. They cannot accept being forced to live in plains, reduced to the level of plantation workers or agricultural coolies in their own ancestral land. They yearn to go into their forests for a peaceful, happy and contented life.

Forest as the core of Paliyan life

"What does forest mean to you?" we asked Vasimalai from the Usilampatti Taluk hill area. The answer came directly and clearly: "Our Soul and our Life."

Paliyans miss their life in the forest, from which they are now widely displaced. As stated by Karuppasamy, a Paliyan priest from Vasimalai Hills aged 65 years:

"We will cling on to these rocks if we are chased away from this forest. Entering into the forest at least once in a day refreshes and recharges ourselves. We cannot live far away from our forest. We feel suffocated down in the plains. Our Mother forest gives us fresh air to breathe".

Karuppasamy's words came out full of emotion expressing how much he gets in

his life from the forest. Being a representative from older generation, he could express himself how much he misses the forest and how enriching a life in the forest he had as a child.

Heritage of the Paliyans

Land and forest are worshipped with reverence by Paliyans. Their habitat, livelihood resources and their enriching culture are in unison with nature. Roots, honey, vegetables and fruit from the forests were their main food earlier. Later they also began to cultivate minor millets like samai, thinai and ragi.

They go for hunting in the deep forest but never disturb young or pregnant animals since they strongly believe that each potential being has every right to live. While collecting tubers, the Paliyans take utmost care of not cutting down the mainroots (called Aniver). In the process of honey collection, the wax of the honey is not crushed but left untouched for the bees to come again.

They are not in the practice of storing surplus. Abundant water resources, self-sustained forest produce and a small habitat has made them contented and happy. Under their traditional local chief, Kannikaran, they have lived quite freely and happily in the forests.

The Paliyan habitats are very rich in medicinal plants. Herbal medicines are still used by the Paliyans and they have a rich knowledge about herbs. The Sathuragiri hills in the Western Ghats are still famous for herbal richness.

Paliyans have a modest living with minimum needs. They are very simple and straightforward in their thought process, and find no reason to acquire in abundance when there is enough for their need. They respect ecological democracy without knowing the terms and concepts used by the so called

educated, modern people.

Karuppasamy says with nostalgia: "Forest fulfills all our needs. We have no use or meaning for money, if we are allowed to live in the forest without outsiders' interruption".

The Paliyans do not even need match boxes since kiluvai (a kind of wood which is used for fencing) sticks help them to make fire even during the winter and rainy seasons. Karuppasamy says:

"We, the Paliyars, are children of the forest and our Mother Forest will take care of our needs. We have neem sticks and herbs for brushing our teeth; kiluvai sticks for making a fire; minor millets to cook and eat; streams for quenching our thirst and rocks to protect us from the sun and rain. The minor forest produce supports us with additional food, and fetches some income through which we could live a decent life. As you people in the plains, we need not depend on money in anything, not even for buying a match box".

These words of Karuppasamy are confirmed also during hot summers when all their streams are dried up: at those times the Paliyans cut a kind of aloe vera to quench their thirst, not waiting for water supply from their local panchayat (village governance organizing also community infrastructure and deliveries) offices.

Forest as a mother

Murugayee, a woman from Kaduguthadi village, Kodaikanal Hills shared her meaning of forest: "In the forest, we have enough honey, roots, fruits and healthy greens to feed us always. Forest is our Mother to whom we rely on during our sickness. For each and every ailment, Forest has very rich herbs and She is our healer".

Paliyan Adivasi women depend on herbs to cure their ailments. For a feeding mother, they boil a root of the local plant and the decoction is given to nourish her. For young girls who have attained puberty, they give different herbs from the forest to add strength to their bodies.

While discussing about their gender relations, Murugayee shared their tradition of

respecting each other irrespective of gender. Both men and women go out for minor forest produce collection and share the work equally. Domestic violence, harassment, molestation, practice of dowry and other gender based differences were not known to them.

For Paliyan women, forests are their real safe place where they live like birds. Unlike in plains, in forests women used to enjoy equal rights with their men, Forest is their mother, teacher, friend, food provider, God and everything with whom their life is closely related. Murugayee said "We marry men after seeing how they collect honey and their perseverance to sustain in the forest for longer days".

Their marriage is very simple. With the honey collected by the bridegroom and with the garland of wild flowers, they share their food with their relatives and the marriage ceremony is over. Murugayee anticipates that such a simple but healthy culture may disappear if the Paliyans consistently live closer to the people in the plains whose values are gender biased.

Mari from Vadakaraiparai, Kodaikanal Hills expressed in a very poetic way that forest is his teacher, who taught him confidence and contentment for peaceful living.

Paliyans are not willing to get down from the hills and even if forcibly evicted, they prefer to settle very near to the hills.

Mari says, "Forest is my first teacher and my mother from whom I learnt how to make my life self-reliant. When I feel hungry, I go out into the forest, search for my food and find it. Whenever and wherever possible, I do some minor millet cultivation and feed others too. I love my forest and my people. I do no harm to them and I live in peace".

Habitats of Paliyans

In olden days, Paliyans lived in rocky cave-like structures called Kalazhais (stone houses) or in small hut-like structures between two rocks, which we can still see in some paliyan hamlets today. Today, these caves serve as a means to classify their ancestors and past lineages.

Now most of the Paliyans have colony houses built by the Government under the tribal welfare schemes. Some Paliyans have built their own small houses in the





plains very near to the hills from where they are thrown out.

Some others, who are still living in the interior forests, build their huts with the minimum of such wood and grass that suit their climatic conditions. Their houses are simple. Food is natural and healthy; medicines are cost-free and they do not have anything in surplus to store.

Options left for Paliyan forest life?

Forests of Paliyans are now polluted with smoke, polythene papers, by ecologically insensitive tourists and outsiders.

Endless hectares of land are in the hands of private coffee plantation owners, who indulge in extensive monocropping affecting the forest bio-diversity

People from the plains, the forest officials and the rich, who visited the forests for official or health reasons, have plundered forest resources and occupied the lands.

Paliyans have lost both their traditional and customary right over their forest and their close relationship with it. They feel that they are now alienated from their Mother Nature. They also realize that their scattered life, their innocence and ignorance about forest laws and rules have made them more vulnerable to become exploited by outsiders. They used to have easy and free access to crystal clear drinking water from the streams nearby their hamlets, are now depending on panchayats for drinking water supply.

Their mobility into the forest for the collection of minor forest produce is curbed to greater extent by the State and the private estate owners. Cultivable lands of Paliyans are now in the hands of non-Adivasis, and the Paliyans must work as daily wage earners for outsiders on their own ancestral land. Their healthy food habits are forcibly changed. They depend on rice under the Public Distribution System (PDS) and grown with chemical fertilizers.

Theivam, a representative of the Paliyan younger generation expressed his desire to go into the forest of his greatgrandparents' days:

"While listening to my elder people, I feel I have lost a lot. I miss my Mother Forest and the basic life skills which my ancestors inherited and cherished. I am reduced to a daily wage earner in plains.

I have to depend on others for everything. Even for my daily work and daily bread, I have to depend on the people in the plains. I eat rice distributed in PDS shops with very minimum nutrition in it. I feel like running into my forest again to find my own way of living". ■

This article is compiled and translated by Varthini, an activist from Madurai, Tamil Nadu. She has studied the situation of the Paliyans and built cooperation with them within the alliance Collective For Action Of Forest Adivasi In Tamil Nadu (CAFAT). For the dialogic content of the article she gives her sincere thanks to the Paliyan villagers Vasimalai, Theivam, Karuppasamy, Mari and Murugayee who participated in the dialogue and for Sukumar, Dhanraj and Marirajan from PEAL for their help



Forest as a Family and Livelihood for Pardhi Nomads

An interview of B.Pardhi



Birju Pardhi, a Pardhi activist from Docranala Pardhi hamlet and the President of Pardhi Mahapanchayat movement coalition, is here interviewed by **Biswajit Dash**, activist of Parivartan organization from Bastar, where he works for the rights of Pardhi communities.

Mr Dash made the interview with questions which were proposed by activists of the India Group of Finnish Siemenpuu Foundation and which have arisen to their mind after meeting many Pardhi communities or other hunter-gathering heritage based Adivasi communities. Mr. Dash noted that after the interview it was not easy to write the interview into English.

Interviewer: [What does the forest mean for your tribe?](#)

Birju Pardhi (B.P.): Forest means family for the members of Pardhi community, who don't feel comfortable to reside in common civilization with other people.

In the death of any member of any family they believe that the place is not suitable for them to live (due to presence of evil power or spirit), so they remain nomadic.

The other factor behind not staying with the villagers from a different community

is that it would hamper their health. They prefer the clean and pure environment of forest. Another strong reason behind the forest living is that they don't want to be in conflict with any one. They can't think of being apart or staying away from the forest.

[How would you see the forest as a home, family or community of beings?](#)

B.P.: - The Pardhi see the forest as their family as their entire life and each of its phases has a strong relationship with forest. They feel that forest is not only their home but also their family. And as a person always needs the family around him and its support, in that manner they cannot think about living outside forest.

[How do you survive in the forest for food and shelter in daily life during different seasons and what is the meaning of seasons for the forest life?](#)

B.P.: -Living in forest has some very exciting and also challenging experiences. A Pardhi house is made up of bamboo, branches of trees and leaves. Each house has merely two rooms. The effect of seasons impacts their life both in a positive and a negative manner.

For forest living the winter season is the most favorable one. In this season they

get enough food to eat for their family, as in this season they get many kinds of leaves and roots and nowadays also rice to eat. The clean drinkable water is easily accessible for them from the natural sources of spring water. But the night time in this season is the toughest one to bear. They burn fire wood inside their hut to make it warm, because they do not have blankets to secure themselves with.

In the summer season, they get plenty of fire wood for cooking, but they struggle to get different leaves and different fruits used as vegetables available in forest. So they only depend upon different roots and meat. The hot day time of summer does not hamper their life some much, because from their childhood they have become acquainted to it. The summer night in the forest is quite pleasant for sleeping, as the air is cooler than during the day. So they sleep outside the houses in the summer. For that they prepare temporary shades. They use the bark of trees as a substitute for bed. But in the matter of drinking water they suffer the most, as the natural water sources dry in this period.

The rainy season makes their life extremely difficult. In this time they get enough different types of leaves to eat. But as it is the budding and developing season for the roots, they are not able to include those in their plate. As it is the period of cultivation most of their savings of food grains are being used as seeds. So they suffer from it.

The most undesirable problem in this season is the preparation of food, since the fire wood gets wet. The "Chullha" (Hearth), the Earthen Stove commonly used in India, gets wet. Its base is on the ground, which gets wet due to the evaporation of water. After the rain it also remains wet for some hours. So it becomes impossible to prepare food in the wet Chullha by burning wet fire wood. The water resources also get contaminated and it adds to all of the problems of health. They prevent water from entering the houses by making small bumpy structures called "Medh" outside the houses surrounding it.

How does your tribe see forest as living or a source of life in relation to humans, ancestors and universe?

B.P: - The continuous deforestation and its consequences are largely affecting the forest life of the Pardhi's. They were getting bamboo and meat from the



forest free of cost in earlier times. As the forest is decreasing, the bamboo is also vanishing.

They also used to enjoy a lot of facilities like continuous water sources and various kinds of food. Lastly the Pardhis main source of livelihood, i.e. hunting of animals has come down to end. Now animals are not available in the forest because the forest has become exploited by the modern society. Only some small birds and mice are left there and the Government has banned the sustainable ways how Adivasis have used the forest. The modern rules and practices have created problematic changes in the life in forest.





How does your tribe's understanding on forest differ from the prevailing modern meanings of forest?

B.P.: - For the Pardhi community there is no sense in any modern meanings of forest. What they have learnt from their ancestors, they believe only that meaning. They think forest is the haven for them. They can not think of managing the forest, because human being can not manage the nature. They believe that if the forest is left to be in its way, it will manage itself.

(Background clarification to the question by Parivartan: The Pardhis are not aware of the concepts or manuals of Indian Institute of the Forest Management (IIFM). The Adivasi life is not separable from the forest. They did not learn the forest as a resource but as life. The word 'sustainable management' came after the excessive exploitation of forest by the Forest Department and Indian Forest Act, which was the brainchild of the western people. It is not our thought. So the indigenous Indian wisdom is still alive among the Adivasis.)

What things are now threatening/changing your forest life, your access and relation to the forest?

B.P.: - Forest and the life of Pardhi community complement each other. The control of forest and forest life by the outsiders threatens their life most. The restriction over accessing the resources like Bamboo and some other Non Timber Forest Products is creating difficulties in the natural life of the community.

Government has banned the hunting in forest. In addition, the forest is decreasing. All these things threaten and change the forest life of the Pardhi community.

What impacts do these changes have on your lives, on the forests and on your ability to live sustainably in the forest?

B.P.: - The above mentioned changes have made a great impact on the life in the forest and on access to the forest. Earlier, to cope with the situation the Hunting Pardhis became "Basod", Bamboo workers, who produce bamboo handicrafts.

But now that also the resources of Bamboo are in the stage of becoming zero, their livelihood in forest is also decreasing. In present situation the Pardhis try to start to cultivate like the mainstream, but are using the Forest Lands for it as they do not have any agricultural lands. As the Government is supplying rice in subsidized rate in the PDS (Public Distribution System) system and as Pardhis can also purchase bamboo from the villages, their direct dependence on local forest is also decreasing.

(Note by the interviewer: Due to effort of the Pardhi Mahapanchayat, after a long struggle in the North Bastar region, they are now enjoying some of the government welfare schemes. As a result of their struggle under the Banner of Pardhi Mahapanchayat for the Bamboo - which is the main raw material for their livelihood - the government is now providing them bamboo in a subsidised rate for non-industrial purposes.)

Background on Pardhi, nomadic tribes and case of unprovoked violence against Docranala

The Pardhi community is a nomadic tribe, belonging to the estimated 60 million people of Denotified and Nomadic Tribes who were criminalised, being "notified" by the British Colonial Government as born criminals due to their nomadism (Criminal Tribes Act 1871). Local administrations were granted sweeping powers to label entire communities as criminals. Despite being formally "denotified" by India in 1952, these nomadic groups still continue to face severe discrimination and ostracism as "invisible" people, plagued with a pervasive stigma of criminality and destitution, unduly harassed by police enforcement officials, and effectively ignored by the government.

The Pardhi families of Docranala within a Nursery forest, in Marampani Panchayat, North Bastar, stopped nomadic life in 2003 by deciding to set up their hamlet with consent of the panchayat. (They had cultivated the land since 1987 and due to the distance of the fields from their habitats, they shifted to the very place in 2003). Since 2003 they have thus taken up agriculture and collecting minor forest products on that land. Under the Forest Rights Act 2006 (FRA), tribal and other traditional forest dwellers have rights to such forest lands which they have occupied for the kinds of self-cultivation and livelihoods mentioned above

before December 2005 and on which they have made their claim under the implementation of the Act. The Pardhis of Docranala have made their land claims accordingly in 2008 for both agricultural and residential lands. The village panchayat has issued them receipts on this. This means according to the Act that "no member of a forest dwelling Scheduled Tribe or other traditional forest dweller shall be evicted or removed from forest land under his occupation till the recognition and verification... is completed". [FRA 4.(5)]

On 15.10.2008, the Pardhis of Docranala were however illegally evicted and their hamlet destroyed by about 1500 villagers from neighbouring villages. They destroyed its houses, utensils, food and crops and scared away the cattle into surrounding forests. The time of the attack, most of the villagers had gone out to work, but a few Pardhi women were there making bamboo baskets. They were brutally beaten up while houses and clothes were torn down. All the Pardhis of the community went to the Narharpur police station to report the incidence to the authority. The authority went back with all the Pardhis to the hamlet but the perpetrators were sent back to their respective villages, without any action against them taken.

When the police arrived there was still around 1500 people assembled, some of them saying: "We will not allow these Pardhis to reside in this area. They are preventing us from felling the forest trees for our fuel and other needs. We have already brought this to administration's notice. As no action has been taken, we took the law and order in our hand and destroyed the hamlet."

Prior to the coming of Pardhis several years ago, the people of these three villages were illegally felling trees. The green cover had reduced consequently. After their settlement the Pardhis began saving the forest.

As Pardhi forest dwelling families of Docranala have occupied the land since 2003 and filed claim form on their rights in the area under the Forest Rights Act, thus records of rights for these lands should be provided to them with proper settlement for the incident. This requires legal action to be taken against the perpetrators and police protection and due compensation to be provided to all the 32 Pardhi families of Docranala including the women and children who have lived in exile in the forest and the men who have been tortured. The damage done to the 62 houses of 32 families and to their utensils, food, household items and livestock would need to be compensated.

The eviction was done illegally on discriminatory basis of the nomadic tribal status of Pardhis, but the authorities took no legal action against it. When Mr. Birjhu Pardhi (President, Pardhi Mahapanchayat) - who had to run away in order to save his life -, demanded in front of the violators and police to know why his community was thus attacked, the crowd of the perpetrators began moving towards him with hostile intent. Even the police rebuked him for raising this demand and took him in to custody. This demand and took him in to custody.

How do you see the idea of forest being owned or controlled by somebody who does not live there? How do the ideas of "backwardness" and "development" impact in forest communities?

B.P: - The outside controller of the forest, mainly the Government, which deals with the forest management, is the principal factor for the changing relationship between the Pardhi community and the forest. It believes that the ban on hunting animals is a positive move towards saving the endangered animals. But only the hunters from outside kill the animals for fancy and money making purposes, even though Pardhi community is always blamed.

Government's restriction of Pardhis' access to bamboo from the forest is not doing justice for them. Now that they are not able to access their two main sources of livelihood, hunting and bamboo collection, State's other restriction on use of forest land for the agricultural purposes eliminates their only remaining livelihood option. Under these changed conditions upon the Earth, Pardhis are realizing that they cannot anymore survive by living in forest and staying away from the main civilization.

Comparing the life of the Pardhis now to that of their ancestors under the British rule, it can be discovered that the problems of identity crisis are still persisting. The present demand of state administrative system which emphasises the identity of a person matters a lot, as the Birth and Death Certificates have been made compulsory. Due to the nomadic nature of their traditional livelihood the present generation is facing more difficulties to find its feet in the developmental process. As well as their ancestors, the present Pardhis have done well in coping with their situations. But in relation to past generations, Pardhis today are deprived of their own means of subsistence and thus completely neglected.

After independence the Government did not take any kind of visible step for the improvement of the Pardhi community. So they remain marginalized instead of getting a better life with a secure livelihood. Now they do not have education, health, land, housing, communication or any other kind of infrastructure facility. In their vision for the future development, they think that increasing knowledge and skills of Bamboo works, livelihood and communication can help in making their life better. But in absence of these means for their self-development, mere infrastructure will not truly contribute to their life.

How to continue your tribe's living relationship with forest life also among the younger generation?

B.P: -The natural life of the Pardhi is such that they have not learnt to think or realize the future. They know only how to live in present in each period of life. But in the changing situation they are bound to think for their survival.



III

Wilds as living space of Earth



1

Wilds and Forests

by Narendra

2

Glimpses of Shringar Bhum

forest as living space - On Koitor's perception of forest, time & work- by Savyasaachi

Wilds as living space of Earth

When Adivasis have lived and cultivated the wilds for millenniums with their indigenous meanings, the wilds have survived and regenerated in a much more natural condition than today.

Wilds, which were earlier well sustained by indigenous life, have however now become governed by the modern literal meanings of 'forest', which have made wilds less natural, less wild and more controlled, thus undermining the access to wilds as indigenous life.

For Adivasis, the indigenous justice is to live in the wilds - rather than in the texts of the pieces of paper, which set up modern literal meanings of 'forest'.

Wilds as home for Adivasis has made possible their life to become adapted through its meanings to the sustenance of the local environment much more inherently than any modern treatment of forest have done.

But 'forest' signifies how such place and space, which is the home of Adivasis, is demanded to be seen and treated primarily as something else than their home (through natural science's applications) We need to understand how the sustenance of wilds for Adivasis differs from the 'forest'.

