

INDIGENOUS METHODS OF FOOD GATHERING OF THE HILL-DWELLING KUTIA KANDHA TRIBE IN KANDHAMAL DISTRICT OF ODISHA

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Abstract: Food gathering has been an important economic activity of tribals since prehistoric time. The examples of food gathering among the tribals can be seen in every part of the country. Food gathering is an economic reality for tribals belonging to different cultural types. Hill-dwelling Kutia Kandha (PVTG) tribe of Kandhamal district, in addition to their conventional foods, rice, finger millet and a few popular pulses, they use many types of naturally occurring unusual additional food items such as carnals of mango, wild bean, tamarind, younglings of bamboo and wild mushrooms etc. Detail methods of processing of these items are unique and bitter tasting chemicals (alkaloids) of these food items are removed by repeated boiling and discarding the boiled water.

Key words: Food gathering, Kutia Kandha tribe, Kandhamal, odisha

Introduction:

Food gathering has been an important economic activity of tribals since prehistoric time. In fact hunting and food gathering represents early stage of economic of mankind because in the beginning, man was not able to produce anything. The examples of food gathering among the tribals can be seen in every part of the country. Food gathering is an economic reality for tribals belonging to different cultural types.

The word Kandha means “mountaineer” derived from the Telugu word ‘Ko’ or ‘ku’ signifying a hill or mountain and their hill as ‘Kui Country’ (Kuidina). The Kandha are believed to be from the Proto-Australoid ethnic. Odisha is one of the most fascinating ethnographic State of India. It has been the home of as many as 62 different tribal communities’ 13 primitive tribes, among which the “Kandha tribe” top the list in numerical preponderance. Their native language is Kui or kuvi, a Dravidian language written with the Odia script. These tribals still continue to call themselves as ‘Kui People’ (Kuilaku/Kuinga) because they speak Kui or Kuvi language. Kui and Kuvi are two regional linguistic variations. While Kuvi is spoken by a majority of the Kandha of undivided Koraput, Kalahandi and Bolangir district, Kui is spoken by the Kandha of Kandhamal district. On the basis of the socio-cultural characteristics, the Kandha may be divided into several sections such as; Desia Kandhs, Dongria Kandhs, Kutia Kandhs, Sitha Kandha, Buda Kandha, Pengo Kandha, Malua Kandha, etc. Among the several sections of the Kandha communities, two sub-sections such as Kutia Kandha and Dongria Kandha have been identified as Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs). Desia Kandhs are found in an around Phulbani district, where as the Kutia Kandhs are mostly seen in Gumma, Bilamal, Belghar, jhiripani, Lonkagada and Mundigada Grama panchayats of Tumudibandha block of Kandhamal district. Dongria Kandhs inhabit Koraput district of Orissa.

Kutia Kandha is one of the primitive sections of Kandha tribe. The Kutia Kandhas are adept land dwellers exhibiting greater adaptability to the forest environment. However, due to development interventions in education, medical facilities, irrigation and plantation and so on, they are forced into the modern way of life in many ways. Their traditional life style, customary traits of economy political organization, norms, value and world view have been drastically changed over a long period. Still it has been observed that they have lack of health awareness and following the customary food habits.

Kutia Kandhas are settled mainly in the vicinity of the forest, and is the repository of age-old accumulated experiences, and specific knowledge of indigenous methods of uses of local flora and fauna. These people have adequate knowledge of utilization and management of the natural forest resources surrounding them, for their sustenance. Earlier, the phytodiversity requirements of the Kutia Kandha tribe for their housing and making of agricultural implements are recorded. Besides the crops grown under settled and shifting cultivations, these tribals depend on the phytodiversity to supplement their diet. To make plants and plant parts edible, they use simple indigenous methods of food processing.

The study have been made in Gumma, Bilamal, Belghar, jhiripani, Lonkagada and Mundigada Grama panchayats of Tumudibandha block of Kandhamal district. Most inhabitants are of the aboriginal Kutia Kandha tribe. Many of them were interviewed individually and in groups in all hamlets of the study area. All of them were given equal opportunities to present their views, and information was recorded as data.

Results and discussion

Watered rice is their staple food. Generally the Kutia Kandhas take meals thrice in a day. In the morning (daisi) they take watered rice (pakali eju/basi eju). After ploughing land they take boiled rice (tila bela eju) during the day. In the evening they take meal (benda eju) with curry (kusa) and in dinner, they take boiled rice (nadangi eju) or (pala) with curry (kusa). They take seasonal cereals, pulses and vegetables like maize (joalaka), mustard (sarsa), Kandul (kanga), Jhudunga (jhudangakasa), Beans (sainga) green leaves (kusa), mushrooms (kutka) etc. which are cooked and consumed. Sometimes they eat non-veg items like fish curry (minnga- kusa), chicken (kajuunga), mutton (ada unga), and the flesh of wild pig (braha unga). They are very fond of different liquors (kalu) such as mahua liquor (irpi kalu) and juice from sago-palm (mada kalu/ sarta kalu) and date palm (kajuri). Mahua liquor (irpi kalu) is used as medicine and also as ritual offering to appease deities

(penu) and ancestors (pideri penu) in different ritual and festive occasions. They also chew (dua) and smoke (kaheli) tobacco. Time of collection and uses of plants species by the tribals from natural resources to supplement their food are given (table).

