

KONDH COMMUNITY FOOD LANDSCAPE

RARE GLIMPSES



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MY JOURNEY WITH THE KONDH ADIVASI COMMUNITY

And their rich food culture, uncultivated forest foods, and biodiverse native forests as vibrant food-producing habitats began in an unlikely place: the bustling capital mega-city of New Delhi. It was December 2014, and I had the privilege of attending a unique and unforgettable event — the „Forest Foods and Ecology Festival“, organized by Living Farms in collaboration with friends and like-minded organizations. For three days, this festival became a living, breathing celebration of India's indigenous foodways, featuring day-long discussions and a stunning display of over 1,200 varieties of uncultivated forest foods and tribal crafts.

REDISCOVERING FOOD'S TRUE ROOTS

This event shattered my limited understanding of food. Like many city dwellers, I was conditioned to see food as something sterile, wrapped in plastic and bought off supermarket shelves. At the festival, I encountered an astonishing array of wild edible leaves, twigs, flowers, seeds, fruits, berries, vegetables, millets, legumes, pulses, roots and tubers, mushrooms, resins, honey, fish, jungle fowl, insects — and so much more. It was a revelation — a vibrant, living testament to India's rich and diverse bio-cultural heritage, nurtured for generations by the Adivasi Forest communities of this land. It was here that I first met Debeet Sarangi, the founding member of Living Farms, and a deeply committed champion of the Kondh Adivasi people and their way of life. That meeting marked the beginning of an extraordinary journey for all of us.



A TRIBUTE TO DEBJEET-DA AND THE SPIRIT OF THE KONDH LANDS

This book, for me, is not only an exploration of the Kondh community's food culture — it is also a heartfelt tribute to Debyeet-da, whom we lost so suddenly to Covid on May 15, 2021. Debyeet-da was born and raised in the steel city of Jamshedpur, Jharkhand, right in the heart of an industrial belt. As a boy, he witnessed firsthand the systematic destruction of Adivasi communities on the Chota Nagpur Plateau — their ancestral forests cleared for iron-ore and mineral extraction, while the people, custodians of those lands, were displaced and devastated. Even then, as a silent but deeply affected witness, he resolved to stand with the indigenous people — to resist the injustices inflicted upon them in the name of „development.“ Years later, he found his karma-bhoomi in the Kondh lands of Odisha.

What made Debyeet-da's work truly transformative was not only his passion and commitment but his approach — rooted in dialogue, solidarity, and mutual respect. He engaged deeply with the Kondh community, not to impose, but to support them in preserving their cultural heritage and building an alternative development paradigm, one centered on community, social cohesion, and ecological stewardship. His work wasn't charity; it was solidarity in action.

Equally important was his effort to awaken people like me — urban citizens caught in the matrix of modernity, separation, and apathy. He helped us reconnect with the soul of India — her forests, her indigenous peoples, and the ancestral wisdom that still thrives within them. For this, I will always be grateful.



This book offers a rare window into a world that is largely unknown, often misunderstood, and tragically marginalized. Through its pages and powerful visuals, readers are invited into the foodways of the Kondh Adivasi people — from their millet-based polyculture farming systems to the seasonal foraging of wild foods, from traditional preparation methods to the deep understanding of nourishment, ecology, and community that underpins every aspect of their food culture. This is more than just a book on food — it is a reminder of what it means to live in harmony with nature, with each other, and with the spirit of the land. Also, a tribute to those who live in deep, reciprocal relationship with the land



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WHY THIS BOOK?

Continuous interaction with mothers and children from the Kondh community conveyed a clear and heartfelt message — children crave variety in their diets. They enjoy the familiar and comforting flavours of their traditional cuisine: rice, millets, an array of seasonal vegetables, mushrooms, roots, tubers, greens, and, of course, meat. Kondh cooking primarily involves boiling along with sautéing and seasoning with Mahua oil — their preferred cooking medium. Deep frying is not favoured, and jaggery remains their natural sweetener of choice.