The next articles provide thus a deeper glance to that how the spaces for the life of wilds have opened to the eyes of the people of Abujh Mad in Bastar. Their heritage is one of most indigenous living Adivasi heritages.

Both authors of this third part of our publication, **Narendra** and **Savyasaachi**, have (independently from each other) lived among the Adivasis of this area for years in the 1980's, also making some participatory anthropological studies.

In his article over the Hill Madias, a hunting and food gathering pre-agriculture tribe, of Abujh Mad, Narendra distincts the words "Forest" and "Wilds" in order to communicate the variations in the meanings and sensibilities they denote from an

adivasi-folk way of looking at things.

Savyasaachi's article gives us a view on how the wild growth of forest opens as a living space for diverse forms and senses of life to take place upon the Earth. By shifting cultivation Adivasis participate in dialogue with the Earth to open further regeneration of the wilds.

The relation to the Earth which has survived in Abujh Mad, contains also something from the wider ancient heritage of Adivasi forest life, reflected in the following myth of Baiga tribe, which Narendra has documented:

"All the kingdoms of the world may fall to pieces, but he who is made of earth shall never be forsaken. He will make his living from the earth. He will dig roots and eat them.... He will not tear the breasts of his Mother Earth with the plough... He will never become rich, for if he did, he would forsake the earth, and then there would be no one to guard it and keep its nails (trees) in place which kept soil and earth together."

This view, according to Narendra, "defined their role in the world as guardians of the forest and the soil. They would enjoy the produce of the forest and grow crops by shifting cultivation in the forest but would never be rich".

But modern civilization tries in many ways to displace the wilds and their sustainable life, to subdue the wildness and to expel the dark and chaotic void - to give way to the lightness of clearing, order and certainty.

Today there is however not much certainty available over the present situation of the life of Abujh Mad, since it is now central war area of India's civil war. In this war between the government and a maoist guerilla ('naxalites'), Adivasis are highly distressed between the warring parties. War is fought over the control of the forest areas and has spread in Adivasi areas from the border of Nepal along the Eastern Ghats mountains down to South India.



Wilds and Forests

Narendra

Narendra works to build 'Dialogue from Other End' with Adivasis in areas adjoining Abujh Mad - even though the area itself is now inaccessible due to the war. He has continued his work and involvement with the meanings of Abujh Mad wilderness since 1980's like also Savyasaachi has done. Narendra's writing challenges our global view and perceptions on Adivasis and forests and for him the adivasi and folk communities cannot be reduced to be understood through categories of social sciences.

Forest is a social artifact, a civilizational and political artifact, with known sights, smells and sounds, created by the modern sensibility of exactitudes and certitudes; like industry, it is a very systemic product. Almost everything in the forest has values that resonate modernity. Like all modern forms and structures it cannot sustain on its own and needs to be conserved. As institutions and extensions of the modern State, forest and modernity are symbiotic one cannot survive without the other.

The State is present in the forest, whether in the form of today's markets, in earlier forms of modern governance or in the form of certitudes that sustain both modernity and the State. It powerfully represents that peculiar sense of certitude that peaked with the advent of industrialization some 250 years ago on the fringes of Western Europe.

The sensibility of the State prevails determining the kind of trees to be grown, the way these trees are decided and how much and what people can take from the forest. Above all, as against the wilds, forest has a profit motive and there are laws, statutory Acts, policies and programs, ministries and departments along with a complex modern apparatus and paraphernalia to safeguard it. Who in his sane mind can expect the State to give up forests and industry or the other modern

processes, symbolising the power of modernity and all that it stands for? The self-image and self-definition of modernity comes from the forest as much as it comes from the industry; such image and definition are further reinforced by the notions that have evolved our understandings of governance, ecology, community, ownership, economy or our debates thereabout.

The discourse of the forest is without much significance to the adivasi sensibility one finds in Abujhmad, because their entire code and mode of living and relating to the landscape, to the 'other' is not much known. In the wild, it is the human who needs to be conserved. One does not conserve the wild, it conserves itself. How does one estimate the mysterious unknown of Abujhmad's wilderness? Without the familiarity of the contemporary apparatus?

The Madia name for his/her homeland is Meta Boom which means Land of Hills. Abujhmad is the name given by outsiders. Abujh is a Hindi term, meaning that which is inscrutable; while Mad denotes the region

So how could the Madia place a value on his tree, or the river, land, ancestors, beliefs, spaces or on relationships with them? The tree explains and consents to his or her existence. Days and nights are distinctly demarcated and have distinctly different purposes in the lives of the Madia. The wild, animals, open spaces, rivers, sky and the spirits, a universe of complex, shared and 'dis-empowered' relationships undergoes metamorphoses as day changes into night and night into day. What belongs to one during daylight is renounced to the other at night. Such willful stepping down has continued since times immemorial.

bujhmad is spread over 1500 Sq Kms. Land occupation is sparse. A hut with dimensions of about 8' x 10' is resorted to as shelter only at night. It is not just

occupants of the family that sleep here but also their goats, dogs, cats, poultry, pigs etc.. Otherwise home was outside the hut over the vast expanse of land, in wilds, hills, rivers, streams, ponds, animals and the sky. These people practice neither agriculture, nor trade nor industry and don't even know domestication of animals in the way we know. They don't have a namesake 'house' for living, or even a sheet to cover themselves in severe cold.

Their notion of prosperity and property was linked with neither the community nor the individual. For them there was much prosperity as there was no starvation or cold wave death in living memory. The world of wilds involves very little of transactions in daily living. The inherent uncertainties of such transactions are at quite the polar end of reaching out to modify, transgress and transform the given circumstance in order to recreate certainty. As against the former it is life sapping in some measure or the other.

For the Madia, living involves very little tangible striving and impingement as though living comes more naturally there. There is negligible accent on executing in order to acquire, create or produce. Both time and circumstance have little of such life governing factors. Unlike modern agriculture or industry the shifting cultivation of Abujhmad is a metaphor of transaction through minimal human agency; it reflects in the Madia's relationship with their landscape, persona or the way they go about daily living.

The Madia's daily life seems to stem from an economy of effort. Effort induces certain friction and wearing away, a linearity that comes from divisiveness and disharmony; as also an exercise in power and control. He lives amidst a fairly primitive context of nature and lets it shape his fairly primitive life style. One sees all around that in the wilds, minimal effort is expended. The seed doesn't try to fall from the tree, the tree doesn't make effort to grow nor do fish struggle to swim; stars sparkle effortlessly. As against defensiveness, there is a certain pristine defenselessness about the Madia and his wilds.

Going from one village to another, though distance be only 5 Km, could mean a wait of a week to a fortnight or more, depending on availability of a companion to accompany one through the dense and uncertain 'vegetation': Not many people have work in another village. They go only when it is necessary, and there are not many necessities as such. During the monsoons there are added concerns of swollen and fast flowing rivers and streams, difficult trails and animals searching dry ground when their usual habitat is seeped. A lot of time is expended in 'purposeless' talk, joking, listening to stories and songs; playing with children or listening to childhood memories of the elders. Surprisingly things have not changed much. Their 40 or 50 year old recollections may well describe today's forest, rivers, animals, seasons, agriculture, villages, households and religious practices. Even events and incidents, vocabulary, modes of description or fervor in it were quite the same as one sees today. The minimal contact with the outside world though bordering on disdain, doesn't seem to have changed much either. At a rudimentary level, not a herb or tree variety has disappeared, nor bird or animal vanished, neither river or stream withered away or their water levels gone down. Housing is in the same fashion, made of the same material. The rhythms and practices of everyday living are about the same.

That certain tentativeness one finds in the thick vegetation of Abujhmad is the same tentativeness one sees in the design and structure of a thatched hut, on a forest trail, in physical postures, the course of a stream, the apparent disorderliness of vegetation: all, and much more, so finely intertwined with the tentativeness of human life and the values and world views that emerge there from. Practically every act of the Madia affirms primarily his location and nativity within a very definite frame of native landscape, be it walking over distances as a form of transportation, physical postures, accentuation in language and vocabulary, consumption habits, sense of scale and size, of phenomena, man

made or otherwise, longevity and good health or the usage of time through the day. His hitherto unwillingness to transgress in any major way is a further affirmation of such location and nativity. His prudence and judgment religious, social or economic-- are governed by residence and location. Both his ends and means are discerned by his location.

In the dense wild where the trail a metaphor for uncertainty, disguise, concealment and obscurity -- was hemmed in by thick vegetation unwittingly organized in, seemingly, some of the most primitive and incomprehensible arrangements, kilometer after kilometer, entailed a certain indeterminate unintelligibility which tends to uproot the outsider's trained and familiar cognitive patterns and disposition; more so when such obscurity continually refused to unravel anything of itself.

It was an unfamiliar premise of cognition and consequent ways of relating with the seen and unseen surroundings where one, in his "human splendor", did not matter. World views rest, at the end of it all, on mere assumptions! What mattered was only dimly felt, mostly un-comprehended, as though vulnerability, veneration and faith were natural corollaries, effortlessly pouring out of a primal context.

To Madia, the wild is his well loved home, his existence and livelihood (how far this word has traveled in meaning and implications from primitive to modern times). It gives him food -- fruits of all kinds, nourishing leaves, roots, honey, wild game, fish and an occasional bird. It keeps him warm with its fuel and cool with its almost impenetrable canopies. It provides him material to build his hut. His religion makes sacrifices to the native gods. Offerings are made when a young tree has to be felled. There are ceremonies before and after hunting. From times immemorial he has enjoyed freedom within the wild, hunting its animals, bathing in its rivers and streams, protecting, revering and using it for living. Yet, he does it have the conviction that it is his, nor would he ever want to fight for it, despite sharing an indivisibility with it.

The wild of Abujhmad is too vast, impersonal and variegated; too deeply labyrinthine, shadowed and much of a poser for one not nurtured in that sensibility where clarity absolves itself of precision and certitude which are a defining characteristic of forests as against the wilds. Wilds and men there have no precise defining boundaries between them. Whatever forms of it exist have non-secular values and significance, ever ready for redefinition. Observance and infringement of such boundaries were never antithetical. There was fear but no conflict.

In the outside world nature and most of human activity seem to be in continuous conflict, the magnitude of it varying with time and context. Something as 'natural' as traditional farming, too, has been in such conflict; the greater the land usage, the lesser the space for animals and vegetation, without threat to their lives and food. Childhood reminiscences, etched in memory from a visit to my native village, bring to mind birds hopping behind ploughs, looking for insects and worms, like beggars, assured and scared simultaneously.

Here one needed a fellow man for reassurance. Even a tiny fire in the dark distance creates immeasurable magic -- momentary or enduring-- with one's disposition. Alone, one may lose all significance. There are reassurances of another kind. Warmth, light, moisture, time and space, love and generosity - so essential for life - are always present and dependable. Above all, a discourse that was conspicuous more by the elusiveness of its existence, a discourse of silence, generosity and accommodativeness, without the repressive exactitudes and certitudes that characterize the tormenting contemporary freedom rigorously imposed in modern life. There is much love inherent in accommodativeness, just as there is much dislike in not letting be. The Madias' attitude towards an outsider could be summed up as, 'We may not be able to do much for you but you can be here with us'.

Silence and quietude are probably the primary aspirations of democracy and freedom. Hasn't democratic life continued in these wilds over times immemorial, relatively unchanged? Freedom is something not to be aspired or worked for. It is there, along with warmth, light, moisture, time, space, love and generosity.

In his less than meager loin cloth, Banda was every inch an emperor. Stout, straight and dark, mostly silent, with a dignity that surfaced in his majestic appearance and magic in his fewest of words. At less than 50, and having lived a 'full life' he was the 'grand old man' in Garpa the largest village with seven scattered huts. He was an economist with words, movement and postures, familial and neighborly relationships, expectations and demands. Conveying the impression that he was an economist in sensibilities and understanding too. For Banda, (which means 'Stone') freedom was the availability of plenty of free time. One makes one's living by living and not working. 'Work is simply doing what needs to be done, and there is so little to be done in any case. Our business is to stay within the limits of our bodies. The business of wilds is to provide our requirements. When we transgress, the wilds retreat, one cannot pursue it. This can be an endless pursuit, futile and foolish. It may never make itself available to us again. We will have to fend for ourselves and go beyond the limitations of our bodies and location. Everyone and everything has a body and the body is not

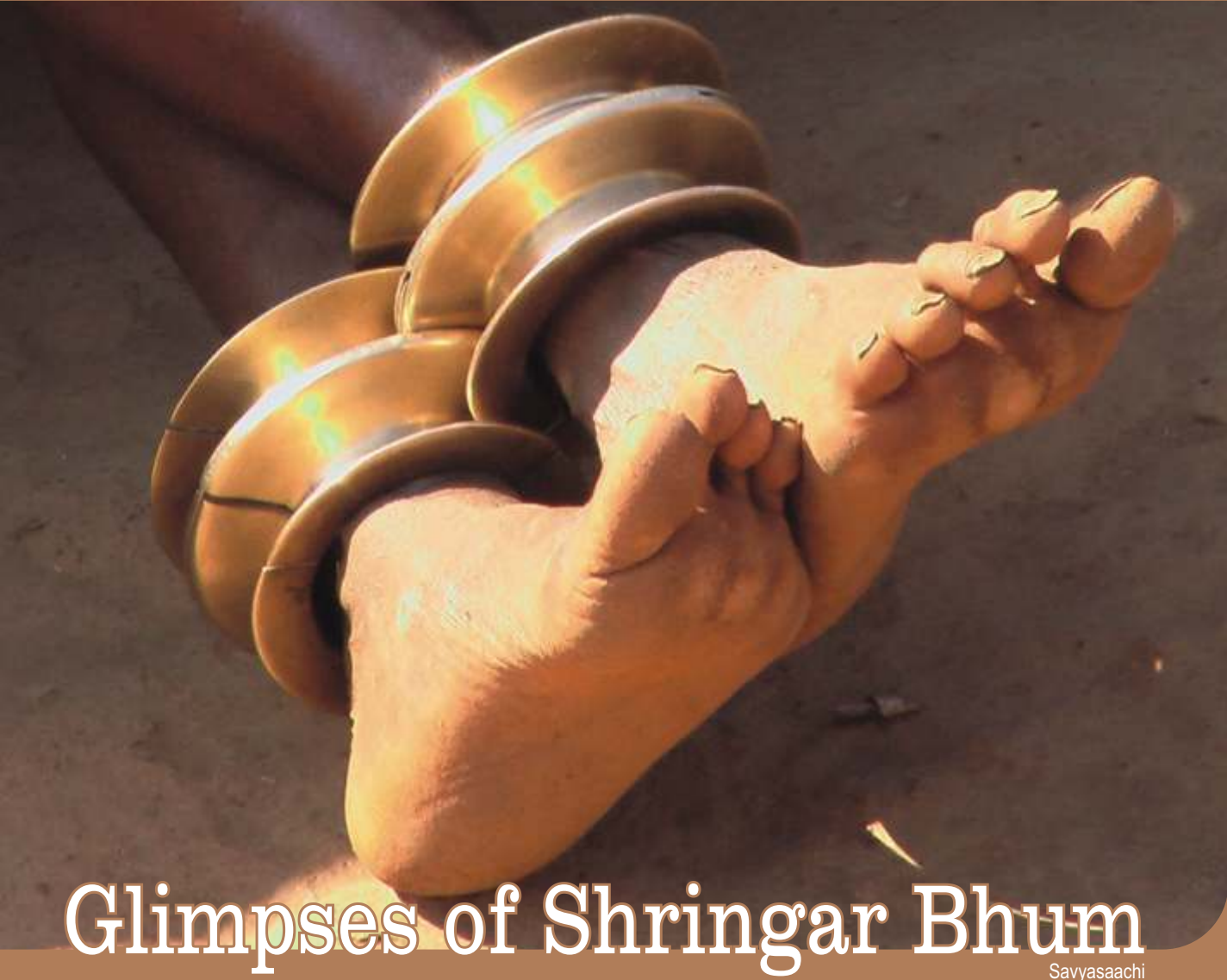
without intent. It is a reminder of limits, indeed about the only factor in terms of immediacy that qualifies our non-transgressive ways of living and relating. Our gods, trees, ponds and rivers, skies and earth, hills and plains are available to us and provide for us. We have lived in these wilds for a long time but we have not lived here in the nature of an intrusion. Intrusions infringe and rupture. Our business is to live, not to transgress and rupture.'

My dialogue with Banda, or with the wilds of his birth, or its other dwellers, was an irregularity of sorts while I persistently wandered into it. Our words were not so different but our meanings had nuances and settings that were apart. It was not easy to penetrate through that labyrinth foliage and into that mysterious, magical substance of the region's abundant silence. Here forms emerged from a certain darkness. Their presence came from a primeval obscurity. From this inscrutable obscurity floated the Madia's perception of the world. ■

Narendra, in Bastar, Aug 14 2008.

Note: The photographs included here were taken by Ms. Malini Kalyanivala. I am grateful to her for allowing me their use for this write-up. I am also grateful to her for editing the text with empathy and firmness simultaneously, without injuring its basic impulse.





Glimpses of Shringar Bhum

Savyasaachi

Background

This essay gives glimpses of what unfolded between 1982 and 1987 while working and living with the Koitor-forest dwellers of Shringar Bhum - literally a 'decorated place'. To outsiders it is known as 'unknown hills', Abujhmarh, located in Bastar, Chattisgarh, Central India.

It was possible to visit them for a few years after 1987. Due to the war, which has intensified over the years in Abujhmarh between the State and the maoist Guerilla, all ways to reach the Koitors have closed.

Both the warring groups have transgressed into the time and space of the forest and of the Koitors. The transgressors and the modern world, implicated in this war, would need to step back in respect for several generations of the hard creative work by which Koitors have made the forest a living space.

This would clear the ground for Koitors' voices, create conditions to learn to listen to the forest, to Koitors' experience of the forest, and know how their imaginations worked to make Shringar bhum a forest home and also a place of work.

I. Shringar bhum: living forest space

Several clans of Koitors inhabit Shringar Bhum. Their narratives of Shringar Bhum constitute a vibrant tradition of exchange with forest nature. Nuruttee clan elders remember, that their ancestors came down the hills from Jagdalpur to Neygameta hills to escape the wrath of the king whom they had defeated in a hunting competition. Here they planted a commemorative tree to mark their arrival and the beginning of a new settlement. Some recollect how they shifted settlement to Kokameta - 'hill of a medicinal plants' and a 'land of flowers':

Every day men returned from work with their bodies covered with sweet smelling pollen dust. The women folk insisted to shift settlement to this land of flowers. They pushed their reluctant men by stopping to cook food and some even stopped to suckle their children. Thus compelled the men agreed to shift.

It was fortunate that Talurmutte, the mother Earth to whom Shringar Bhum belongs, signalled her consent by making extra rice grains available over night after all the threshed grain had been collected and stored the previous night. This was also a reminder that they do not own that which is not created by their labour.

Today there are no residues of the settlement at Neygameta. Forest regeneration dissolved the work of Koitors and in this manner Talurmutte reclaimed Earth. Nuruttee Koitors thus cannot return to the past to claim this earlier settlement. Some of them who tried either died or were afflicted with illness.

What remains with them is a sense of a passage of time.

The epic of origin of Shringar Bhum describes the work undertaken by Talurmutte to reclaim Earth from flood waters. The primeval flood waters were distributed in rivers and lakes and Earth was prepared for habitation. This epic work was done by the crow, wild boar, snails, millipedes, earthworms, etc.

Talurmutte taught her friend Kanga ways of living in the forest. This included how to make a home, cultivate food and perform rites for the dead and acquire knowledge of the forest. One important learning was to keep the earth and sky separate and other living beings in the forest in their respective path ways. Koitors are offsprings of Talurmutte and Kanga.

In keeping with this learning, trees are not cut to expose the horizon where the



earth and sky meet and homes, work places and forest are made contiguous.