The indigenous methods of processing of different food items are as follows:

Table 1. Food items of Kandha tribe with collection time and uses

Food items	Time of collection	Time of uses
Mango carnals	May, June	July to October
Tubers	Except summer	All seasons
Khursa (Wild bean)	February	September, October
Mahua flowers	March, April	July to October
Kardi(bamboo)	July, August	Rainy season
Mushrooms	July, August	Rainy season

Mango carnal:

During May and June, mango stones (seeds) are collected, dried and buried in a pit. On a rainy day, these are taken out of the pit. Further, the endocarp is broken and the carnal is pounded into fine pieces with the help of an axe, knife or stone. To wash off the astringent and bitter taste, pounded carnal pieces are kept in a bamboo-basket covered with a piece of cloth and kept on a flowing stream. After 24 hrs, the basket is taken out from the stream, sun dried and the carnal pieces are pounded repeatedly with a wooden mortar and pestle to fine powders. Carnal powder is kept future in a running stream to get rid of any trace of remaining bitterness. It is so arranged that waterfalls on the face of the basket covered with a piece of cloth, from a height of 06-1.5m. Sometimes, they use a leaf-sheath of banana to make the water falling from a height, for a pressure generated from the waterfall. Powder is further sun dried and stored till consumption in the following rainy season. These are cooked with rice in place of the powder of any minor millet as the finger millet, etc. Sometimes, cakes are prepared directly from mango carnal powders.

Sago palm (Salap):

The slender pith of the old plant, which does not produce sap any more for liquor preparation, is cut into small pieces and sun dried. The dried pieces are pounded in wooden mortar and pestle to fine pieces. Further, powder is sieved and the grinding is repeated with the help of stone grinders till fine powder is obtained. Cakes are made from this powder, which is boiled with enough water for consumption. Sometimes, pieces of stem are cooked with meat for a characteristic state of the plant.

Tamarind (tentuli):

Tamarind Seeds (tentuli monji) are collected, roasted and finally pounded in wooden mortar and pestle to get rid of seeds coats. Further, the obtained carnals soaked in water overnight before making fine pieces with the help of a stone mortar pestle. These are taken raw or stored after sun drying. The powdered carnals are cooked with rice, similar to finger millet powder.

Mahua flowers (Mahul):

Wild flowers dried under sun and are stored for further use as food. Dried flowers are soaked in water, rubbed to separate the outer flower skins, boiled till water gets totally dried up and stored for consumption.

Bamboo (Kardi):

Shoot tips of youngling bamboo collected, sliced into pieces are called *Kardi*. These pieces are dipped in water for a day for fermentation and consumption. After a day of fermentation, the bitterness is washed off and further cooked. It is also sometimes pounded in stone mortar and pestle and sun dried. It is locally called as *Handua*, which is taken as a curry throughout the year. It is also used as a medicine against any digestive problem, particularly against constipation.

Wild bean (Khursa):

Wild bean-like seeds of the plant are collected from the forest and many a times, the plant is cultivated. During processing, the seeds are boiled in water 5-7 times to wash off the toxic contents presented in seeds. The processed seeds are boiled with dried *mahua flowers* and taken as food. It was recorded that without repeated changing of water during seed boiling, intoxication could occur after consumption, sometimes leading to many severe health problems.

Wild tubers, Kanda or Alu (tubers):

They collect a number of tubers from the surrounding forests by digging it by the help of crowbar (sabalo) and spade (kodala), all belonging to genus *Dioscorea*. These are bono kanda, kabra kanda, kanta kanda, great yam or khamba kanda, karadi kanda, kasha kanda, pani kanda, pita kanda, tunga kanda, and barahikanda baraha kanda. Some of these tubers are sweet in taste like potatoes and others taste bitter. Sweet tubers are boiled directly and the bitter tasting ones are roasted in fire, for consumption.

Mushroom or chhatu:

A number of wild mushrooms are collected from the forest are taken as curry. Mushrooms are also dried and preserved for use through the year. The tribes have an indigenous knowledge in selecting the edible ones from the poisonous ones.

Wild fruits:

The hill-dwelling tribals gather many wild fruits, mango, almondette or char, jackfruit, bael, amla, banbhalia, java plum or jammu, custard apple, kendu and kurdu, udumbara or dimiri, and berries like wild jujube or buro, jackal jujube or kanto koli Wight, etc., which vary with the season.

Wild leaves:

Many a leaves, hog-weed or punarnava or puruni saga neem, kunjel, karbusar or bhader, kanchanar or kuler, sambarkhai, ludru, red kanchanar or aamti, kena, dronapushpi or gubi chakramardar or chakunda, sunsunia, dahipatru Diels, nili, girul, fanji or muti, etc. are collected and cooked at home, which supplement their food.

Conclusion

Food gathering is one of the oldest means of tribal livelihood. These hill-dwelling tribal are using wild produces since time immemorial, as their conventional food items. These people have developed simple and conventional indigenous technology of food processing and associated practices. For them it is a conventional and time-tested food practices. These wild fruits, leaves, tubers and other forest produces make them resistant to different diseases and also enable them to develop stamina to work hard in the field. The wild edible plants constitute an important source of diet of aboriginal tribals. Forest provides a variety of nutritious food stuff as edible, but they also relish. Such resources are important for sustaining the livelihood of these aborigines.

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