An important aspect of their food culture is preservation. The community has mastered the art of drying millets, pulses, mushrooms, greens, tubers, roots, flowers, fish, and prawns to ensure food availability during the lean seasons. They are also experts in making mango pickle and Amba Sada (mango jelly), both of which can be preserved for over a year.

This booklet is the outcome of ongoing dialogue and collaboration with Kondh mothers. It brings together a collection of recipes made entirely from locally grown ingredients — combinations of millets, pulses, and oilseeds. The Kondh women graciously took the time to cook, experiment with variations, and organize seasonal food exhibitions showcasing both cooked and raw foods.

Yet, amidst the richness of their culinary traditions, there is growing concern.

Mothers observed that their children are gradually distancing themselves from traditional foods, drawn instead to junk and fast foods, often because of their appealing packaging and novelty. Another strong influence is the food served in residential schools — mostly white rice and dal — which, while easy to consume, lack the nutritional diversity and depth of flavor found in traditional meals. Many children become accustomed to rice-based meals at school and resist millet-based meals when they return home.

During discussions, mothers shared the following suggestions to revive and sustain their food culture:

WHY THIS BOOK?

- Introduce more variety in recipes
- Develop modified or adapted recipes based on traditional ingredients.
Revive traditional food crops and create recipes that appeal to children in terms of colour, flavour, texture, and taste.
- Educate children and communities about the benefits of chemical-free food and wild edibles, and the harms of chemically grown produce.

They emphasized the need to reconnect children with their native food basket. To that end, this booklet includes several Ragi-based recipes, since Ragi is a favoured millet in the region and may encourage children to rediscover the joy of eating traditional foods.

The photographs in this document were taken by the team at Living Farms and myself. This compilation would not have been possible without the enthusiastic participation of hundreds of Kondh women who contributed their time, knowledge, and skills through food shows, recipe festivals.

I extend my heartfelt thanks to Jyotirmayee Sarang, Rupasi, Bichitra Biswal, Jaganath, and Nibbas for their valuable contributions. Sincere thanks to Ananya and to Reul Emmanuel of Elpeeda Technologies for skilful designing. **I do not consider myself the author of this work, I have simply collected and compiled the wisdom generously shared by the Kondh women.**



Sincerely,
Ms. Buduru. Salome Yesudas
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RAGI LADDU

Ingredients:

Ragi flour: 100 g *Jaggery:* 50 g

Groundnuts: 25 g

Method:

Roast ragi flour to get good smell. Jaggery powder and ground nuts to be mashed together. Add this to roasted flour and press them to laddus. Consume within 2 to 4 days



RAGI HALWA

Ingredients:

Ragi flour : 250 g

Oil : 4 tsps

Jaggery : 125 g

Method:

Add flour to equal measure of water and make a paste, take thick bottom vessel put on live stove, add the flour add powdered jaggery and stir on slow flame, add ghee or oil till the it turns deep brown in colour and oozes out oil, Spread on a plate allow it to cool cut into pieces and serve., We can add dry fruits, nuts, grated coconut etc. as topping



RAGI FRUIT PORIDGE

Ingredients:

Ragi flour: 25 g *Milk:* 100 ml
Jiggery: for taste *Banana* small one
Papaya small piece *Oil:* 1 t spoon
Water

Method:

First, all the fruits are properly washed and mashed (ripe papaya and ripe banana). Milk is poured into a vessel and brought to a boil. Ragi flour is roasted and mixed in water as batter and is added into the boiling milk with constant stirring to prevent lump formation. After that, a spoon full of oil and jaggery are added in the mix. Remove from fire allow cooling add cutting or mashing the fruits into the porridge mix well.



RAGI DOSA

Ingredients:

Ragi flour : 250g
Jaggery : 125g
Oil : as required
Water : as required

Method:

Dissolve jaggery in cold water. Add ragi flour and mix thoroughly to form a batter. Shallow fry small amounts by spreading the batter on a pan. Add a little oil on the sides and cook on both sides.



RAGI VADA

Ingredients:

Ragi flour: 200 g, Curry leaves: a few, Onion: 100 g, Salt: to taste, Oil: for frying, Green chillies: 4.