Koitors experience a "living space" between the earth and the sky, self active and self-regenerative. This is the ground of their way of life. When asked who is Talurmuttee, Koitors pick up tori (earth) and say this 'earth we can touch and feel'. Tori is malleable, and is given any number of co-existent life forms. These plural forms enrich the diversity of 'living spaces' in the forest that fade in and out across seasons with the play of light and shades of the sun and moon. As the forestscape changes from barrenness in summer to colourful abundance after monsoon living spaces in the forest also change.

II. Koitors and Earth's work

Koitor experience a tree as the primary manifestation of Earth's self activity. Thus its base is considered the most appropriate place for making the altar of Talurmuttee. The tree selected for this purpose is sal (Shoera Robusta). Koitors identify with the tree. A friend Koitor said:

"Mix mud and with water, or during monsoons take a blob of wet mud, keep it on the palm, and close the fist. The mud that slips out to the upper part of a fist signifies the top of the tree; the mud that remains on the palm signifies the trunk and the mud that comes out from between the fingers signifies the leaves and fruits. The closed fist signifies the grip of an axe used for cutting a tree".

The cutting of trees unveils regenerative self activity as the 'being' of the forest and also the complimentary relation between the work of nature (Talurmuttee) and the work of man (Koitors). Earth's self activity weaves diverse time cycles of forest regeneration. Itself alive it animates all other living spaces and beings. The co-existent life cycles dissolve the mere physicality of forest. The diverse life cycles generate forest symphony. This some Koitors read as conversations between different living beings in the forest - this is the voice of nature. Close your eyes and the soundscape comes alive.

With every sound there is an invisible lurking presence, camouflaged and concealed by forest cover. From this difference between what one sees and what one hears emerges the awareness of the depth of living forest space.

III. Right(s) and forest

Koitors say that one's belongings must not weigh more than one can carry.

This measure of a person's independence - this parsimony and frugality in their material life - is an outcome of how the economy of nature and the nature of economy complement each other, regenerating abundance and variety in the forest. This defines 'right' both as ethically appropriate and as adequate claim for a person's well-being. Koitors notion of jagha bhum is an example:

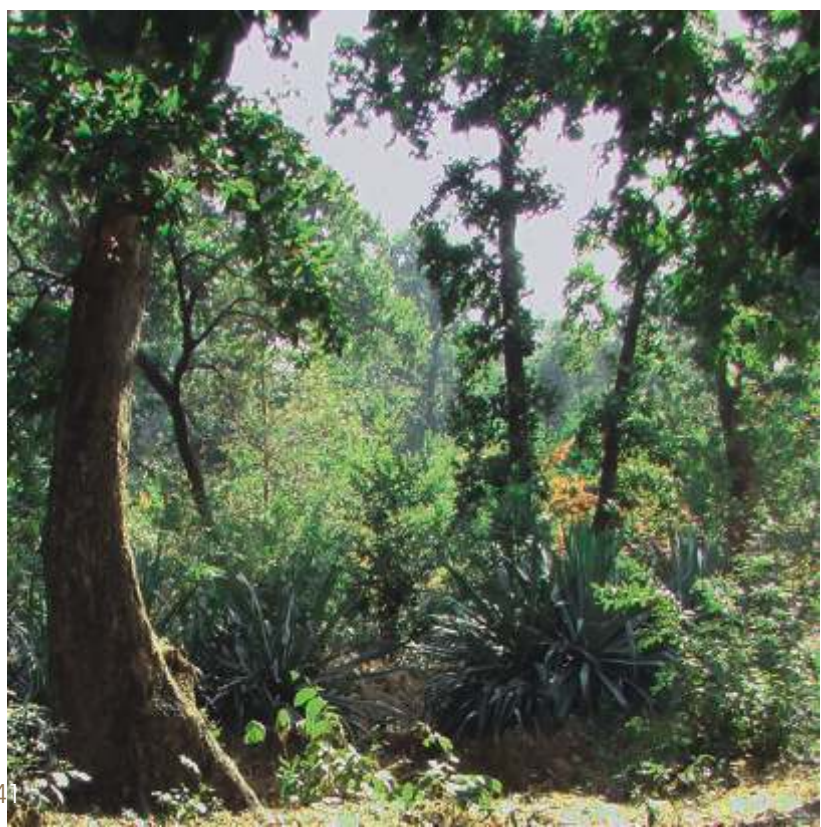
Shringar Bhum is equally accessible to all, togetherness accommodating all households. Someone's use of forest does not diminish it for others. Talurmuttee, work of nature, needs to be cared for. Everyone follows the principle that the creation of nature's work does not belong to Koitors but Koitors belong to it. In other words, Koitors belong to Shringar Bhum but Shringar Bhum does not belong to them. Any place circumscribed by Koitor work is a settlement and it is known as jagha bhum.

IV. Penda: Cultivation encompassed by regeneration time

Koitors share rights to forest produce cultivated, gathered and hunted. Within the jagha bhum Koitors earn their livelihood by penda (shifting cultivation) tenure system. Penda is a clearing for cultivation on gradual hill slopes. Koitors shift from one penda to another to allow time for natural forest regeneration. The cleared field and its dissolution by self active regeneration within each penda is the basis of Koitor's social life and their mode of knowing the forest universe.

For determining cultivation time they do not need to know lunar months. Changes in plant and animal life across seasons provide a rich variety of markers of time for different cultivation operations. The cultivated produce on a penda clearing belongs to a family only as long as it works there. The rights over penda plots dissolve once people leave the village. Each household gets a preference over the forest produce from its regenerated penda fallows. For penda cultivation five natural elements are important: earth (jagha), fire (heat), wind (air), rain (water) and time (lenj-moon cycle).

At the beginning of summer each household independently selects a forest site, a part of which is to be cleared for penda cultivation. The forest should have tall trees and low undergrowth to be suitable for cultivation.





Over this clearing Koirtors have user rights. The ratio of clearing size to size of household is equal for all households. That is, the physical effort a person/family can make determines the size of a clearing. Rarely a previously uncultivated forest areas is used for penda cultivation. Penda preparation begins when the height of heat radiation from the earth's surface is approximately one arm-length. Women begin to clear the forest vegetation with sickles. Men follow and cut down trees and shrubs with iron-axes.

Trees are cut three to four arms lengths above the ground to facilitate regeneration. The branches of trees are further chopped and reduced to smaller sizes to facilitate proper drying in the summer sun. This exposes the clearing to light and heat and the forest around the clearing prevent soil erosion. By the time heat radiation rises to nine arm-lengths the vegetation on the ground has dried and is ready for burning. Men set fire to the dried vegetation when the wind is not strong to enable slow burning and to prevent forest fire. This is considered good for the fertility of the soil.

After a few days, each household surveys its plot, collects pieces of unburnt wood and if need be again set them on fire. The larger pieces of wood which remain unburnt are taken home. The plot is then ready for rain which mixes ash with soil. Sowing begins with the onset of rain, when the ashes of burnt wood and vegetation mix with the soil. Different quantities of a variety of seeds are mixed in one basket and broadcast on the plot. For some a digging stick is used. The crop in the first stage is protected from heavy rain and soil erosion by the forest weeds that grow alongside.

Towards the end of the monsoon, weeds are removed by all members of a household, including children, to allow crops to ripen. After monsoon several animal traps are laid in and around a penda to hunt and protect the crop. Some of the members of each house shift residence to their respective penda until harvest.

Harvest begins with a festival. After harvest women prepare the threshing floor in a small area within their respective penda. Threshing is done collectively by the village. People of a neighbourhood get together and carry the grain home to households. Each house makes large bamboo baskets to store the grain.

At all the stages of the cultivation households begin work at the same time - together but independently. However, all households cannot finish a particular cultivation activity at the same time, on account of factors like the number of working hands, work demands at home, illness, etc.

Towards the end of every stage, those who finish their work early, assist those who have not been able to finish in time for the next stage.

Each household has exclusive rights to crops cultivated in their penda. The volume of crop taken home and consumption is directly determined by the human effort (productive capacity). With shifting cultivation, no household remains rich or poor over generations. All have a cycle of affluence and relative poverty.

V. Time cycle of living space

Penda cycle has several years of natural regeneration of vegetation and one year of cropping. In a cultivation cycle a new penda is prepared every third year. In each successive year, the fallow penda (cultivated in the previous year) may be cultivated on a smaller scale. Thereafter, it lies fallow. It may be again taken up for cultivation after several years.

The fallow is the time for rest and is also fertile. Fallow periods in different pendas form the long duration cycle for forest regeneration. While one penda is cultivated, the process of regeneration is in progress in other pendas. Thus the dynamics of penda cultivation lies in the alternation and contiguity between the work of Koirtors and the work of nature during successive years in each penda. Penda cultivation cycle on each plot is part of the larger fallow cycle across several pendas. The periods of cultivation and forest regeneration occur simultaneously across different penda.

The fallow period for earth's rest needs to be adequate, as it is commonly said: 'Talurmuttee suffers from having too much nourishment extracted from one particular penda. The Koirtors, therefore, leave it and move to another penda to return to it later, over a period of time Talurmuttee would have recovered from her former exhaustion'.

Between fallow cycles there is a period of 'seasonal hunger'. During this period Koirtors switch to a starvation diet supported by the gruel cooked from dried trunks of the salphi tree to keep the body cool and prevent stomach ailments. Roots and berries are also eaten. This period of hunger ends after the harvest. During the fallow period Koirtors celebrate festivals and visit relatives. Houses can be repaired and new ones can be made as well.

Talurmuttee's assent is requested for constructing a new house. The work cycle of a household begins with the constructing a house. It ends with the dissolution of the house and the regeneration of the forest. When there are perceived signs of

Talurmutte's anger (tiger destroys cattle, crops fail or death recur frequently), Koitors then make efforts to correct their relation to Earth or may abandon the settlement to search a new place.

A house is made from materials provided by the forest mud, bamboo, wood and elephant grass. Near the selected site men dig out mud and women fetch water to be poured into the mud pit. The mix is then kneaded by walking in the pit. From here blobs of mud are carried to make walls of a house. Its pyramidal roof, the frame of which is bamboo or wood, is thatched with elephant grass. If looked after, the house may last one generation.

VI. Reading the forest from within

Shringar bhum stands for an idea of everlasting life; idea grounded in the spontaneous self activity of forest regeneration and life cycles of different durations. The presence of the forest is felt along all the contours of the Koitor's body. The bare body is an identity in nature and a receptor of changes in the environment. The near absence of clothes in the culture of Koitors brings the body in direct relation to the forest and its rich abundance of life, which leaves its signs on it.

Changes in the forest across seasons shape the body and its work habits, leave their "inscriptions" on the body, determine the colour of the skin and its texture, the tactility of their being and their capacity for endurance and resilience. The body measures forest's dimensions, and the size and shape of penda by Koitor work capacity.

During rest, the self activity of nature runs its course in the human body as well as in the penda. In the way the unity of space, water, air, time and fire constitute life force (jiwa) and animate mother Earth's self activity, similarly way they also animate the human body and 'being'. "Let there be no air, all will die, man, animals and plants included. Though it is possible to survive for sometime without water and food, it is not possible to survive without air. Let there be no rains, there will be no crop and no vegetation in the forest. And we will die of starvation" (A Koitor elder).

The body is enveloped by the forest. The depth of the forest and its living spaces is known during the food gathering and hunting. The Koitors and the animals recognize each others presence by sight and by sound. The forest camouflages the co-presence of other living beings in the animal and the plant kingdom. The body is exposed to various shades in the forest while it rests.

A child is also born in the forest. This initiates the child into the universe of the forest which is an integral part of one's social environment. The Koitors believe that before birth a child is influenced by its mother's desires and feelings and by darm (shades) in a forest. While suckling, the child is carried astride a mother's hip during the day. This facilitates feeding and the child gets familiarized with the forest landscape.

The ability to make one's way in the forest allows Koitors to know its depth. There is always a possibility of losing one's way in the forest. Ignorance of the forest camouflage may result in loss of direction and of life. The camouflage blurs the sense of difference between what is visible to the eye while moving along a path in the forward direction and while returning along the same path.

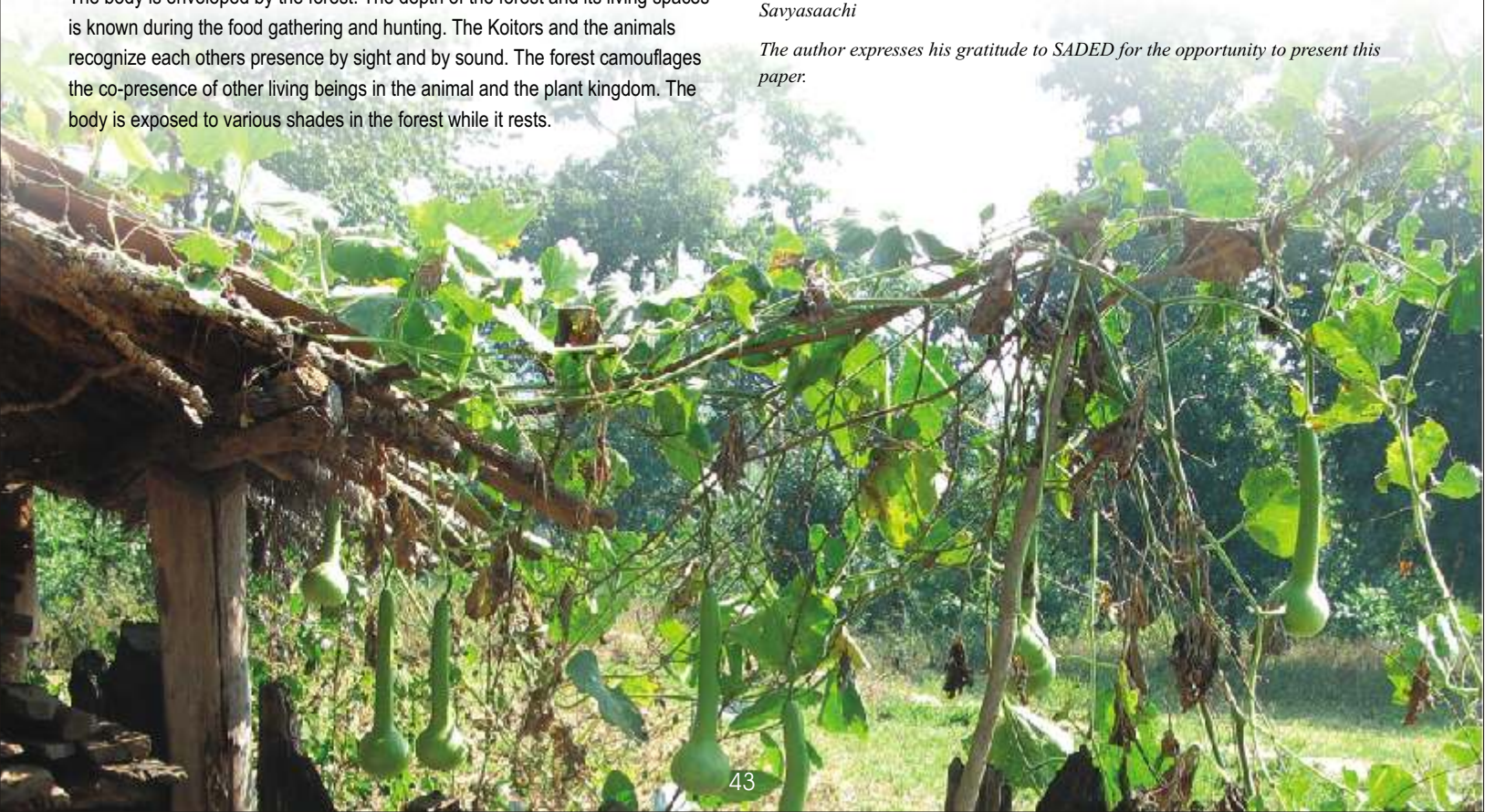
The absence of signs of past generations' activities and the inability to differentiate one view of the forest from another can also result in the loss of direction. It's necessary to differentiate between these perspectives to be at home in the forest. One should be able to turn one's vision 180 °, to see the forward movement as well as the return. When lost in a forest, Koitors are in a position to confront the forest from within. Fear brings a sense of one's body possessed by the forest. The animated non-human nature then permeates the body, opens up its every pore for forest to be internalised.

Koitor describe the lost presence of mind and sense of direction as lesna, forgetting as in loss of orientation of time and of space. When a correlation between what is heard and what dawns again within Koitor, the knowledge which makes it possible to find one's way out of the forest can become accessible. In the oral history of the Koitors, past is framed in dreamtime because the forest merges the past and the present and can be grasped by transcending everyday concerns.

A leski's is skilled for inducing a forgetting of his social being which is framed by everyday concerns, and step into dreamtime which is analogous to the self activity of the forest. Leski does not enjoy among Koitors any privilege in return for the services rendered. On the contrary, the Koitors point out that a leski's pursuit of knowledge often brings them poverty. It is believed that one who has such knowledge can become rich only by using it for harming people. ■

Savyasaachi

The author expresses his gratitude to SADED for the opportunity to present this paper.



IV

Forest - integral part of indigenous education, health and spirituality



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Gond Jungle culture and revival of its education

Narmada, Gond Adivasi, Disha (Chhattisgarh)

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Baiga Jungle school

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Reviving Indigenous Herbal Practices

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Sacred Groves

Y. David, PEAL (Tamil Nadu)

Forest - integral part of indigenous education, health and spirituality

For the practices of indigenous education and health care, which maintain sustainable indigenous life, the wild forest and its spiritual meanings are also significant.

This fourth part of our publication discusses thus how tribal education and health care should be thus respectfully accustomed to serve the cultural and spiritual needs of sustaining tribal forest life. Narmada, a Gond woman writes about Gond Jungle culture and revival of its education, while Devjit tells about Baiga Jungle school in Chhattisgarh.

Singh Jhala writes about reviving indigenous herbal practices of healing, based on local plants and trees and Rakesh Bhatt about Bishnoi tribe's ecological stewardship of protecting the trees as sacred - both in arid areas of Rajasthan. Learning from the healing and rejuvenating significance of forests as sacred is not foreign either to the main stream culture of India, as can be seen in the article on sacred groves by Y David. He writes about the way how spirituality is connected to specific locations of forest and expands the consideration from the indigenous perspective to a more general level of the meanings of forests in India.

Adivasi communities have often lived as part of the wilds in an intimate dialogue with trees, plants, animals and ancestral spirits surrounding them. They have still ways to transfer the meanings of their such dialogues or communication with the wild forest life. Adivasis "can understand the calling of the tree, the screaming of

the bird, language of stone or sand" and "the language and the joy of the surrounding environment, its cry and tears... the movements of the birds and animals and get the message from them what they are trying to say". These kind of intimate connections between Adivasis and the surrounding wilds as described above by Gond Adivasi woman Raimotin Markam, should be taken into account and sustained - not neglected or displaced by the modernity.

For Adivasis the word 'Adivasi' 'who lives without beginning' in an area, means often not only people but also trees, rivers, wild animals, air, wind etc. "We are part of all our ancestors... the stone is also my ancestor. It will be a mistake to separate the Adivasis and the ancestors as we survive on them and they survive on us". Life can be seen as inherited "also from the ancestors that are the rivers, the changing seasons, etc.". "You should learn to be part of the stone, the tree of or the jungle". These words of a young Gond Adivasi Raimotin are quite different from how biology teaches about nature and about the human being as a part of it.

Adivasis have learned how to belong to the life of the forests by living themselves as a part of the meaning of the wild forest. Many forest tribes see the surrounding living beings of forests as animated by the ancestors who have been also animated by the other beings and spirits of the wilds. "Like we, also the trees and animals are brothers and sisters of a common mother. From time immemorial, when everything was just in beginning, they are all from that time and we are also with them". (Gond Adivasi woman Kalawati)

Gond Jungle culture and revival of its education

Narmada



The Adivasi have a life long relationship with the Jungle. They assume the forest and the nature as their property in the same sense as they have been acknowledged by their fathers or forefathers. In Adivasi culture, there is a tradition to worship the animal beings. To to kill certain animals, to cut certain trees, or to take them in domestic use is regarded a sin and has therefore been prohibited

The Adivasi lead very plain life and use the resources of the Jungle in limit. They live in the Jungle and protect it, avoiding any kind of destruction. They consume the produce of Jungle according to their own constituted laws. They earn also income through selling products collected from the Jungle and thus fulfill their supplementary requirement. The Adivasi are used to clean and pure atmosphere. That is why they dislike modern urban life and manners. They are so dependent on the Jungle that it is difficult for them to imagine life without it. They know well how important the Jungle is for their life.

There are more than a hundred varieties of trees in the Jungle. Each kind of tree has a different value and meaning for them. They sincerely obey the duties determined by their ancestors throughout their life. Mahua, Salfi and Saal are the trees used by the Gond Adivasi in their daily life and thus they carefully avoid destroying them. There is a tradition in Adivasi life that they can collect medicinal roots, fruit and leaves and hunt the animals according to their requirement. If these are misused or overconsumed, Adivasis think the deity of the Jungle (Vandevta) will get filled with anger which they might become victims of. Thus the

Adivasi strictly obey the nature. There is depicted 750 types of animal beings, trees and plants in their culture which are protected by every Adivasi family.

The Adivasi people protect wild life and plants. The Gond tribes have their many sub-casts, which are called "Gotra". Every Gotra has its own deity (Kuldevi). Related to important trees and plants there are diverse responsibilities connected to specific gotras:

Tree and leaves of Shahja :- The deity 'Dokradev' resides under this tree. The liquor of Mahua tree fruit or flower is put on the leaves of Shahja tree, devoted to its deities. **Trees of Shahja, Plass, Peepal :** The deity Raodeo who is responsible for farming and crops resides among these three trees. In the place where the deity Raodeo lives it is prohibited to cut trees or use them for household purposes.

The tree of Kumbhi: The tree of Kumbhi is the lord of the seven brothers of the Kumeti Gotra. It is considered a great sin to step on the shadow of this tree or to cut it.

The tree of Kassi : As this tree is the lord of the seven brothers of Uika and Kachlam lineages, thus they don't go against the laws of this tree.

The tree of Dumar : Evidence is found that the female deity 'Matadev' resides near this tree, which is thus protected by the Gond and it is prohibited to cut this tree.



The trees of Beeja and Tendu : The famous and venerable deity of Gonds, Aangadev, is built with the wood of these trees to represent a sacred symbol, and therefore domestic use of these trees is limited . **The trees of Semar and Neem :** Semar is considered a male and Neem a female, personified as the sister of the deity "Dokradev" Koisee. These trees are hardly seen in domestic use but the leaves of Neem are used as insect killers (insecticide) in farming. Neem seed oil is used as medicine on wounds and itches.

Thus in the Gond Adivasi culture it is a tradition to protect and develop many trees and plants of the jungle as well as animal beings. The people who belong to the lineage of Marai Gotra don't kill and eat 'Gohia' (a kind of lizard). The people of Shori Gotra don't hunt lions. The snake 'nag' (cobra) is considered to be the lord of the Poya Gotra so they worship it and don't kill it. Tortoise is the deity of the Netam Gotra.

These rules, which the Gond society still follows, were determined by their ancestors. Their self-dignity is from the Jungle. There is recognition within the Gond Adivasis that where there stands a dense forest, the people of this land are lucky: the forest brings prosperity and happiness to their lives. Although they don't officially own sufficient land, a dense forest can help them earn their living. They depend completely on the Jungle. They collect a large number of useful things from the jungle between January and June, but in the remaining time of the year they cannot get a lot. They can get some income by selling products collected from the jungle; they lead a happy life on eight months of the year.

Leading a life according to the laws of the nature, they always have a smile on their face. They live in the present and do not care for the future. They believe in this way "no saving, no cares". Adivasis not only consume the jungle but they have a deep relationship with the nature. They respect the mother Earth and other living beings.

The Adivasis have dense and sufficient forest land but they never misuse it. They are generally greedless, they live in huts with the family and they cure their diseases and wounds with the help of herbal medicine gained from the forest.

Many times skin, bones and nails of animals as well as bark, leaves, essence, fruit and flowers of the plants are taken in use. They even believe in blind faith to magic, souls, ghosts etc. and perform their own religious rites.

The pride of the Adivasis lies in the jungle. Not only India but the whole world has admitted that where the Adivasis reside, the jungle is safe and secure. Modern and developed world has caused the destruction of the forest and environmental imbalance.

Lingo Ashram and Gondi school

Semargaon is a village in the Kanker district of Chhattisgarh, where an Ashram named "Lingo Sanskar Ashram" has been established. Years ago the Raood of Lingo Baba, one of the Adivasis' Gods, was founded there (Raood is a holy, religious place which is covered with trees and where hunting of wild life and cutting trees is prohibited). Lingo Baba is identified as the discoverer of Adivasis' religion, culture and art. It is said that he practiced "Tap and Dhyan" (a set of meditation&rituals, translated as "to adore and concentrate") for twelve years and got internal knowledge. This venerable ancestor of the Adivasis classified the Gond people in Gotras (sub-caste), like Marai, Shori, Netam etc. He classified the Gotras further in two groups: the even and the uneven, defined with the help of leaves of the tree Semar (In Semar, the leaf bunches are irregular and can change between having an even/odd number of leaves). He teaches the people of the Gond society to marry on the basis of the equal and the unequal. He drew inspiration from the voices of birds and animals and formed words of expression which are known as Gondi language. This greatest forefather of the Adivasis started centers, "Gotuls", for folk arts and the Adivasi culture. He also invented their seven rhyme scheme and 18 musical instruments. He led his life for the Gond Adivasi people. The knowledge and moral with which the Gond Adivasis are dwelling today is regarded as a blessing given by him. On his memory and to save his percepts the Lingo Sandkar Ashram was founded at Semargaon in 2008. Here in the Ashram the teachers (guides) are providing the people with the rich Adivasi culture and heritage.

Aims of the "Lingo Sanskar Ashram."

- To develop social unity and community spirit.



- To secure the places related to religious affairs.
- To revive and popularize the Gond language
- To inspire people to compose literary works on Adivasi culture and tradition.
- To make the Adivasi people learn professional skills and to be given training of profession.
- To guide the Adivasi for education and especially for higher education
- To enable people to learn important herbal medicines and the products of the forest and inspire them to protect and develop the forest
- To make them learn "Koya crop Ayurved" (Curing diseases with local plants grown by the Gond Adivasi)
- To enable them to struggle for their rights
- To strengthen them in arranging their culture and customs.
- To inspire them to protect public property.
- To enable them to understand the disadvantages of drinking and to campaign against over-drinking.
- To inspire the people to follow the path guided by "Pahandi Pari Kupa Lingo."
- To contribute in reforming of the environmental imbalance.
- To implement "TOTEM system" in society (to save animal beings).

The activities operated in the Lingo Sanskar Ashram and Jango Raytad Vidhya Ketul are absolutely different from the education system of Govt. school. The education in these social educational institutes is activity based education of Adivasi's own social manners. It focuses on Adivasi life style and daily routine. In these schools (Ashrams), there is no criteria of age or classes; those schools are mobile, moving through teacher's (guide's) feet as they travel between villages. The training can be organized also in Gotuls during social events and festivals of the Adivasis. The guide trains the people in the sustainable ways of farm work, gathering Jungle produce, taking their animals to pastures and other practices. The education is based on the relationship between human and the environment, and how to understand and identify the transformations in nature.

Schools similar to Lingo Sanskar Ashram have been established and spread also



in other districts, and by now there are already 25 mobile schools working in Antagarh and Bhanupratappur in the Kanker district as well as in Bastar and Narayanpur districts. The Adivasi teachers of these schools, and other wise people of Adivasi society exhibit the scientific facts in Gond scripts, Adivasi religion and culture. The teaching takes place in religious venues, social gatherings and literacy conferences where folk song, art and fables related to Gond Adivasi culture are presented by artists. Exhibitions are organized based on art, pictures and portraits etc.

The Adivasis play an important role to save the environment and to shelter animals' being through the Adivasi skills. The "Kille Koi Rchcha Parmao Koi Gotul" is an organization working for systematic Adivasi culture and custom. This organization, founded in 2005 in Neeljher (Amabeda), as well as the Koya Punem Seva, work in guidance of the Lingo Sanskar Ashram. ■

Of the author

Miss Narmada Netam is a social activist who is born in a Gond Adivasi family. She's been raised up in Puswada village in the Kanker District. She has been working for the socio-economic empowerment of the Adivasi community for five years. She is playing a chief role in fighting for the Adivasi rights on the jungle with Disha Samaj Sevi Sanstha organisation. The common struggle of Disha and the author focuses on the recognition of the Adivasi's rights on the Forest.





Baiga Jungle School: An Innovative Education Experiment

Devjit Nandi

The Baigas are some of the very few tribes remaining in Central India, who have not been greatly affected by mainstream civilization. Apart from the tribe, the name "Baiga" has also become a general name for sorcerers or medicine men.

Earlier, Baigas used to practice "Bewar" shifting cultivation in the hill tracts deep inside the forests. The Baigas are extremely shy forest dependent communities mostly living on minor forest produce and for their staple food they cultivate small crops on the slopes.

Traditional Baiga life under threat

The Baigas have been forbidden to practice the Bewar Agriculture, which their forefathers used to practice. The so-called experts find this practice outdated and responsible for the denudation of forests. This has further led to a ban on shifting cultivation by the government. Many researchers also claim that the carrying capacity of land under shifting cultivation is not competitive.

But Baiga have good reasons as to why Bewar is justified and beneficial, if only their traditional practices would be evaluated in adequately scientific manner. The

cultivation of a suitable mixture of crops in the rainfed bewar plots requires less resources in terms of human and capital input compared to ordinary settled agriculture. It also tackles the climate vagaries which have become very much prominent in the recent past. Bewar could be deemed as subsistence farming suitable to the closed economy of the Baigas. The recent policies of government have put a ban on Bewar without making any alternative livelihood system possible for them.

Rights to forest use

The nationalization of the forests has also been a further disadvantage for the tribal forest livelihood, because it has derecognized the tribal ownership right over land. All the forests of revenue land or Malguzari (agricultural land that may not be used for industrial or other purposes) are the property of state government and community forests haven't existed since the promulgation of Forest conservation Act in 1980. The act, which disallows human settlement and farming in the forest reserves and restricts the open grazing of domestic cattle in the forest, has further imposed restriction to the livelihood of the Baigas.

Economic exploitation of the forest by contractors is another factor which has been responsible for creating a mindset among the general public that tribals are the destroyers of forest. This has led towards changes in forest policy, favouring such isolation of conserved forests from human habitation, where the Baigas, the primitive forest dependent communities, have been cut off from the forest.

Due to these actions, their younger generation does not understand the symbiotic relationship between the forest and the tribes. This has led to a conflict between manmade environment and the wildlife existence. Each nexus between contractors and forest officials further consolidates the conflict.

Herbal medicine and the challenges of new drugs

Practicing Herbal Medicine ("Gunia") is another traditional area of expertise, which is nowadays not relied upon because of the widely popular disbelief in indigenous therapy. The situation has gone so far that even the tribals prefer allopathy. Traditional Medicines are rejected as unscientific. The whole notion of localized traditional healers has given way to market oriented drugs. The rising cost of imported drugs pushes the tribes further into debt particularly due to the structural adjustment programme, which requires devaluation and cuts in the government subsidies.

Agony of the Education Process

Neither the propaganda of Christian Missionaries nor the influence of Hindu culture has touched the Baiga in their home areas, but today the formal school system is posing a threat to their culture. The Baiga have their special language, Baigani, which is a mixture of Chhattisgarhi speech, Dravidian Gondi and Indo Aryan Hindi. They have had historically very low literacy level in formal education but they do have adequate skills to carry out their traditional livelihoods.

The present educational system is destructive of primitive life and culture. Since most of the teachers disregard the aboriginals' lifestyle and see their children with greatest scorn, they do not put any effort for really educating the children. In addition, the teachers come from the plain areas or have urban mindset and regard their own culture as superior to that of the Baigas. The teachers bring with them waves from the mainstream culture, where e.g. women are not respected and have a lower status in the society. In the Baiga society the women are more free and empowered. Also untouchability, which is preached by the teachers, is not practiced by the Baiga.

The Centralized education system respects all sorts of Hindu, Muslim or Christian festivals but none of the aboriginal festivals are marked by the school holidays. The children lean and pray to alien gods, but do not learn anything about their own





system. They study the lives of the Indian liberals, but nothing about their own history.

The formal education generally makes a Baiga child a stranger in his own home and creates an inferiority complex towards his own culture. The mainstream Hindi textbooks, the unfamiliar dialects and out of context subject matter further add to their problems.

Our Initiatives:-

Every child should have the rights to do or be able to do things. But there are different rights for the children in our society. The children from poor families do not have any child rights, nor equal access to education suited to their own language and culture. Instead, they are forced to labour from young age. Most of the poor children are obviously those of the tribals, among whom even the governmental structures don't work or are non-existent.

The situation of education is pathetic, and health care is very poor since the health practices to which they have access are made impossible.

Local school experiments for the Baiga

The organization Adivasis Banihar Sakti Sangathan (ABSS) has been working with the Baiga, along with other indigenous tribes, for close to 5 years. The work has aimed towards the upliftment of the tribes along with the development of the children.

We in ABSS have felt that children should be prepared to their community life from

a young age and should be properly educated not only to make them aware, but also to overcome fear from others. Through education they could increase their understanding and analytical power as well as know the simple reading and writing to become aware. An ABSS-launched experiment on innovative education continues in 2 villages in Bilaspur district in Chhattisgarh.

The school has about 20-30 students and 2 teachers. After 2 hours of training in reading and within arithmetic, the children learn art, craft, songs and stories. They also interact with old villagers on identifying trees, minor forest produces, herbs as well as record the folk stories from their parents. Once a week the children spend time outside the school studying the environment and interacting with the communities. There is no employee and only small fees are paid per child. The four teachers who are Baiga youths are supported with food by the parents of the school children.

The children are educated by their teachers through ideas innovated and adapted to Baiga life. The pupils are completely involved in the education process and their suggestion is sought to make it more innovative. Since the government's formal education causes trouble and disturbance for the tribal children, the tribals don't understand the importance of education and, in fact, they fear it.

Realizing all this, our challenge was how to introduce a very location specific education system. We felt that the stress should be on employment oriented education for the Baigas, who with their limited mobility would earn more due to practical training.

Through our ABSS efforts we make the children interested to come to school.



Results of the Baiga school and new ideas for tribal education

The process of education mostly happens through plays, songs and drawing. In all these the Baigas depict nature, their livelihood and their subsistence economy etc. These issues form the curriculum and thus are taught to the children. The children have grown interest in coming to the school, and the parents also involve their children who look more confident after 2 years of education. The whole village looks lively and the children are sharper and actively involved rather than their parents. The children also don't discriminate and that has further created more togetherness among communities, particularly between the tribals and non-tribals.

The education for the tribals should be more selective and vocational. Special text books need to be prepared and primary emphasis should be on the skills which they possess. The school must relate to the tribal life system, and the recreation and organizational activities should be of an aboriginal character.

The education should be extended more in the agricultural and forest related fields so that they would become experts in their traditional occupations of farming, forestry and local crafts, which do not require large capital and other inputs. ■

Devjit Nandi

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The author, Devjit Nandi, has done his MA in Agriculture and has a background of doing organic research for the empowerment of the Adivasi and minority communities on their resources and creating their own model of subsistence. He is an activist of Adivasis Banihar Sakti Sangathan (ABSS) organization, which has worked for years for Adivasi forest life.





The Jari Buti and Gunis in the Aravalli Hills: Reviving Indigenous Medicine & Health Care Practices

Dr. G.P. Singh Jhala

By Dr. G.P. Singh Jhala, Programme Director, Ethnobotanist and **Mrs. Brinda Sharma**, Research Associate

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Rajasthan and its protected regions:

Rajasthan is the largest state of India having its geographical area 342 239 (3,42,239) sq.km which is 11% India. Rajasthan is arid for most of its part with 32 550 Sq. km (9.5%) of its area recorded as forests with unique biological diversity in the country.

There is a number of plant species found in the wild habitats

(e.g. *Dalbergia sisso*, *Acacia catechu*, *Madhuca indica*, *Jatropha curcas*, *Pongamia pinnata*, *Boswellia serrata*, *Commiphora wightii*, *Holarrhena antidysentrica*, *Embolia officinalis*, *Aegle marmelos*, *Gloriosa superba*, *Chlorophytum borivillianum*, *Asparagus racemosus*, *Ocimum gratissimum*, *Eulophia campestris*, *Celastrus paniculata*, *Enicostemma hyssopifolium* etc.)

Some of these are medicinal roots and stems (Jari Buti) discovered and tested through times by indigenous inhabitants, i.e. the Adivasi of Mewar.

Tribal communities' relationship to environment

The forest areas of Mewar Aravalli are inhabited by tribal communities like Bhil, Meena, Garasias, Kathodias, etc. Some of the nomadic tribes such as Banjaras, Gaduliya, Kalbeliya etc are also residing in the region. In numerous pockets of the inaccessible or less accessible forests, hills and other habitats, they still live in a primitive style, secluded from modern civilization and upholding the ancient

tradition of their ancestors. These are the ancient and native people, with a distinct identity and tribal culture that has a territorial identification.

The Southern/Central region of Rajasthan is historically known as Mewar. It has a history of producing some of the greatest war heroes of India. Mewar includes the districts of

Dungarpur, Bansawara, Bhilwara, Chittorgarh, Rajsamand and Udaipur. The Aravalli Range is the eroded stub left from an ancient range of folded mountains, and is mostly composed of sedimentary rocks like Marble and Kota stone.

The region is a part of the Kathiawar - Gir dry deciduous forests' ecoregion which is a hilly, rich forest of wild flora and fauna. These famous dry deciduous forests have been converted into protected wild life sanctuaries Sitamata, Phulwari, Kumbhalgarh, Tadgarh, Jaisamand, Mount Abu, etc. These reserves have major physiographic and bioregional features meaningful to the forest ecology of the state.

Flora, fauna and herbal medicines in Mewar Aravalli

The forest of Rajasthan is unevenly distributed in the various districts but most of the forest is over the Aravalli hills of Mewar i.e. in Udaipur, Rajsamand, Chittorgarh, Sirohi, Dungarpur and Banswara districts.

The Mewar Aravalli covers mainly the southern part of the hill ranges which makes up about 11 971 Sq.km of forest - i.e. 36.8% of the total forest cover of Rajasthan. The unique floral wealth of the region has high commercial value of timber and minor forest produces including fruits, oilseeds, gum, leaves, medicinal plants, etc. which play a major role in tribal livelihood and health



They share a harmonious and symbiotic relationship with the Earth. They are the real owners of their territories, forests, water and other natural resources.

This centuries old association has bestowed on them an in depth knowledge about the conservation and uses of the local biodiversity, on which they rely for their subsistence in food, fodder, fuel, shelter and medicines.

The local tribal communities of Southern Rajasthan call by the name 'Guni' those traditional local health practitioners who have some specific 'Gunas' (qualities or properties) to treat ailments by using locally available biophysical resources like wild medicinal plants, soil, minerals, etc.

Gunis have astonishing competence to e.g. do bone-setting and treat fractures, skin

diseases, intestinal worms, indigestion, cold, cough, fever, snake bites, etc, which are ailments occurring both in men and in livestock. Gunis are mostly forest dwellers from tribal and ethnic groups well versed with Traditional Medicines (Jari- Buti) Knowledge inherited from generation to generation or transferred through the traditional Guru-disciple relations / lineage.

Use of environment as local source of health

Man evolved on Earth amidst pristine Nature. For his benefit, he had the surrounding ambient flora and lurking fauna at his disposal. Ever since his life as a caveman he has depended on the elements of the Nature for his needs and his very survival. Until recently, man lived in perfect harmony with the Nature. In the rise of the modern civilization the fruits of the present day science converted the natural habitats of primitive man, confronting the natural flora and fauna.