Method:

Chop onions, chillies and curry leaves. Add salt to Ragi gram flour and mix well. Mix the chopped ingredients. Add water to the flour to make thick dough like paste. Heat oil in a deep pan. When the oil is hot, add small quantities of the dough and flatten it with palms into round shape deep fry till golden brown in colour



RAGI PAKODI

Ingredients:

Ragi flour: 200 g, Curry leaves: a few, Onion: 100 g, Salt: to taste, Oil: for frying, Green chillies: 4.

Method:

Chop onions, chillies and curry leaves. Add salt to Ragi gram flour and mix well. Mix the chopped ingredients. Add water to the flour to make thick dough like paste. Heat oil in a deep pan. When the oil is hot, add small quantities of the dough and deep fry till golden brown in color. It is of irregular shape, soft and crisp.



RAGI ROTI

Ingredients:

Ragi flour: 200 g, *Water:* as required.

Method:

Make a dough mixing flour, salt and water. Flatten out a ball of dough between both the palms on a wooden board. Bake on a hot tawa, followed by heating on direct flame for a few minutes, till the roti is completely cooked.



RAGI MALT

Ingredients:

Ragi flour: 250 g, *Milk:* 250 ml.

Method:

Soak ragi for two to three hours. Tie in a wet cloth and leave until seeds germinate. After germination, dry the seeds and roast slightly. Grind in a chakki into a fine powder. Cook the flour in water and add hot milk. Either salt or sugar can be added depending on the taste.



RAGI THOPA

Ingredients:

Ragi flour: 250 g, *Oil / Ghee:* 4 tsps, *Jaggery:* as required.

Method:

Boil water, add flour and cook till thick. Add oil, jaggery and serve.



RAGI / LITTLE MILLET UPMA

Ingredients:

Little millet: 500 g, *Water:* double the volume of millet, *Greens / Carrots / Any vegetables:* 50 g, *Onion:* 25 g, *Green gram dal:* 250 g, *Green chillies:* as needed, *Oil:* 20 g, *Seasoning seeds,* *Curry leaves,* *Ginger-garlic paste,* and *Salt:* to taste.

Method:

Wash and chop onion, chillies and greens. Clean and wash Green gram dal and soak for half an hour. Take a big clean vessel and heat the oil. Add the seasoning seeds (mustard and cumin seeds), curry leaf, chopped onion, ginger garlic paste, greens and green gram dal. Allow it to fry well, add salt to taste and add water. Cover the vessel with a lid and allow boiling. Wash little millet and pour it in the vessel. Stir well, cover with a lid, and cook to a firm consistency on a steady low flame.



LITTLE MILLET PONGAL

Ingredients:

Small millet: 100 g, *Lentil:* 50 g, *Oil:* 20 g, *Green leafy vegetables (Amaranth):* 25 g, *Seasoning seeds,* *Curry leaves,* and *Salt:* to taste.

Method:

Heat oil. Add seasoning seeds and curry leaf. Allow it to turn golden brown, add double the volume of water for millet and lentil. While the water is boiling add washed dhal, millet and salt. When it is half done add chopped green leafy vegetables cook for another few minutes, serve hot.



FOX TAIL MILLET KHEER

Ingredients:

Fox tail millet: 250 g, Milk: 200 ml, Jaggery/Sugar: 250 g, Cardamom, Cashew nuts: 5–6 pods, Ghee: 50 g.

Method:

Cook Fox tail millet / Fox tail millet in just sufficient amount of boiling water until it is almost done. Boil milk and add to the cooked rice. Add sugar or jaggery and stir well till it dissolves. Add cashew nuts and cardamom fried in ghee. Cook the mixture for 3–4 minutes, and remove from fire. The final consistency should be pouring or dropping. It is usually served hot.



MAHUA LADDU

Ingredients:

Mahua flower: 50 g, Jaggery: 50 g, Groundnut seeds: 15 g, Oil: 5 ml.

Method:

Roast Mahua make powder mix it with jaggery add crushed nuts, elachi powder and press into laddus with hot water for immediate consumption. You can store the mixed powder for 2 weeks and make laddus as required.