Also practicing traditional medicine requires reviving a traditional relationship between man and his surroundings:

"We have labored under the yoke of resource scarcity largely because we forgot about the vast indigenous and traditional resource base in people's hand".

These ideas also apply in the relation between traditional and modern medicine. Tribal medicine men work with the richness of natural local resources as opposed to the modern resource-consuming health care.

Thus JJVS conceived the idea of promoting the indigenous system of medicines as a viable alternative to the costly and scarce modern treatments in primary health care. JJVS has been almost single-handedly responsible for reviving the interest in these historically proven local health traditions in India.

Mr Singh Jhala is an MA ethnobotanist and activist in JJVS working with identification, conservation and field research on wild medicinal plants associated knowledge and documentation **Mrs Brinda Sharma** has MA in Botany and has worked with Mr Jhala during her time in JJVS. Mrs Sharma has also supported the editing of many texts and their English translations published by JJVS.





Bishnois: The Ecological Stewards

Rakesh Bhatt

The stories of hunting are often narrated by hunters, never by those who get hunted. Until the pray narrated the story of the game, the hunter would continue patting his own shoulder. But when the hunted took the role of the narrator, the story did not die in the pages of history. Rather it created history, throbbing in the hearts of humanity.

The Massacre of Khejarli

It was in the year 1730 when the Maharaja Abhay Singh of Jodhpur needed wood for the construction of a new fortress. Since the Bishnois (community of nature worshippers in Rajasthan and its surroundings) neither obeyed the demand for the delivery of timber nor made any payments instead, the ruler sent his soldiers out into the villages with the order to chop down Khejri trees (*Prosopis cineraria*). These trees, which prosper even under extremely harsh conditions, have always been worshipped by the Bishnois - and in appreciation the trees have offered them shade, food, building material, humid soils, protection and clean air.

When one of the villagers, Amrita Devi, heard of the imminent danger, she hurried, followed by her relatives and neighbours, to the place of the tragedy, named Khejarli, which was a place where the Khejri tree grows. They tried to prevent the soldiers from what they had come to do. However, when all reasoning failed, she hugged the first tree to be cut in order to protect it. The soldiers beheaded the woman whose last words would become history: *"sir saanthe runkh reho to bhi sasto jaan"* (If a tree is saved even at the cost of one's head, it's worth it).

The incident above led to what has later become known as the massacre of Khejarli (1730 A.D.). Although the soldiers had warned that anyone intending to stay in their way would share the fate of Amrita, her three daughters followed her example and were also killed.

Men, women and children stepped forward, embraced the trees and let themselves be axed to death one after the other, Andoji, Virto, Vanial, Chaboji and

Udoji, followed by Kanhoji, Kishoji, Dayarayaji...

The terrible message spread like wild fire, so that people from eighty-three different surrounding villages rushed in, ready for the extreme sacrifice to lay down their lives for the trees. When the Maharaja heard the cries of the witnesses of the massacre who had run to his court, he himself went to Khejarli and stopped the tragedy.

However by then it had already cost the lives of 363 Bishnois. The ruler was moved so deeply and was so impressed by the dramatic non-violent protest that he promised to honour the conviction of the Bishnois in future. He forbade hunting and woodcutting in their area by means of a law that is still valid today.

The quiet village Khejarli still exists and is situated about 30 km south of Jodhpur. A tarred road leads into the place, which consists of an accumulation of scattered huts and a pond.

A small structure - which they call a temple - reminds of the 363 Bishnoi martyrs who saved the Khejri trees, and whose demonstration of altruism still seems to inspire the India of today. Indian Gazelles and Black Bucks roam around this shrine of mass self-sacrifice denoting the fact that animals and vegetation are safe in this region, for it is the Bishnois who reside here!

The foundations of the Bishnoi ethics

The question of such motivation, even capable of overcoming the instinct of self-preservation, can probably only be understood in the presence of an extremely stable moral foundation.

This extraordinary steel base was poured many centuries ago by someone who himself had just survived a famine. This person was to be called Guru Jambheshwar. His teachings are based on laws, which stress the importance of virtues like self discipline and non-violence. This brought about the 29 rules from e



Guru Jambheshwar 1452 1537

where the religion eventually derived its name, (i.e. Bish-noi stands for 29).

The philosophy also impresses by its wisdom to wed Hindu and Islamic elements.

rots, radishes and sesame oil is produced. The cultivation methods are ingenious and perfectly adapted to the local conditions. Wild fruits and vegetables play an important role in the diet of the Bishnoi women. During drought periods in Rajasthan, one can see carcasses of thousands of domestic animals having died of thirst and hunger, forcing the non-bishnoi villagers into ecological exile. Ecological experts are amazed to find that there has never been a sight of such tragedies in the Bishnoi areas, not even during the most difficult periods.

In the Bishnoi villages one does not witness horrific scenes but rather a modest and peaceful routine. The Bishnois have a very simple explanation to this. They believe that if you care for the trees and animals, they would return the favour to you when you need it the most. The Bishnoi followers' tenets assert that the people should be willing to sacrifice their lives rather than allow the destruction of flora and fauna.

Bishnoi relationship to animals

For modern societies it is unbelievable to find that the Bishnoi women feed milk to the babies of the black deer with their breast caring for them as their own children.

The Bishnois worship Jambheshwar as their only God considering him to be the incarnation of the Lord Vishnu of hinduism. However, they bury their dead like Muslims who return the bodies to the holy earth.

Eight of the 29 commandments exhort the community to protect and sustain the environment. The community has thus been promulgating eco-friendly principles and necessities of sustainable development for centuries before they became known to the modern societies.

Bishnoi life in cities and villages

The estimated population of Bishnois is approximately six million. Bishnois are found in Haryana, Punjab, Uttar Pradesh, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Delhi and Mumbai. However their concentration is in Rajasthan, especially in the districts of Jodhpur and the adjacent Nagaur.

The Bishnoi houses in major cities of Rajasthan like Jaipur, Udaipur, Jodhpur and many others are color coded. The local municipality does not provide clearance certificates to shops and houses who do not paint the doors, windows and roof top with blue colour. The Bishnois are exempted from following this rule as the followers of the Bishnoi faith are strictly prohibited from wearing blue. The reason for this lies in that blue clothing would be dyed in indigo, requiring large amounts of indigo shrubs to be cut down to produce it. It is a telling comment on how laws of the rulers seem helpless before the laws laid down by faith.

The Indian caste system has no grip in the Bishnoi philosophy, in which generally equal rights between the sexes also prevail.

Sustainable lifestyles enabling life in desert conditions

One would be intrigued and amazed, while crossing the great Indian Thar desert in Rajasthan, to find that even in the midst of this barren and vast landscape of sand dunes, the areas that are inhabited by the Bishnois have well functioning traditional water harvesting systems, even collecting dew drops from the plants. There is normally no serious lack of food, despite the extremely difficult environmental conditions. Millet, wheat, car

It is this determined adherence of the Bishnois to their values that has helped them survive and ensure the survival of the fragile desert ecosystem.

Bishnois never kill any animal. The male animals are used for work. However, should there be too many, they have to be sold, preferably to other Bishnois. Even if the animals end up with outsiders they still stand a reasonable chance of dying a natural death unlike in the countries of the European Union. In the EU farmers are paid by special premiums to kill the 'waste by-product' calf as young as possible, in order to control the meat mountain.





Kiran Devi Bishnoi breastfeeds a baby orphan deer in a village in Jodhpur. She found the newborn fawn close to its dead mother hunted by stray dogs near her village. The fawn stayed at kiran's home, sharing her milk along with her young daughter. The Bishnoi's are respected world over for their compassion and sacrifices done as they worship nature. PHOTO- HIMANSHU VYAS/Hindustan Times/3-5-2007.

Sustainable traditions - surviving amidst modern environmental crisis?

At the end of the year 2000, a congress was held in Bonn in order to look for solutions regarding the emerging development related disasters. Although the reasons, i.e. over-grazing, clear cutting of forests and destructive agricultural practices, are known and understood perfectly, an effective healing-process of environmental scars does not seem to have been initiated up to now.

All around the globe clear cutting of forests has led to serious problems. For example in China, wide soil erosion has advanced the Gobi desert within a hundred kilometers from the centre of Beijing due to high water consumption and uncontrolled clearing of forests. Now strong sandstorms unload annually a million tons of sand over the city.

The situation in Africa is even more dramatic. A loss of land of approximately 100 square kilometers per day has been estimated because of intensive exploitation of the soil. This forces three million humans to look for new habitats every year. In north east Tanzania, the Usambara mountain region was the most fertile in flora and fauna in all of East Africa. Now the majestic forests have disappeared.

The tropical rain forest in South America which constitutes one sixth of the earth's surface and a habitat for half of all living species is being destroyed with a breathtaking speed. Half of the world's forests were already ruined in the last century and if the destruction continues at this rate, nothing of the Earth's breathing lungs would be left by mid 21st Century.

The Bishnoi faith and its followers are those islands of tradition which have been

able to withstand the tide of modernity that threatens to engulf their centuries-old belief system. For the Bishnois the memory of Amrita Devi and other martyrs is still very much alive and in the year 1973 even led to a similar, although fortunately less tragic incident, in the village Gopeshwar in Uttarakhand. The incident laid foundation to the famous resistance movement Chipko (In English: "Hug")

If we could translate our obviously fast and globally growing uneasiness into consistent nature protection, there might be reason for more hope. The time for a new ideology is here, along with a need for a different style of life: based on a desire for unity and not merely on economy centric development models.

The Bishnois have understood this truth for a long time already. Their conviction that each living being has the right to fulfillment, unimpaired in its individuality and spiritual destiny, can be an example for all of us. There is no better way into a peaceful and sustainable future.

Even though the Bishnois are presently protected by their very own wisdom, a disturbing question remains open nevertheless: How will the fast spreading urbanization in all corners of the world eventually affect any hitherto religiously pursued ideology of sustainability?

Will such unique traditions, like that of the Bishnois, flow through the changing times or will they dry off in this age of global warming? ■

The author, Rakesh Bhatt, is an activist of SADED and has worked there as coordinator. He has studied Islamic theology, and his main interests lie in issues of faith, spiritual democracy and dialogue of these in relation to ecology. He considers faith and belief systems to be one of the most potent tools for sustainable development.



Sacred groves in Tamil Nadu - Shelters of culture and biodiversity

Y. David

God's element is dwelling in the nature. This is the view held by peoples all over the world in the remote past. This belief in God's presence in the Nature helped people to lead a life in harmony with their environment. People revered nature with devotion and considered it to be sacred. The sacredness was thought to manifest itself in certain rivers, ponds and trees.

Nature worship is an ancient tradition in India and all forms of life have been considered sacred. There was a general conception among the early people that the godly element was actively at work in places of natural beauty. Hence trees were sacred to the ancient Tamils. They considered trees to be abodes of spirits and gods and believed that the sacredness of living beings and inanimate objects ensured their safety and persistence. Many villages set apart sanctified land to propitiate the *vanadevatas* (*vana meaning forest and devatas meaning spirits*, i.e. tree spirits). In certain groves, the entire vegetation was considered sacred and worshipped.

Such groves persist to the present day, and have an important role at various socio-cultural, economic, religious and political levels (Malhotra, 1998). These groves express their belief systems and lifestyles fashioned by closeness to nature and conserving the biodiversity. Folk art, folk literature and folklore throw much light on sacred groves. The groves play an important role in the socio-economic life, culture and ecology. Their size varies, extending from one acre to hundreds of acres.

The distribution of sacred groves in Tamil Nadu

Such sacred groves are scattered all over India, numbering about 100,000 of which 14 000 are well recorded. It is also estimated that around 1000 square kilometers of unexploited land is inside these large groves. The groves are thus keeping the forests protected and serve as reservoirs of flora and fauna. Tamilnadu has a large number of sacred groves, of which 528 are well recorded by C.P.R Foundation.

The classification and ownership of the groves

Sacred groves are classified into three categories:

- Traditional groves which have existed for many generations. There are several myths in circulation around them.
- Temple groves which are developed around temples.
- Groves developed around burial and cremation grounds.

These sacred groves are protected and managed by local committees elected by the villagers from among the elders. There are also some privately owned sacred groves held by certain families and managed by family trustees. The government does not in any way interfere in the administration of these groves.

Shelters for spirits and deities

While each sacred grove has its own unique features depending on the region, type of people and the type of deity whom they worship, there are many common characteristics found in all the sacred groves. Each sacred grove has a presiding deity. The most common deity found in many sacred groves is Amman (Mother Goddess) who bestows blessings and safeguards the people from evil forces, followed by Ayyanar, a male deity who majestically moves around the village on his horse surrounded by a number of soldiers and dogs for protecting the village. There are also a number of other male and female deities such as Mariamman, Peedariamman, Yellaiamman, Esakiamman, Maduraiveeran, Karupannan, Kaliamman etc. These deities perform various tasks. Some are peace loving while some others are revengeful spirits. People worship them either to get blessings or to propitiate them from doing any harm.

The terracotta idols of the presiding deities and other associates like Horses, Dogs, Elephants, Soldiers, snakes and other deities are kept under the shadows of trees or in an open space. They are made by potters from sheer clay and are painted with various colors.

These idols are taken to the sacred groves in a procession during village festivals which are celebrated at certain intervals and in specific months. The potters in the village, who made the idols, are the Pujaris (temple priests). In the villages, we have the potters as pujaris performing the role of the temple priest on all days along with their pottery work. They consecrate the idols. The clay idols stay in place for one or two years before a new one is installed. The remains of the old ones disintegrate and become a part of the earth.

The whole process symbolizes the process of birth, existence, death and rebirth - the cyclical understanding of life process. Festivals are celebrated at certain intervals. Food is prepared and offered to the deities before distributing it among the people. Fowls and goats are sacrificed and cooked after offering them to the deity. Performance of folk dance, folk story telling and recital of folk songs play an important part during festivals.

People believe that the spirits of deities stay in the sacred groves. Couples who

desire for child hang tiny cradles on the branches, believing that they will get a child. In the trees people also tie small pieces of clothes in different colours hoping that their different wishes would be fulfilled.

The existence of an invisible realm of spirits and its influence on the visible world are central to the belief system which finds expression in matters relating to the sacred groves. The way the tribal peoples have related their life with the invisible realm and linked their life with ancestral spirits is seen as superstition by modernity. There are studies available (for instance, Mr. Ravichandran from Vikravandi, Tamil Nadu has done extensive research on spirits and the belief system of the people) which indicate the positive side of such belief system and affirm the existence of the invisible realm and invincible spirits that have their influence on the visible world.

Groves protecting biodiversity

When ecological biodiversity is shrinking everywhere due to the present pattern of development process, the sacred groves are able to maintain the bio diversity intact to a large extent. Sacred groves shelter different varieties of medicinal plants, trees, shrubs, bushes, small animals and birds in large amounts. The flora and fauna are rich in the sacred groves. While some of the sacred groves are situated near springs and ponds, all sacred groves have their own ponds which are either natural or dug artificially. These ponds help to maintain the surface water at a constant level and prevent it from going down. When the neighboring regions are dry and suffer from lack of water, the ponds in the grove are full of water collected during the rainy season. This keeps the grove green and pleasant even in the driest period and enables the neighboring villages' inhabitants to fetch water from the grove when their usual water sources have dried.

Medicinal plants

Each sacred grove has plenty of medicinal plant varieties which are used as cures for the ailments of the village people. The following list gives a rough idea of the plants and their medicinal use as described by P.S. Samy, (Professor in Plant Science), M. Kumar and Sundrapandian (Professors in Botany) in their article *Spirituality and Ecology of sacred Groves in Tamilnadu*.



Names and uses of some important medicinal plants recorded in the sacred groves of Tamilnadu

Species	Part used	Diseases treated
<i>Abutilon indicum</i>	Seed, root	Black patches, ulcers
<i>Achyranthus aspera</i>	Leaf, root	Scorpion bite, scabies
<i>Alangium salvifolium</i>	Leaf, root	Poisoning, fever
<i>Andrographis paniculata</i>	Leaf decoction	Scorpion and snake bite, dysentery
<i>Calotropis gigantea</i>	Latex, flower, root	Wound healing, fever, cough
<i>Canthium parviflorum</i>	Leaves	Dysentery
<i>Cassia auriculata</i>	Flowers in cooking	Diabetes
<i>Chloroxylon swietenia</i>	Rootbark in milk	Impotency
<i>Cleome gynandra</i>	Seeds	Expels worms in stomach
<i>Cleome viscosa</i>	Leaf juice	Ear pain, itching
<i>Commelina benghalensis</i>	Plant paste	Bed sores, pimples
<i>Croton bonplandianus</i>	Leaf extract	Fever
<i>Dichrostachys cinerea</i>	Root paste	Rheumatism
<i>Euphorbia hirta</i>	Leaves, latex	Venereal disease
<i>Evolvulus alsinoides</i>	Leaf decoction	Prolonged fever
<i>Ficus benghalensis</i>	Latex, fruit, aerial root	Whitish discharge, tooth trouble
<i>Gisekia pharnaceoides</i>	Plant juice	Expels tapeworms from stomach
<i>Jatropha curcas</i>	Crushed bark, latex	Cholera, pain relief
<i>Leucas aspera</i>	Leaf, root flower	Scorpion bite, rheumatism,
<i>Madhuca longifolia</i>	Gum, bark, seed, leaf	Rheumatism, eczema, constipation
<i>Pavetta indica</i>	Stem extract	Rheumatism
<i>Pedaliu murex</i>	Plant mucilage	Stomach pain, ulcers
<i>Phyllanthus nodiflora</i>	Plant extract	Piles
<i>Phyllanthus amarus</i>	Root	Jaundice
<i>Pongamia pinnata</i>	Flowers, seed	Whitish discharge, skin diseases
<i>Sarcostemma intermedium</i>	Stem powder	Induces vomiting
<i>Solanum trilobatum</i>	Leaf, flower	Cough, ear trouble
<i>Streblus asper</i>	Latex	Gum diseases, stops bleeding
<i>Strychnos nux-vomica</i>	Seed poultice	Wounds
<i>Syzygium cumini</i>	Seed	Diabetes
<i>Trianthema decandra</i>	Leaf extract	Jaundice
<i>Tribulus terrestris</i>	Plant ash	Rheumatism
<i>Wrightia tinctoria</i>	Bark decoction	Piles

Vegetation in Tamil Nadu

The entire state of Tamilnadu receives rain during the Northeast monsoon, with little or no rainfall in the months of May and June. The key vegetation species of the sacred groves in the drier regions of the plains are predominantly *Memecylon umbulatum* (ironwood tree), *Chloroxylon swietenia* (east Indian satinwood), *Albizia amara* (sirir), *Glycosmis cochinchinensis*, *Capparis divaricata* (capparis bush) and *Gmelina asiatica* (small Cashmere tree). However, species like *Atlantia monophylla* (Indian wild lime), *Terminalia glabra* (hardwood tree), *Zizyphus nummularia*, *Terminalia arjuna* (arjun), *Hardwickia binnata* and *Santalum album* (sandalwood) are found in the groves of Tirunelveli, Kamarajar and Dindigul Anna districts, especially in higher altitudes adjoining some forest reserves. *Aerva tomentosa* is found only in the Tirunelveli and Kamarajar districts. This plant is endemic only to the plains of the Tirunelveli District. *Flacourtia ramontchi* is found in the sacred groves at higher altitudes. There are also trees like Banian, Neem

and Tamarind found in many sacred groves.

Conservation and its relation to indigenous belief systems

It is interesting to see the way in which these sacred groves are conserved over a period of long time. The basic principal on which the conservation of biodiversity lies is the tribal peoples' belief system which says that Gods' element is dwelling in the nature and everything in nature is sacred. According to this faith they revered trees, plants and everything in the grove as sacred. Within this deeper faith, they also have developed rules, taboos and rituals. Tree felling is completely prohibited, as is plucking of the leaves and cutting of the branches. However, in some groves dried branches are allowed to be taken away in order to treat sicknesses.

Removal of foot wears before entering the grove is strictly followed. Villagers do

not usually go inside the sacred groves, except for during festival periods and fulfilling their vows. Movement within the groves is very much restricted and self regulated. A strong belief prevails that transgression of rules or taboos would bring poor harvest and diseases in the village. This fear built in the mindset of the people is a strong motivation for keeping the rules and taboos. Hunting of small and big animals within the groves is prohibited.

Threats to the sacred groves

Despite the strong tradition to preserve the sacred groves, there are many threats to their existence from different directions.

- ▶ **Disturbances in the belief systems:** Their traditional belief system is disturbed due to the influence of modern rational thinking, which doesn't value the presence of God's element in nature.
- ▶ **Urbanization:** In the process of urbanization, many sacred groves are destroyed by the commercial interests. - Increasing pressure and encroachment on land have already reduced the size of the sacred groves in many places.
- ▶ **The invasion of exotic plants** such as *Eupatorium odoratum*, *Lantana camara* and *Prosopis juliflora* grow widely in the sacred groves affecting the growth of traditional varieties. Also, these varieties since not very holy to the villagers, they get into the sacred groves to cut them for fuelwood.

- ▶ The increased mobility of the villagers let in livestock also freely affecting the sacred groves also.

Conclusion:

The preservation of sacred groves is very important, especially in the context of shrinking biodiversity and the emerging threat of global warming. Steps need to be taken to restore the neglected sacred groves, which should, along with the ones still thriving, be protected from commercial interests.

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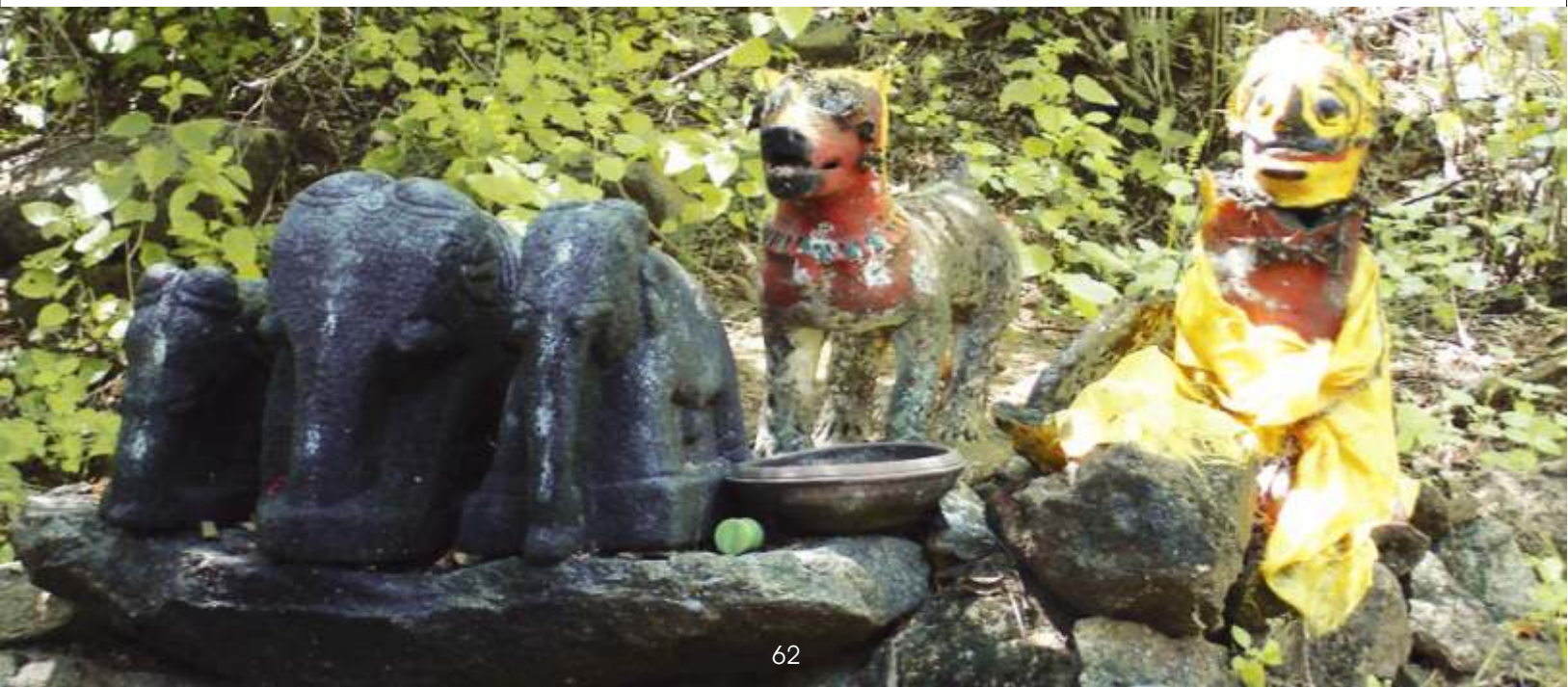


**Annex: Tamilnadu's
District-wise distribution of Sacred Groves**

Sl. No.	Name of District	No. of Sacred Groves	Area in hectares
1.	Coimbatore	10	201.76
2.	Cuddalore	31	49.80
3.	Dharmapuri	31	4421.39
4.	Dindigul	6	1147.79
5.	Erode	21	6248.97
6.	Kanchipuram	4	9.49
7.	Kanyakumari	37	55.20
8.	Karur	8	15.77
9.	Madurai	3	46.13
10.	Nagapattinam	11	21.48
11.	Namakkal	20	157.59
12.	Nilgiri	32	2100.93
13.	Perambalur	63	131.11
14.	Pudukottai	28	111.41
15.	Ramanathapuram	17	22.87
16.	Salem	24	714.47
17.	Sivagangai	5	48.88
18.	Tanjavur	5	5.9
19.	Teni	12	397.58
20.	Tiruchirappalli	34	65.81
21.	Tirunelveli	12	709.63
22.	TiruvallurTiruvallur	3	1.10
23.	Tiruvannamalai	47	1847.41
24.	Tiruvarur	3	2.23
25.	Tuticorin	5	42.7
26.	Vellore	16	1918.37
27.	Villupuram	34	54.74
28.	VirudhunagarVirudhunagar	6	556.58



About the author: Y.David, a senior social activist in TamilNadu, has initiated campaigns against industrial shrimp cultivation and nuclear power plants, and is continuously promoting ecological farming, alternative health practices and people centric development process as against growth centered development. At present, he is the convener for the India division of Citizens' Global Platform.



V Ecosystemic cycles of forest with land, water and human society



1

Significance of Mangrove Forests for the Coastal Areas of Tamil Nadu

L. Antonysam, TNEC (Tamil Nadu)

2

The Meaning of Forests for Agriculture and water resources in Tamilnadu

Mr. Peter, Leisa (Tamilnadu)

Ecosystemic cycles of forest with land, water and human society

Forests' significance for natural ecosystemic cycles in general is treated in the last part of our publication, complementing the experiences and Adivasi perspectives presented in the earlier chapters.

The condition of the forest affects the mutual relations between land, water, agriculture and human communities. Where forest has been lost, it should be revived in as indigenous form as possible.

For sustaining balanced relations of forest/hill ecosystems to the plains, cultivations and coastal ecosystems, we discuss here the opportunities of agroforestry and how mangrove forests can act as guardians of the coasts (like in the case of a Tsunami).

The articles of Antonysamy and Mr. Peter deal with all the above mentioned issues in the context of Tamil Nadu's situation, which provides interesting cases

also for global dialogue.

How, then, are these ecological cycles connected with the Adivasi experiences described in the rest of this publication? The answer may lie in the abilities of indigenous societies to relate and communicate sustainably with the cycles between forest, land and water. For this they however have not needed concepts of biology or ecology.

For example at the time of the Tsunami 2004, the indigenous Onge community in Andaman and Nicobar islands interpreted the messages of the seashore and the animals and survived from the Tsunami by running with the animals to the highest parts of their island just before the Tsunami waves came. They have no separate identifiable names for the animals, the wind and sea but link it all in the word 'Inyabonye' (my spirit).



Significance of Mangrove Forests for the Coastal Areas of Tamil Nadu

L. Antonysamy

Introduction

Ancient Tamils prior to 2000 BC, classified Tamil Nadu into 5 geographical regions namely Hills ("Mullai"), Forest ("Mullai") Crop Lands ("Marutham"), Coast ("Neithal") and Desert ("Palai"). In those days, there was no Desert. But, what they cautioned was: if the Hills and Forests were not properly maintained, the Tamil Nadu would become a desert. Indeed, Tamil Nadu today is fast becoming a desert State. One indicator of this is the disappearance and deterioration of the Mangrove Forests in the estuaries and sand dunes along the coast of over 1100 km including Puducherry, the Union Territory State of India.

Mangrove forest is an integral part of Tamil Nadu coastal ecology. It is naturally found in estuaries, where the river and sea meet. It is the home land of many species, and works especially as the breeding ground for fish population. It plays the role of a pacifying mother, who makes the ferocious sea waves slowly become nullified. That is why it is beautifully called "Alayathi" in the Tamil language, meaning: "making the waves become calm". The Tamil Nadu and Puducherry coastal areas were once rich in mangrove forests. However, today one can see them wider spread only in Pitchavaram and Muthupet of Tamil Nadu and a very small portion in Karaikal of Puducherry.

What happens when we do not care for protecting the natural resources like the mangroves, is what happened at the time of the Tsunami in Tamil Nadu and Puducherry on December 26, 2004. The disaster made thousands of people and domestic animals lose their lives and a manifold amount of people lose their livelihood means along with their homes.

Alienation in the name of Blue Revolution

The "Green Revolution", which was supposed to ensure food security, first cut the

organic relationship between the farming communities and the natural resources. It made the farmers to become the exploiters and polluters of the natural resources and cater to the profit needs of the corporate sector. Similarly, the "Blue Revolution", which was to ensure prosperity in the life of the fishing communities, brought devastation. It introduced industrial fishing means like trawler fishing and deep sea fishing done both by the fishermen and foreign companies. This has made both the Govt. and the communities focus more on big fish catch rather than on maintaining the fish breeding ground - namely mangroves - and the coast protecting ecosystems like sand dunes, green cover including bushy plants, creepers and a variety of trees. The traditional village or community based fishing received a death blow. The traditional rights became old fashioned. Fishing communities fought against one another, and bloody battles were enacted along the coast. The role of the fishing community in protecting the coastal ecology was not given importance. The only method followed to protect the fish wealth is declaring a restriction on fishing in 45 days of the year. This allows the reproduction of the fish population. Instead of protecting the traditional fish catching practices, harbour based fishing has been systematically promoted affecting the mangrove forest areas.

Industries Destroying the Coastal Resources

India, especially Tamil Nadu, is historically a part of the so called 'Asiatic mode of production', which has been nature centric and sustenance based. But the later preference for the capitalistic mode of development following industrialization process did not take the preservation of the coastal resources into account. As a result, the coastal livelihood resources started disappearing. Tourism, chemical and shrimp industries, as well as mechanized fishing practices paved the way for this process.

Pitchavaram mangrove forest, which is one of the rarely existing mangrove areas, is facing a lot of threats for its existence. Shrimp industries have been set up near the mangroves and the untreated effluents have been indiscriminately let into the mangrove forest. Apart from the effluents of the shrimp industries, the Vellarau (White River) estuary of Pitchavaram has now become also the carrier of the civic wastes into the mangrove forest.

Voices from the Coastal Communities

The existing mangrove wetland also degrades very fast due to environmental factors like siltation, less fresh water flow, poor tidal flux, elevation of soil salinity, pH rise, and the grazing of cattle. Mangrove cutting for fuel takes its toll, as well as the lack of environmental awareness of the local coastal communities on wetland reservation.

Tuticorin and Cuddalore Districts

In the Punnakayal and Keezhavaipar coastal environments the degradation rate has been very high in the last 20 years due to the harvest of animal fodder and cutting for fuel wood. From the Keezhavaipar fishing community it has been told that around 250 hectares of mangrove wetland degradation has happened within 25 years of time. Currently mangrove vegetation exists only on the estuarine water edges. In Tuticorin District, salt industries have also taken over some of the estuaries, where mangroves before were plenty. As various industries are located along the coast, the estuaries and the coast are becoming polluted due to the untreated chemical effluents. (The industries are producing iodized salt using potassium iodide or iodate. Companies have taken over salt production from community based salt production. Chemical process in preparing iodised salt requires some time to verify the chemical process and the type of chemical effluents released.) This will in turn affect the future salt production. The villagers in Punnakayal and Keezhavaipar, coastal fishing villages in Tuticorin, have stated the following:

"The mangrove forest protects the houses along the village edges from sea water directly eroding the walls. When they do not go to sea for fishing, both women and men catch prawns, crabs etc. in the mangrove forest area." - **Mr. Kumar**, Punnakayal

"The mangrove forest protects us from the strong cyclone waves." - **Mr. Sandanaraj**, Punnakayal

"The mangrove forest supports us in raising our economic status, and we want them to be planted and grown where they already have been degraded." - **Mr Jegan**, Punnakayal

"The shrimp industries have cleared the mangroves and the village people added up to the destruction for fulfilling their fuel wood needs. Therefore, mangrove afforestation is a must in this area." - **Mr. Eugene**, Punnakayal

"In the Gulf of Mannar, coral reefs fringe a chain of 21 coralline islands, sheltering mangroves, lagoons and a shallow 'trapped sea' with extensive seagrass beds. This mosaic of coastal ecosystems forms the basis for sea-based livelihoods among the coastal communities. These livelihoods include the extraction of

seaweed, shells, lobsters, sea cucumbers and reef fish from the reef flats and lagoons. Harvesting of crabs, squid, fish and shells from the seagrass beds and the 'trapped sea' between the islands and the mainland coast are also done."

Mrs. Mariammal, Keezhavaipar

"Mangroves and coral reefs are a part and parcel of the ocean; it is the place from where everything sprouts and spreads throughout the entire sea. The mangroves and reef areas are the natural nurseries. It is because of the mangroves and reefs and their fertility that we get different varieties of fish to catch and the protection from the ocean waves." - **Mrs Pachiyammal**, Keezhavaipar

The people along the Nanjarau river, near the Kayalpattinam area of the Tuticorin District, have expressed that the chemical industry on the bank of the river has been continuously releasing its industrial effluents into the river, finally reaching the estuary and converting its colour entirely into red. This estuary used to be the home for mangroves and the water became contaminated, making its fish population become extinct. The sea in the area also looks red. On the other side of this estuary, where there still is mangrove forest existing, it serves as livelihood especially for women who catch fish, prawn and crabs in the mangroves.

"The effluents of the shrimp industries have affected and depleted the naturally available prawns in the mangrove forest. The civic wastes dumped into the river also add fuel to the plight. The fisherfolk who once depended on the river and the mangrove forest for their livelihood, are now suffering. Plastic bottles and other tourism waste have become the indicators of the lost charm of Pitchavaram, as it has ruthlessly been promoted as a tourist destination and a movie shooting spot." - **Mr. Kalimuthu**, fisherman, Pitchavaram mangrove area

"The (chemical) industry has spoiled the fish catch and my income is becoming less and less." - **Mr. Antony**, fisherman, Nanjarau

Thermal power plants and effluents in Pulicat Lake region

Pulicat Lake is one of the largest coastal lakes, covering both Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh. Pulicat in Tamil means 'Forest of trees that bear fruits and roots', referring to the trees of the mangroves. But, unfortunately, it is very difficult to see mangroves with the exception of some areas. There are many villages around the lake, from which the people did not go to sea for fishing. Instead, they stayed within the lake as the lake had sufficient catch. There even was an agreement that the sea fishing fishermen would not come to the lake and similarly the lake fishing fishermen would not go to the sea for fishing.

An old man from one of the villages was puzzled when asked about the mangroves: "The present generation doesn't even know the meaning of the name Pulicat nor would they know about the once abundant existence of the mangrove forests. The estuaries and the Pulicat lake are being spoiled by thermal power plants, Chennai city wastes and untreated effluents of various chemical industries, making the fish wealth become extinct and making it difficult for marine life to find a place"

Firewood cutting and Tsunami in the Southern districts

In Southern Districts the mangrove in Tamil is known as "Kanna Kadu". "The





Kanna Kadu was once dense here. People cut the trees to be used as fire wood.", a fisherman from the Pudukkottai District stated. When asked about whether it was fair to cut the mangrove, which is so important for the coastal ecology, he replied by saying that you can not burn the hand you use for cooking. But due to the pressure of short-term economic interests, people do not take adequately into account the ecological importance and thus mangroves have already widely disappeared.

At the same time, people realize the importance of the mangroves when they see it with their naked eyes. In a fishing village called Vadakku Ammapattinam, the people realized the importance of mangroves at the time of the 2004 tsunami. They thankfully remember that their village was saved because of the mangrove forest. The mangrove near the village is still dense. **Mr. Ramasamy**, a villager, empathetically said that the village would protect the mangrove forest by all means, as it has saved their lives.

Mangrove Forest Ecological and Social Importance

"Mangrove forest is the homeland not only for marine organisms, but for migratory birds, too. Migratory birds such as Cormorants, Painted Stork, Pelican etc. have been found in the afforested mangrove forest. Similarly, Prawns, Etroplus, Crabs etc. were found. More migratory fish, as well as different varieties of prawns also started breeding. The mangrove species Rhizophora and Avicennia, which are the most found species in Tamil Nadu and Puducherry play a major role in withstanding and moderating the pollution. Mangrove forests arrest soil erosion and prevent the inundation of sea saline water into the land area thus preventing the ground water becoming saline. They also play a major role in moderating the climate in their area by having ever green canopy. Above all, it was the mangrove forest that nullified the ferocity of the tsunami killer waves entering through the mouth of the estuary to land. The witness to this was a big bridge in Karaikal and a multi-crore cost large bridge in Manakudi of Kanniyakumari, which both were wiped away by the tsunami as there was no mangrove forest in the estuaries." -

Dr. Santhanakumar, environmental scientist involved in mangrove afforestation

Mangrove Forest is the natural gift as a bioshelter; it enhances the marine estuarine environment to produce more fisheries resources that accelerate the employability of the fishing communities and the ability to supply aquafood for the entire humanity. According to Mr. **Rajendra Prasad** from the Southern Initiative NGO Forum for Participatory Development (SINFPAD) and PAD, the mangroves restoration and plantation is very vital in order to create an effective, long-term solution to coastal erosion and degraded bio-diversity. Along with these it would offer substantial protection against the regularly hitting cyclones and the future tsunami threat. The mangroves act as natural buffers and greenbelts offering a great level of protection from winds and waves. A healthy natural buffer of coastal mangroves will sustain the livelihoods of the coastal communities, promote the wild fisheries and maintain healthy biodiversity. When it is protected and conserved, the various other needs of the community such as fodder and fuel

requirements will be met. He further stressed that a well maintained mangrove eco system will help the community self sufficient and above all, the mangrove will help the community mitigate the global warming issues.

Afforestation of Mangrove Forests NGOs

Apart from the Govt. Forest Department, NGOs have been involved in mangrove afforestation, as the civil society organizations understood the ecological, social and economic values of mangrove forest. After the tsunami in 2004, several initiatives have been made to regenerate mangroves. Their significance lies in the participation of the coastal communities in the mangrove afforestation process. Various sections apart from the local communities have visited these areas and realized the multi-disciplinary value of mangrove forests, acting now as the messengers in spreading the news. The awareness on the importance of protecting the mangroves is increasingly visible in the civil society.

NGOs and other instances involved in Mangrove afforestation:

- ▶ CEDA TRUST - Tuticorin district. (Supported by CORDAID, Netherlands and Siemenpuu Foundation, Finland.)
- ▶ PAD - Participatory Action for Development - Gulf of Mannar region, Tuticorin district.
- ▶ BHUMII - Pulicat Lake
- ▶ Trust Help -SEEDS, Tanjore
- ▶ Centre for Appropriate Technology in collaboration with Dr Santhanakumar Kanniyukamari

Conclusion

Mangrove forests as ecological necessities have not gained the same importance in people's minds as the forests found in hill areas and plains. Attribution of forest, especially of mangrove, to the coastal eco systems has received little or no attention of the communities and policy makers along the majority of the estuaries. There is also a misconception that the water from the hills and the plains through rivers is unnecessarily allowed to go into the sea.