HORSE GRAM LADDU

Ingredients:

Horse gram: 250 g, Sugar or Jaggery: 250 g, Cardamom: 2–3 pods, Oil: for pressing laddu.

Method:

Roast horse gram make powder mix it with jiggery powder and add elachi powder and press then into laddus

with hot water for immediate consumption. You can store the mixed powder for 2 weeks and make laddus as required



NIGER LADDU

Ingredients:

Niger: 250 g, Sugar or Jaggery: 250 g, Cardamom: 2–3 pods.

Method:

Roast Niger make powder mix it with jiggery powder and add elachi powder and press then into laddus



JAM WITH GREENS

Ingredients:

Amaranthus, Drumstick, Gogu: 100 g each or a bundle each, Jaggery: 150 g, Little water, Elachi powder: for flavor.

Method:

Wash greens chop and grind to fine paste. Grate jiggery take in a thick

vessel add water just to soak the jiggery, allow boiling and adding greens paste and simmering till it forms a thick paste. Add cardamom powder stir well and store in a dry bottle, good for children and will last for one month at room temperature

INDIGENOUS FOOD SYSTEMS

Indigenous food systems encompass the culturally specific and traditional methods of food cultivation, production, harvesting, processing, distribution, and consumption that Indigenous communities use within their local ecosystems and territories, deeply connected to their history, culture, land, and spirituality. These systems are often holistic, sustainable, and regenerative, relying on diverse local and traditional food sources and knowledge to ensure food security, nutrition, and well-being.

Cultural Significance: Food is intrinsically linked to culture, land, social structures, and spiritual practices.

Local ▢ Traditional Knowledge: These systems rely on deep traditional knowledge about local ecosystems, seed selection, cultivation, harvesting, processing, and preparation.

Holistic ▢ Integrated: They involve complex relationships between land, plants, animals, water, and people, viewed as interconnected and interdependent.

Sustainable ▢ Regenerative: Indigenous food systems are inherently grounded in sustainable and regenerative livelihood practices that promote the long-term health of resources and communities.

Biocultural Diversity: They are a vital component of biocultural heritage, protecting diverse food sources and varieties that are often overlooked by industrial systems.

Food Sovereignty: They empower Indigenous communities to have autonomy over their food systems, deciding on the production, distribution, and consumption of their own food.





FOXTAIL MILLET



RAGI



MIXED FA



LITTLE MILLET



BARNYARD MILLET



JOWAR



BAJRA



CRAB FRY



SNAIL FRY



CRAB CURRY



CRAB FRY



CRAB CURRY



MEAT FRY



MEAT BOILED



**RICE WITH REDANT
EGG**



RED ANT EGG



RED ANT EGG



FISH FRY



FISH FRY



FISH CURRY



FRY



MUSHROOM CURRY



DRY MUSHROOM



MUSHROOM BOILED



**BAMBOOSHOOT
CURRY**



BOILED TUBERS



BOILED TUBERS



BOILED TUBERS



VARIERY



RICE WITH RAJHMAH



RICE WITH GREENS



RICE WITH GREENS



RICE WITH GREENS



RICE WITH GREENS



GREENS



GREENS



GREENS CURRY



GREENS CURRY



IVY GOURD



**LOCAL BITTERGOURD
BOILED**



LOCAL BITTERGOURD



WOOD APPLE



MARKING NUT



MAHUA



RAMA PHAL



KUSUM HAL



JACK FRUIT



TAMARIND



ROSE APPLE



MUSHROOMS



MANGO



GUAVA



BEDI FRUIT



LOCAL FIG



CUSTARD APPLE



BELA



LOCAL GOOSEBERRY



BANYAN FRUIT



AMLA



BARAKOLI



JAMBO FRUIT



KUSUM KOLI



WOOD APPLE



MUSHROOMS



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MUSHROOMS



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MUSHROOMS



**LIVE CRAB FROM RICE
FIELDS**



AMBA SODHA IN MAKING



DEDICATED TO
SRI DEBJEET SARANGI

**who was part of the trials and triumphs of
KONDH COMMUNITY**

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