This is a clear indication that people in the plains, especially the farming communities, urban population and also policy makers are yet to understand the importance of the estuaries, which remain the base for mangroves and marine life. Hence, there is an urgent need to make the communities and the policy makers understand the ecological relationship between the hills, plains and the coast as one eco-system. The civil society organizations have started this process and what is expected from the civil society and policy makers is a responsible response in terms of concrete actions. This response is starting from the regeneration and protection of the mangrove forest along the estuaries in the coastal regions. ■

The author, L. Antonysamy, is the State Convener of Tamil Nadu Environment Council (TNEC), which is an advocacy campaign network with 600 associate organisations; Editor in Chief of North South Perspective a magazine on earth and people; Editor of "Nizhal" an environmental Tamil magazine; Convener of Siemenpuu Foundation Tamil Nadu Core Team and has grass roots experience for more than 25 years.

Note: The author is grateful to Dr. Santhanakumar, environmental scientist and the State Convener of Environmental Scientists Forum; Mr. Rajendra Prasad, the Director of PAD and Convener of SINFPAD; Mr. V. Nadanasabhapathy and Mr. C. Mathivanan of TNEC and especially the coastal community members of Tamil Nadu and Puducherry for making this article more meaningful through their contribution.



The Meaning of Forests for Agriculture and Water resources in Tamil Nadu

L. Peter

In India there is a continuous loss in forest cover at an estimated rate of 1.3 million hectares every year and it is also observed that the effective crown cover in the remaining forest area is estimated to be only 56 %. In Tamil Nadu it is seen that the deforestation in the past fifty years has satisfied human needs and interests, having at the same time had profound devastating consequences - including degradation of soil, ground water depletion, increasing cost of cultivation, monoculture, extinction of endemic plants and animals, social conflicts and climate change. These challenges are in fact global, and not limited to our country. And climate change is likely to impact forest ecosystems significantly in the next few years in Tamil Nadu.

Such ecological degradations can be checked with the concrete effort of increasing tree cover over the Earth. Trees can protect the environment by their filtering action of pollutants such as dust, dirt and others. In addition, shading effects of tree cover in agro forestry systems improve the soil environment. It is high time we stem the loss of forest cover in Tamil Nadu and initiate steps for modelling our forest policy towards a sustainable forest management in order to revive our indigenous agricultural practices and restoration of water resources.

The subject of *tropical forest agriculture* has not been discussed by agricultural scientists in our State. It is estimated that forests are one of the world's primary carbon reservoirs, storing an estimated 610 billion tons of carbon. Tropical forests are vital to the hydrological cycle. Efficient forest management practices in our forest areas will definitely turn down the thermostat. By preventing the destruction

of old forests, we can keep a huge amount of carbon from being released into the atmosphere. By planting native trees endemic to the area, we will be able to absorb large amount of atmospheric carbon.

Protecting forest cultures and increasing water supplies for farming potential

Increased human pressure on our forest ecosystem in Tamil Nadu has ultimately threatened the livelihoods of thousands and thousands of indigenous communities dwelling on the mountains. Forest resources are the only resources for forest fringe communities (especially in the Eastern Ghats Mountainous areas). And the Western Ghats region is under the surveillance of international community for its wonderful biodiversity.

Conservation International, through ATREE (Ashoka Trust for Research in Ecology and the Environment), has initiated steps for biodiversity conservation in the entire Western Ghats mountain range, but several initiatives concerning the livelihoods of forest dependent communities have been ignored. There are several programmes such as the Western Ghats Development Forum that involve local people's participation and indigenous communities in the management and sharing of benefits from our forests in Tamil Nadu. Yet these programmes are inadequately developed and have not benefited the mountain communities at large. This is the case as far as the mountain ecosystem is concerned.

Regarding agricultural lands and water resources, the scenario is different, alerting

more scientists and conservationists in Tamil Nadu. Land degradation is considered as a national problem and it occurs primarily due to an increase in human and animal population on a limited land resource. The prime factors responsible for the degradation are different types of soil erosion, water logging, soil salinity and alkalinity, pressurized shifting cultivation, formation of sand dunes and others.

Dry land farmers in drought-prone districts of Tamil Nadu are nevertheless unable to co-manage forest resources and irrigation activities in order to gain insights into integrated natural resource management. This is mainly because the changes in the land use impact the existing water resources for irrigation and traditional community based means for irrigation are deprived. The question of managing our forests to protect surface water catchments arises when the monsoon deprives forest dependent communities in the buffer-zones.

In this context, various forestry based alternate land use systems have been developed in India. These systems are aiming at the efficient protection and conservation of the natural resources of soil and rainfall as well as the enhancement of the land productivity. The systems involve the practice of any farm enterprise other than monoculture crop production. Tree farming, alley farming, wood lots, pasture, grassland systems, ley farming, agro-forestry etc. are a few examples for the utilization of land under alternate systems. Among these, agro-forestry is the most common and appropriate system for most of the situations due to its sustainability. In agro forestry the addition of a perennial component that has drought tolerance can withstand the aberrations of monsoon

and imparts ability to the production. The basic principles involved in the system are as follows:

1. Selection of suitable land use model
2. Identification of trees and shrubs that are not relished by cattle
3. Minimum level of competition between trees and crops for soil, water and light
4. Consideration about the farmers preference for fruit plants
5. Improved planting techniques
6. Adoption of improved in-situ (on the site) water conservation measures

An interesting case study

Coffee planter M P Chandranath's feat has very few parallels in the country. He developed a forest only to augment his water sources. For this purpose, he had least hesitation to sacrifice six acres of his prime coffee plantation. Chandranath owns 45 acres of coffee estate near Kalpetta, in Wayanad, Kerala. It is located on a hill named Puliymala. Apart from coffee, he grows arecanut, cardamom, coconut, etc. For coffee cultivation, getting timely rains in the early summer during the time of inflorescence bloom this is called blossom shower - is very important. But rains can be erratic, and planters who have enough water sources usually provide artificial rain (irrigation) at this time with the help of sprinkler jets. Initially Mr Chandranath was able to irrigate only 3-4 acres of his coffee plants. But after



the development of his forest and the increase in his supply of water, he is able to cover about 20 acres. (Courtesy: India Together-30 Jul 2008)

Corresponding to the example there are thousands and thousands of acres of cultivable land available in Sirumalai, Bodinayakanur and in other mountain areas of Tamil Nadu. These lands are owned by private land owners. If these estate owners are ready to sacrifice some of their lands in order to develop forests for water resources, people down the hills will benefit at large. Similar examples of forest-dwelling farmers can be replicated in our State.

Soil biodiversity essential for sustainability

Soil biodiversity is the root of Sustainable Farming which includes Micro-organisms (bacteria, fungi, etc.), Micro-fauna (protozoa, nematodes, etc.), Meso-fauna (acari, springtails, etc.) and Macrofauna (insects, earthworms, etc.). It also includes the roots that grow in the soil and interact with other species above and below ground.

Trees can play direct and supplementary role in soil conservation. They are responsible directly for erosion control by acting as barriers and covers. In our present study trees function as a barrier checked the run off and suspended sediments, whereas as a cover they reduced the raindrop impact and run off. The supplementary role of trees in conserving soil came through the stabilization of conservation structures or contribution to the productive use of lands.

Wastelands are characterized by severe wind erosion and high thermal regimes, which affect the growth and yield of crops. A mixture of trees and shrubs planted against the prevailing wind direction in the present trial by REAL has prevented the ill effects of the wind. Soil erosion in the wastelands was well managed with afforestation programmes carried out with agricultural activities.

Agroforestry has become inevitable because of the degradation of soil, forest vegetation, water resources and the impoverishment of the farm community. Agro forestry can bridge the gap between the conservation of natural resources and their utility in sustaining agricultural development

Agro forestry - What it means?

Agro forestry is a collective term for the land use systems in which woody perennials are grown with herbaceous crops and/or animals on the same land by spatial arrangement or temporal sequence so that they are economically and ecologically compatible. Thus, the system of agro forestry normally involves trees and other agricultural crops, which provide a collection of products throughout the year for a number of years.

The promise of Agro Forestry REAL's research

Dindigul district in Tamil Nadu, India, is located in the western parts of the state (adjoining the Western Ghats) and it is traditionally considered as a rain shadow region of the south west monsoon. The district receives an average annual rainfall of around 800 mm which is often poor, ill distributed and erratic and thus making the customary crop production as intricate. Therefore, every alternative option is tried by the farmers and organizations concerned, the techniques including mixed farming, alternate land use systems etc. With this perspective, REAL has adopted the option of agro forestry in its service area with REAL LEISA network.

REAL has conducted a pilot study in 27 acres (11 hectares) of dry lands in its service area in Dindigul district. The preliminary study enunciated and addressed the objectives of protection and stabilization of ecosystems, production of economic outputs of fuel, fodder, timber and organic manure, as well as providing employment and improving income. Realization of the study paved the way for transmission of the technology and REAL took up the challenge to create a

replicable model of the system of agro-forestry coupled with soil and moisture conservation, nursery raising and planting, protection, growth assessment, growing of intercrops etc. This trial covered 1200 acres (nearly 500 hectares) of dry lands in 20 villages spreading over 10 blocks of Dindigul district

The study proved that the yield of agricultural crops and wood/other products is larger in agro forestry systems than in simple agriculture without trees. The total output of the system is found economically higher than the crop yield loss (especially with those of fruit trees). Growing of suitable intercrops (like sorghum, cow pea and beans) has resulted in additional net income of about Rs 3000/acre.



The study of agro forestry practices indicated that the system is, compared to other systems, more productive and capable of meeting the human requirements of food, fuel and timber. In addition, the trees in the system also gave other products like fruits, fodder, fibre, oils, medicines, gum, resins and spices. Agro forestry systems increased the employment opportunities by utilization of labour in alternate practices. Most of the forestry activities are labour intensive and they can generate considerable opportunities for labour.

Sl.No	Activity	Estimated Employment opportunities (man days year-1)
1.	Primary level Land preparation activities to planting	200 to 500 per hectare
2.	After care and maintenance	50 to 75 per hectare
3.	Harvesting	10 to 15 per hectare
4.	Secondary level and Tertiary level Industrial employment of wood based activities like furniture, sport goods etc. other activities like paper and pulp, ply wood, panel products and others	10 to 20 times more employment than primary level

The pilot and the comprehensive studies carried out by REAL LEISA network displayed that the practice of agro forestry in dry lands can improve the ecological status of the area through the trees raised along with agricultural and other crops grown in the area. Agro forestry systems, based on spatial and temporal resources sharing between the components, can pave the way for better utilization of sunlight at more than one level and they can also benefit the use of ground water and soil nutrients at different root zones. Growth and yield of annual crops are affected either

More research and action needed

The following research works are to be taken up immediately for sustainable management of agricultural systems in our State:

1. Agro forestry on existing watersheds in different districts.
2. Extractive Reserves in Mountainous areas to facilitate livelihoods of indigenous communities dwelling on mountains as forest-dependent people.
3. Documentation of successful sustainable farming practices of individual farmers
4. Promoting Conservation Agriculture (the system of raising crops without tilling the land and retaining crop residues on the land surface thus minimizing soil disturbance)
5. Promoting fertilizer micro-dosing (the system of providing growing

crops with adequate quantity of biofertilizer when it is required.).

6. Bio-technology assisted crop improvement in dry lands and training dry land farmers on this technology.
7. Revitalizing the cultivation of small millets with nutritional value and encouraging farm community to cultivate small millets in a large scale to meet the demand (since there is a resurgence (in) of the interests to "return to nature")
8. Encouraging the Forest Department to intensify buffer zone activities together with conservation agriculture in the proximity of mountainous areas.

The issues discussed can be concluded with the alarm raised by the Rainforest Alliance: 🌳

Nearly half of the Earth's original forest cover has already been lost, and each year more than thirty million tropical forest acres are destroyed. Our world is facing the greatest extinction crisis since the fall of the dinosaurs some 65 million years ago. The future of over 50% of Earth's plants and animals -- and hundreds of human cultures -- will be determined within the next few decades. Because our lives are so intertwined with the forest's great bounty, our fates -- as well as that of millions of plants and animal species -- are at stake. It is up to all of us to act responsibly and to be good stewards by contributing to the sustainable production of all the goods and services that the Earth's tropical forests provide.

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VI

Towards Community Self-Rule of Indigenous Forest Life



1

**Indigenocracy - indigenous
community rule of forest, land and water**

Ghanshyam, Judav (Jarkhand)

2

**Meanings of Forests for
Inhabitants of Nepal**

Uddhab Pd. Pyakurel and Indra Adhikari

Towards Community Self-Rule of Indigenous Forest Life

The Adivasi forest life provides a model for local community rule which is firmly adapted to sustain the human life within the whole of land, forest and water. This is reflected in the last article by Ghanshyam on Indigenocracy, which is a term coined by his organization JUDAV. This term has been in their use already for years to describe and promote indigenous local democracy.

Indian subcontinent has a strong tradition and movement of forest connected community self-rule as basis of its life's independency. India has now also a new Forest Rights Act authorising the forest communities to initiate how the forests are to be used and conserved. But what is missing is such model of practice of modern law and governance, which would adjust the modern legal authority to serve the self-rule of indigenous forest life.

The recent practical experiences in Nepal on how laws on community forests have been implemented there, could thus bring a valuable addition to the discussion on the meanings of forests relevant for Indian subcontinent. The article of Uddhab Pyakurel and Indra Adhikari helps us to understand the meanings of community forests for Himalayan forest communities and what could be learned from these community forests.

We hope the articles of this publication help in finding a more democratic framework and wider audience for the discussion on the meanings of wild forests and indigenous rights.



Indigenocracy - Indigenous Community Rule of Forest, Land And Water

JUDAV

Indigenocracy is a word yet to be coined. It is the praxis that may take the world and its people, especially the poor - who comprise three fourths of the human beings on the face of the Earth - out of the mess created by the dominant classes and races.

It was there during our great grand parents' time and further back. It was there before the empires of the North and the West spread their tentacles into the South and the East, aided by the dominant castes and classes to grab and commodify land, water, forests and everything within them.

The search for this alternate ideology began after more than a decade of work among adivasis in Jharkhand, West Bengal, Orissa and Chattisgarh besides gathering of information in other parts of the adivasi heartland in Eastern and North Eastern India. The struggles of the adivasis here for retaining their dignity, self-rule and communitarian lifestyle were lessons that activist in the region learned and the attempt here has been to put down on paper these alternate

policies.

At the collapse of the Soviet Union in the end of the 20th Century, Capital in its new form has tried to take over its role as "Policeman of the World". It has driven developing nations into the corner by projecting consumerism through the process of globalisation. This consumerism which commodifies everything including human beings, individualises them to the extreme. It becomes necessary to re-visit traditions before the onslaught of so called modernism.

The basic fact that consumerism tries to do is to MASTER nature. In this attempt it projects nature and its resources to be processed into goods, which have broken down the value systems in human society. Due to the avarice of the so called science and technology, human society has broken down to a rat race to accumulate and aggrandise at any cost, leading to destruction rather than development.



INDIGENOCRACY'S PRINCIPLES OF THE LIFESTYLES OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

The basic outlines of Indigenous Civil Society need to be stressed. They concern the following:

1. Relationship of human beings with nature;
2. Relationship of human beings with other human beings;
3. Relationship between women and men;
4. Relationship between humans and other animals;
5. Relationship between individual human beings with the community

Relationships of Human Beings with Nature

Indigenous Civil Society accepts that human beings are a part of nature. It keeps the relationship between human beings and water, forests and land, alive and active. It takes from nature what is required for a sustainable living and returns to it what is required to conserve it and for its revival. When the forests were in their hands, the adivasis saw to it that nature was conserved and its resources were used in a sustainable manner. However, when the forests were grabbed by the government under laws enacted by the British and still valid after their departure, destruction of forest began in a way that literally can be called maraud.

Land, Forests and Water are not Commodities

Experience in working among adivasis gives an understanding of what forests mean to them. For them human dignity and creativity were first introduced into human society by forests. Dignity is what separates human beings from other

animals and creativity leads human beings towards self-reliance.

Indigenous Civil Society does not consider water and land as a means for quenching thirst and hunger. They are traditionally equated with life and what lives in nature.

The Imperialist Civil Society in India is equated with the arrival of the British East India Company which came into the Indian Sub-Continent more than 200 years ago. Land for them was a means of production and therefore a commodity. The lands which were community resources were sought to be changed into individual property. In response, the great leader of the indigenous civil society in Eastern India, Tilka Manjhi, said: "The land is given to us by Sing Bonga (the Sun God). There can be no tax on land nor can it be bought and sold!"

The indigenous philosophy indicates the precious responsibility that human beings have as being stewards of nature and not its masters.

As a result of the philosophy of linkages of human beings and other animals for the conservation of nature and for sustainable development, the land belongs to the entire community of nature and not to human beings alone. Ignoring this concept would be dangerous for human society as a whole. The Indigenous Civil Society has similar views on water. It prefers water to run its own course. Quicker the flow of water the faster it finds its direction and this flow gets the rays of the sun all the way, which helps to keep it clean and pure.

Indigenous Democracy (Indigenocracy)

To understand this communitarian pattern of living it is necessary to understand the values and lifestyles of indigenous peoples as these do not necessarily conform to democracy as understood by the elite of the North and West. For them democracy is primarily concerned with individual freedoms or Capital, as opposed to Indigenous Democracy which rejects them. Indigenocracy asserts the establishment of a society on a communitarian lifestyle, labour and egalitarianism. Hence it is not merely political but social, economic and justice based lifestyle and





community. It accepts the diversity and differences among human beings but it also accepts the limitations in these regards for development of communitarian living

This lifestyle does not give government unlimited powers to exploit society. It does not limit individual freedoms but nor can an individual prey on society and government. There is justice and equal access to forest, land and water for everyone, independently from caste, gender or religion. In Indigenous Civil Society there is self-rule, self-reliance of the family and dignity of the individual.

In Indigenous Democracy the issue of human development is based on the following points:

Communitarian Adivasi reality: Self-rule and self-reliance

The concept of Self-Reliance among the indigenous communities can be looked at through the following concepts: Food, clothing, shelter, health, education, recreation and economics (Indigenonomics).

Food

The indigenous peoples consume only as much as is required by the body to carry out labour and nothing extra. The food consumed depends on the availability of materials in nature and their sustainable use. Leftover rice is preserved in water for breakfast in the morning.

In cooking food, water is an important factor. Indigenocracy has developed different levels and areas of water resources. Each resource is used for different purpose, e.g. for growing crops, for cooking food or for washing. Rivers, streams, lakes, ponds and wells, all have their different uses decided by the community. Different cooking mediums are used for different foods and seasons. Fuelwood cut down has to be replenished.

In farming emphasis is laid on traditional methods linked with life, contrary to modern practices which make farming a burden. For indigenous societies food and life are inter-linked, which brings out the best in their traditional knowledge

systems. The basis of this traditional knowledge of the farmer is the cycle of seasons. They plant what grows best in a particular season. This knowledge is gained through hundreds of years of experience. It is said "Experience is knowledge".

Clothing

Among the adivasis, clothing has emerged from their communitarian lifestyle. The clothes conform to climatic conditions and not on dress codes imposed by the imperialist civil societies of the North and the West, as copied by the elite and dominant castes and classes in the South and the East.

From the beginning of evolution of human beings in the South and the East clothing among the adivasis has been dependant on the geographical and climatic conditions.

Homes

It would be worthwhile to assert that indigenous people have homes and not houses. Home is where people live and where they lead a communitarian lifestyle. Houses are often mere structures imposed by various industrial, contractor and political leaders who are working overtime to get their schemes approved without concerning the people nor the geo-climatic conditions.

Homes of the Adivasi are linkages between the universe, nature and human life, having place also for the animals. Their walls are made of mud (earth) and the roofs are made of bamboo, wood and hay. For sleeping cots made of wood are interlinked with ropes of coir or other natural grasses. The walls are painted and decorated by colours made from natural resources. Women maintain such homes based on their understanding of the change of seasons, the role of climate and the need for security of life.

Health

Indigenous Communities have been concerned about health. Priority is given to the security of life. Precaution is taken for safety of food and water and of clear home atmosphere. Efforts are made for healthy food intake by promoting a

balanced diet. The food intake contains vitamins in the form of various green vegetables, fruits, flowers and roots picked according to seasonal cycles. Only things that need cooking are cooked. Others are eaten raw. Picking and eating vegetables is done according to seasonal cycles. This way is a way of preventive health care.

In case of ill health, emphasis is laid on herbal medicine, of which the indigenous communities have hundreds of years of experience. If the illness is beyond their understanding, they go to the indigenous medical practitioner who is an expert in diagnosing through messaging of veins or breathing of the patient and the like.

Education

The processes of education begin with the effort to develop the function of senses. The educational means are related to nature, and in the process the child begins to understand the surrounding world, learning to grow plants and feel safety in living with animals.

Recreation

Dance, music and recreation is a part of the life of the indigenous communities. For them art and science are eternal cycles just as life and death. Festivals are held e.g. to celebrate reproductivity.

Economics (Indigenonomics)

Indigenous communities do not believe in loan, interest and profits. In their weekly markets known as Haat, there is no buying and selling or accumulation of money. It is a place of bartering and exchanging each others needs in a convention like atmosphere. Haat is not making and accumulation of money. This is exchange without any hassle.

Self-Respect and Dignity in Communitarian Lifestyle

Under Indigenocracy development is a communitarian model. Development processes envelop the entire community. The goals of development are based on a union of diversities of the community.

Indigenocracy encourages hidden qualities and creativity where labour is not considered as a commodity. The individuals under Indigenocracy become creative and inter-dependant.

History has recorded that whenever forces from outside their homeland intruded and trod upon their human and community rights, indigenous people have united en masse to confront those who challenged and subjugated their dignity.

To understand Indigenocracy there is need to look back into the historical events also to the incidents of the 'defeated', mainly the common people like adivasis, dalits, other minorities, "backward" classes and women. Would it not be correct to state that written history has so far been the history of exploiter class of people? Real history is however created by common people and needs thus to be re-written. For this there is a need to do an in-depth analysis on the relationship between the society of human beings and the evolution of the universe. ■

GHANSHYAM

JUDAV, Jharkhand.

About the author

Ghanshyam is the Executive Director of JUDAV and its founding member, who has led it in an activist mould from its registration in 1995. JUDAV seeks to empower Jharkhandi Society as a whole for regaining its cultural traditions and ethos of Self-Rule. Ghanshyam has studied, initiated and actively participated in the struggles of Jharkhand since the JP Movement of the 1974 (The Movement for Total Revolution in the then Bihar) and has learnt the importance of community rights as part of human rights.

"Indigenocracy" is the product of these studies, initiations and activities. As a result Ghanshyam and colleagues/comrades learnt the structure and functioning of Jal, Jungle and Jamin (land, forest and water) as a combined force for sustenance and development of Adivasi Society. He is a leading activist in India to defend Rights of the Indigenous Peoples and in the process he has taken initiatives in creating an alternative indigenous education system as a response to "classical" systems which breaks up communities and individualises the society and threatens the indigenous community.





Meanings of Forests for Inhabitants of Nepal

Uddhab Pd. Pyakurel and Indra Adhikari

"Both India and Nepal have community forestry programmes. And forest bureaucracy, too. But the forests are greener on the Nepalese side because communities are given the forests to protect, manage and use"

(Richard Mahapatra and Prakash Khanal, *Down to Earth* Vol.8 No.19 Feb 29, 2000)

As land, water, and forest are the available main natural resources in Nepal, it has to rely on it for its economic development. According to the Census 2001, forests currently provide 81% of total fuel consumed and more than 50% of fodder for livestock in Nepal.

Interestingly, Nepal's Community Forestry Programme gives an example of its success in the world despite its failure in almost all other sectors. It does not mean that Nepal always get success in the area of forest management and utilization; it is the country which lost almost 14 per cent of forest area between 1978 and 1988. It was due to the wrong policy adopted by the government in the name of Panchayat Forest and Panchayat Protected forest in which forests were not handed over to actual users who were protecting the forest.

The main cause behind today's success is due to the fact that the programme is built upon the principle of devolution of power and authority to local communities, and both local communities and government agencies are working in together on the basis of mutual trust and cooperation. Today one can find not less than 14,000 community forest user groups, which include about 1.5 million households (more than 42% of rural Nepali households) and a total of over seven million people of the country. The community forestry program is more prominent

in the Mid-Hills of Nepal in comparison to Tarai region.

Given the background, we explore how people of rural Nepal make them associated with the concept of community forest and get benefit from it. The examples we draw here is taken from Shree Jalpa Community Forest Users Group, Gerkhu Nuwakot which covers our own household in the village.

Shree Jalpa Community Forest Users Group and the Meaning of Forest

Shree Jalpa Community Forest Users Group is one of the oldest forest user groups registered under the guidance of the Forest Act of 1993, Forest Regulations of 1995, and the Operational Guidelines of 1995. It has covered whole the political boundary of Ward No. four (a ward is the lowest unit of local body called Village Development Committee (VDC) and there are total nine wards in a VDC) Gerkhu VDC. Each and every household of the ward, irrespective of caste/ethnicity, gender and religion are the members of the Forest Users Group (FUG). It is an independent, autonomous and self-governing institution responsible to protect, manage and use a defined forest boundary. The FUG is formed democratically with a huge participation of its members and registered at the District Forest Office. It has its own written Constitution, which defines the rights of the users to a particular forest. The FUG is given the name of Shree Jalpa Community Forest Users Group as there is a famous Jalpa devi Mandir in the midst of the forest.

The forest is handed over to the community; the committee has its operational plan and working plan approved by the District Forest Officer. Now it is the general assembly of the FUG which is the supreme body to finalize and amend the plan. And the finalized plan is generally implemented by executive committee. It has a

11-members working committee with executive power which has to be elected/nominated by the general assembly for a two-years tenure. There are reserved seats provisioned for marginalized community like Dalits and women in the executive committee to make the committee more inclusive and to get inputs from marginalized community in the decision-making.

As the coverage area of the FUG is mostly village, most of households belong to farming occupation; very few people of this area are in the job sectors. Most of the households have their own land but almost half of them can not manage food for a year by the land product. Therefore, they have to be dependant on forest as it is only the natural resource available to help them. For them, forest is everything; it is for firewood, grass, wood and medicinal plants for their daily needs. Without having these valuable forest products, neither they can build home nor make two meal a day possible. As there are many mango trees available, habitants send their kids to collect mango fruit in the seasons. They collect available forest fruits like *Thankal*, *Bandumri* etc., and *Kandamuls* (edible wild roots and bulbs) like *Ban Tarul*, *Gittha* etc. from the forest to manage their meal. Sometimes, they make money by selling such forest fruits in the near by market.

And, those who can just survive from the grain product of land also have to be depending on forest to manage their day-to-day expenses. Without the access to forest, the livelihoods of the rural people would be unimaginable as they are only familiar with hearth of cooking that needing fire wood. There are a good number of households with ethnic Tamang and Magar background; they are customary to make *Raksi* (home made local wine) which is very mandatory for them to continue their rites and rituals. As they are familiar with this skill, some of them especially the women member of the Tamang household convert this skill into a source of income; they make *Raksi*, sale it in the local market so that they independently can cover their daily expenses. For all, they need firewood in a good amount which comes only from the forest. Again, people of this area are familiar with

having milk, milk products, meat etc. which is, for them, possible only through livestock farming. That is why, most of the household of this area keep either cow or buffalo or both animals for milk. As there is no alternative to cultivate agriculture land, bulls or ox are needed for plough their field, male buffaloes and goat for meat; again all the mentioned animals are a must for manure also for a farmer. It meant that they need domestic animal in each and every step to fulfill the subsistence needs of the household. For farming livestock they need grass, fodder and animal bedding daily, which they get only from forest.

Again, the members of this forest users groups use forest as a direct source of income. One can find many mud quarry of *Rato Mato* (red mud which has been used to paint houses in rural area), *Kamero* (white mud can also be used to paint house) inside the forest. There are many people especially the poorest of the poor dependent on such quarry; people collect such mud, limestone etc. from the forest and make money by selling it in the market. Forest also helps training many local carpenters; they collect timbers from the forest, use it to make furniture and make money after selling it in the market. *Babiyo*, a kind of grass used for making ropes, booms etc. is another forest product available in this particular forest. People collect it, make it either broom or rope and use it for domestic purpose or sell it in the market to make money. Likewise, *Khar* is another forest product like grass available in this area by which people either make broom-stick or to cover the buildings, cottages, sheds, hovels etc. Some inhabitants collect *Khar* do its business also to survive in the society.

Another meaning of the forest for this community is about medicine. Most of them use the forest a source of medicinal plants instead of going to the health center; they use *Banmara* instead of Dettol or other antiseptic if there is small injury; they use *Aingeru* if some one is suffered from Panyele or Jandis; they use gum of *Aak* if one have tonsil; they use gum of *Sallo* tree or turpentine if there is fracture in any bone.



Lastly, locals find some ritual and spiritual association of them with the forests. All most of them believe in forest deities as they offer Pooja to Bhumedevi. If there is no rain in the season, whole of the villagers go to pray Sansari Devi who is believed to be in the forest. Aitabare is another deity associated with forest who prefer the pray only on Sunday. Both, Bhumedevi and Aitabare temple are there inside the CFG area.

Again, Tamang community especially has more association with forest as they are only the community in the village who cremate their dead body inside the forest. They name the forest as Chihan Danda and use it as cremation plot.

Change Brought after the Implementation of Community Forestry

There is no substantial change about the number of households; social composition etc. before and after the concept of community forest came. Neither the land composition has changed in the village. But we can witness some major change in the society in terms of using the forest products. Before the community forestry, local inhabitants had only access to grass. But people had to wait a particular day for fire wood and grass also. To get even a single tree for timbers while constructing a new house, people had to go to the then Village Panchayat, local body of the government for its approval. If one needs more than a tree, he/she had to go to District Forest Office (DFO) for approval. As there was no transparency, more interesting fact was that it would not be sure to get approval even after knocking the door of DFO. In this situation, elites and people with power who are familiar with the modus operandi of the different lyres of government institutions could be the only beneficiaries of the forest though the real needy are the people from lower economic and social background.

As forest user communities are given the forests to protect, manage and use today, one can find a rapid transformation within the users themselves in terms of their assertion and empowerment; it is due to the role and responsibility which has to be performed by the community in general and member in particular. Today, one need not go to any government authority to knock its door for any of the forest related problem; there is a established rule how to get firewood, how to get timber and other woods if need. If one meets the conditions provisioned by the constitution of the FUG, he/she get the benefit locally without any hindrances. Generally working committee of FUG is capable to solve many problems locally; if there is special situation or serious thing to be decided; meeting of the general body of FUG settles the problem.

Talking about the access about the marginalized section of the community to the decision-making body of FUG, what is witnessed is that they are more assertive than that of so-called mainstream. Though there are some elites active in the FUG, the households from marginalized community are always in majority while there is meeting related to forest. Sharing his past and present experiences, Krishna Prasad Pyakurel, the founding chairperson of Shree Jalpa Community Forest Group says, "Only few Tamangs and Magars used to attend the meeting in the past when they had no idea that this FUG could take every decision related to forest management and utilization. Women hardly attend the meeting in the past. We used to see them in jungle during such meetings so that they could collect needful from forest without hindrances in the absence of the members of forest community. Today most of them come to the meeting, submit their demands formally and takes the benefit of the forest as much as possible. They now know that there is no need of thieving something from the forest; it can be easily

available. We provide enough firewood for individual while performing their rites and rituals; we provide enough timber and trees if one has suffered from any kinds of tragedy. We can mobilize small grant for development work also as we have a good balance in bank which is also the earning of the forest. That is why the FUG has become the focal area of each and every section of the village; one need not go far away from the FUG to see local level politics today. It is the contribution of the new forest policy of the government. We are also happy with the policy as we managed to have a heavy forest even after meeting the forest related basic need of each and every members of the community."

In summary, Community forestry program has not only helped managing and utilizing the forest but also empowered the people especially the marginalized section of the village. As they are keen to take part the meeting of FUG, they started learning how to approach something to other; how to be articulate etc. It is really like a training center to those who has less exposure and network forum to those who has been leading the institutions for a long. ▢

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Ms. Indra Adhikari, a Nepali national, is working towards Ph.D. degree as SAARC fellow at Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. Previously she was associated with Nepal Center for Contemporary Studies (NCCS), Kathmandu as research associate. She has contributed dozens of articles to journals and local newspapers on gender, democracy, civil-military relation, conflict and other socio-political issues.



Glossary

Abbreviations of the names of organisations or groups, whose name appear in this publication

ABSS	Adivasis Banihar Sakti Sangathan, working for rights of Adivasi forest life and its education in Bilaspur district, Chhattisgarh	LEISA	Low External Input and Sustainable Agriculture, network for rights of poor farmers and sustainable farms in Tamil Nadu
ASM	Adiwasi Samta Manch, an Adivasi women led organisation, running an Adivasi news agency and forest rights campaign in Bastar, Chhattisgarh	NAAlliance	National Adivasi Alliance, a network of groups working for rights & self-rule of Adivasis in India
BKS	Budakattu Krishigara Sangham, an Adivasi led organisation for Adivasi rights to land, forest and farming in Kodagu and elsewhere in Karnataka	Parivartan	organisation working for rights and self-rule of Adivasi communities in Bastar, Chhattisgarh
CAFAT	Collective For Action Of Forest Adivasi In Tamil Nadu is a network of groups working for rights and self-rule of Paliyan Adivasis in Tamil Nadu	PAD	Participatory Action for Development, NGO working for participatory development in Tamil Nadu
CORD	Coorg Organisation for Rural Development works as the secretariat of the National Adivasi Alliance and for Adivasi rights in general, based in South Karnataka	PEAL	People's Education for Action and Liberation, working for the empowerment of the marginalised communities in Tamil Nadu
CEDA TRUST	Working for emancipation and development of the marginalised and over-exploited people in Tamil Nadu and for social change through empowerment and collective approach for egalitarian society	SADED	South Asian Dialogues on Ecological Democracy, a network for Ecological Democracy
DoE	Dialogue from Other End, a project for Adivasi dialogue in Bastar, Chhattisgarh	Save the Forest Movement	Jarkhand - Adivasi led movement for saving the forest in Jarkhand
Devote Trust	Adivasi women led organisation working for the up-liftment, rights, culture and self-rule of Adivasis in Kandhamal in Orissa for <i>a just, sustainable, collective and participatory society</i>	Seba Jagat	Organisation working for rights and livelihood of Adivasis in Kalahandi, Orissa
Disha	an Adivasi led organisation for tribal rights, self-rule, culture and education in Bastar, Chhattisgarh	Siemenpuu Foundation	
JJVS	Jagran Jan Vikas Samiti, working for Adivasi rights against displacement and for indigenous herbal healing in Udaipur, Rajasthan	Sinfpad	Southern Initiative NGO Forum for <i>Participatory Development</i> ; network in Southern Tamil Nadu
JJBA	Jarkhand Jangle Bachao Andolan = Save the Forest Movement, Jarkhand	TAFSC,	Tribal Associations for V Schedule Campaign; network of NGOs working for Adivasi in Tamil Nadu
Judav	Organisation for rights of Adivasis, their culture and ethos of self-rule in Jarkhand	TAAK	Tamilzhaga Adivasi Ammaipukalin Kootamaipu - Federation of Adivasi People's movement in Tamilnadu
		TNEC	Tamil Nadu Environmental Council, an advocacy campaign network with 600 associate organisations in Tamil Nadu
		VK	Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam, 'Earth is one Family' forum for comprehensive democracy
		VRDP	Village Reconstruction Development Project, working for the rights of Adivasi communities

Glossary of other words

Adivasi	A hindi word referring to the original or earlier inhabitants or pre-inhabitants of an area; 'people who live in an area without beginning'. These autochthonous people, many of whom have been called also 'forest dwellers', have remained so far much less determined by the mainstream - Hindu, Tamil, Muslim, Christian, etc. - cultures. They are particularly numerous in the Indian states of Orissa, Chattisgarh, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, West Bengal. Some of them live also in Karnataka, Kerala and Tamil Nadu. In this publication the word Adivasi is used as a general name for the tribal peoples and their members in these areas. Many of them are also officially recognized by the Indian
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government as "Scheduled Tribes" in the Fifth Schedule of the Constitution of India. (But not all who are recognised as tribals in the Constitution, recognise themselves as Adivasi: for example in many areas of the North-East India, the tribal do not identify themselves as Adivasi)

Denotified Tribes

Tribes who were earlier notified by the British colonial rule as criminals by birth but who were later on 1952 recognised as legal citizens by birth even though in practice many of them are not recorded as citizens as they do not have any official address or residence.

FRA = Forest Rights Act

Scheduled Tribes and Other Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act 2006. It is an Act for 'tribal' type of forest rights, as realised typically by Adivasi life but it covers also other 'forest dwellers' than tribals. See the Act in the website of India's Tribal Ministry: <http://tribal.nic.in/index1.html>

Guni

A name given to the local tribal healers in the process of beginning the JJVS project for mapping out tribal healers in Rajasthan and later also wider in India. The word *Guni* is derived from the Sanskrit word *Guna* which stands for a quality or a set of properties, thus referring to the knowledge and personal properties of a healer to treat various ailments. Due to the linguistic connection to Guna, the word Guni as a name for traditional healers is understandable throughout India.

Guru- shishya parampara

The traditional relationship between guru and his disciple, where knowledge is transmitted in a close manner from guru to his disciple for generations in a lineage.

In-situ conservation

In situ means 'existing', 'on the spot' and 'in-situ conservation' of species means their conservation in their natural environment or location, where they naturally exist

Jari-Buti

traditional herbal medicine; herbal roots and plants

Lakh

Indian term for 100 000. (Sometimes numbers marked also as 1,00,000)

MFP = Minor

Forest Produce Non-timber forest produce. A major source of traditional livelihood for gathering forest societies.

National

Tribal policy

Policy on tribal issues formed by the Government of India for being implemented specifically by India's Ministry of Tribal Affairs

NGO

Non-governmental organization. People's organization.

Non-scheduled areas

Tribal-inhabited areas which are not given official tribal status. On these areas which exist particularly in southern India, tribal rights for land use are weaker than on the scheduled areas.

Panchayat

Local people's governing body, functioning in India in village, block, sub-division, etc. levels

PDS system

Public Distribution System, through which the Government provides delivery of ratios of oil, kerosin, wheat, sugar, household materials for people who need these

PESA Act

Panchayat Raj Extension to Scheduled Areas Act 1996 = Constitutional extension of Panchayat rule to Scheduled tribal areas

Scheduled Tribes

A name given by the Government of India to people recognised as tribals for having also particular rights based on that - regarding for example their tribal cultural autonomy

Shifting cultivation

Such cultivation in the forested hill areas, which clears the (by cutting and burning) the woods from a piece of forestland to cultivate and which is transferred after 1-3 years from such area by clearing a new area from the woods - while letting the forest to grow again wildly to the area cultivated in previous year. It has been used mainly for cultivating indigenous species in forested hill areas which can not sustain settled agriculture.

Tribal

In India, a member /members of tribal groups are also referred to with this word

Tribal welfare schemes

Indian governmental programmes that provide tribal areas with welfare functions and goods such as infrastructure, modern housing, health care and schooling as well as publicly distributed provisions like rice and water

WSF

World Social Forum





Siemenpuu Foundation, Finland
Tamil Nadu Core Team (TNCT) / CEDA TRUST, India
South Asian Dialogues on Ecological Democracy (SADED), India
National Adivasi Alliance (NAAAlliance), India
Friends of Earth International (FoEI), (Forest and Biodiversity Program)
Friends of the Earth Finland
Coalition for Environment and Development