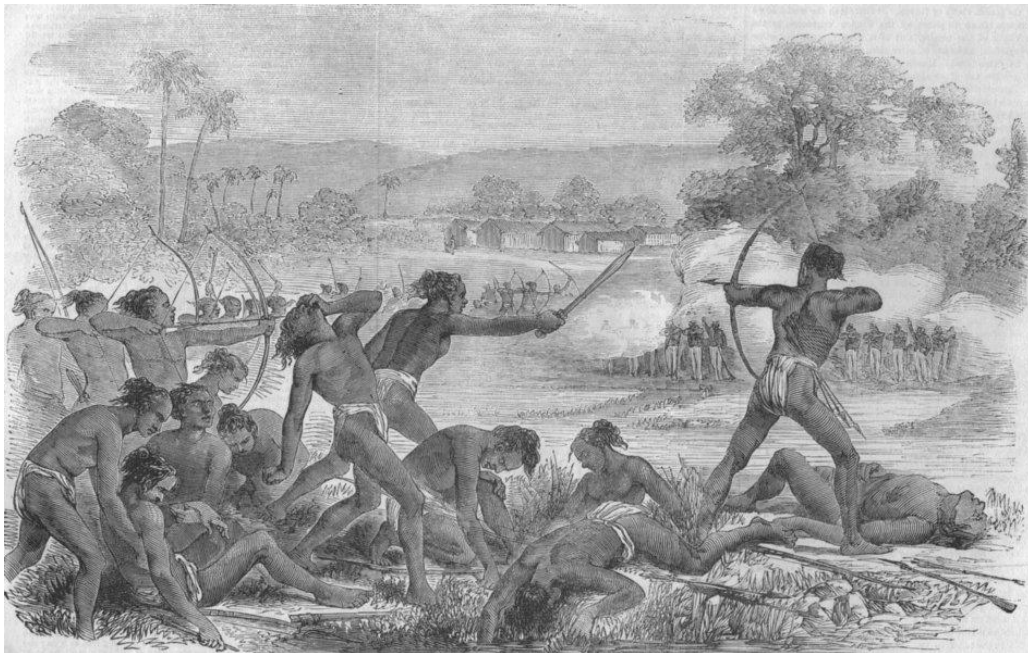


The Koya Tribe of Telengana and Andhra Pradesh

By Vanshika Bhatnagar

GODAVARI AND GOND COUNTRY

The Godavari river is one of the longest rivers in India, second only to the Ganga. A serpent of a river whose mouth resides in Maharashtra, slithers through Telengana, Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Odisha. Her tail touches the Bay of Bengal, where it meets with the ocean after cutting across the vast breadth of the country. If divided into three halves, it is in and around the banks of the third portion that we find the Koya adivasi's of India. The Koyas are subdivided from the overarching Gond tribe, one of the largest ethno-linguist groups of people in the country. It is believed that their original land was Bastar in Chhattisgarh and that they migrated towards the Godavri basin and based themselves there. In the days of yore, the Koya's were known as a warrior tribe, their legends and history are flooded with stories of valour and rebellion against kings and colonizers whom they fought fiercely. Sammakka and Sarakka are a Koya mother-daughter duo who fought against Telugu rulers in the 13th century. The biggest tribal fair in the nation, and one of the largest gatherings of people in the world, is the *Medharam Jatra*, in which these tribal goddesses are worshipped. In the 1870s, the last Queen of Malkangiri, Orissa, led her extraordinarily large battalion of Koya warriors against the encroaching British troops. At around the same time, the Rampa rebellion of 1879 stirred up near Visakhapatnam, caused by an Act by the Madras government (then British India) which deemed toddy-tapping illegal and levied taxes on the indigenous palm wine, an attempt to cripple the community which is so dependent on the liquid. Perhaps one of the most important elements of Koya food culture, this Act was unacceptable by the tribals, who ignited a rebellion which spread like a forest-fire across the region, engulfing one hill tribe after the other. To picture their bows & arrows against the British's guns & cannons in a crossfire over a land they have roamed for centuries is a sight to behold, one that epitomizes the indomitable spirit of the Adivasis.



The Santhal rebellion of 1855, from Illustrated London News

THE TALE OF TODDY

Many sun and moonrises ago, on an early morning, a thirsty parrot perched itself on a date palm tree and pecked on its fruit. A milky liquid began to drip from it, which formed a puddle on a stone below. Some folks witnesses this cloud like puddle, but none dared to bring it to their lips and taste it. Finally, one courageous man cupped his hands and drank the liquid, only to be overcome by its sweetness. This is the tale of how palm wine became the favourite drink of the adivasis of south india, favoured even over the rice beer which is loved all over the north eastern and central tribes. A man with a pot (*burra*) hanging from his waist and along with two daggers (*kachapadeka*) on his belt will hug the bark of the tree and climb it, collecting the sap which has been stored in the bamboo vessels he'd placed there a few days ago. One can see this happening in the wee hours of dawn, in the blazing afternoons or pink-skied evenings.



The toddy collected in the morning is richer in fructose and hence sweeter, preferred by women and children, whereas the one collected in the afternoons is more fermented and has a tinge of sourness, and is consumed by men. Either way, a slight aftertaste of coconut water rises on the palate after a sip of Tadi.

From marriages and funerals to festivals and poojas, toddy is part of Koya people's daily lives as well as celebrations. *Gujdi* is when community drinking takes place, folks of both genders and all ages drink the wine in leaves from palm trees. It is also a ground for the pollination of cultural stories which make their way from ancestry to posterity. The spiky and durable leaves of the tree are dried and used to make the roofs of their houses, utensils and strong ropes. The young fruit of

the sugar palm tree, also known as ice apple, is found in the coastal towns, a cooling agent in the summer months also packed with rich antioxidants, carbs, fibres and calcium. The young shoots, called Taiga in Telugu, provide starch and are useful for energy when food is scarce. The oil from the Tadi nut is used in cooking meat, which increases the shelf-life of the dish and keeps it from getting spoilt. The joy of drinking fresh toddy isn't just in the energizing, sweet nectar of the fruit, but also the flavours of the freshly plucked leaf it is consumed in, which both create a zesty experience in one's mouth.

PODU : FARMING IN THE FORESTS

The second Rampa rebellion took place in 1922 under the leadership of Telugu revolutionary Alluri Sitaram Raju due to the ban on podu agriculture. Podu, also known as swidden, shifting, *jhum* or slash and burn agriculture, is one that has been invented by humans since the Neolithic age. In it, a patch of forest is cleared by felling trees and set aflame. Wood ash is an excellent fertilizer, rich in potassium, phosphorus and magnesium. The ash, mixed with rain, enriches the soil with required nutrients. Crops, mostly cereals, are planted in the rugged, hilly landscapes where *jhum* is practised. Then a fallow period of over one or two decades is given, where the soil renews itself for the process to recur, done by the tribes or their next generations. Today this slow-agriculture method is looked upon as primitive and detrimental to the land by the state authorities as compared to modern agriculture practices. Most tribes were originally hunter gatherers, since the advent of agriculture was the stepping stone to humans leaving their nomadic lifestyles to gradually settle down. So even when the adivasis began to practice agriculture, it was this rotational form of agriculture that they undertook. Living in the forests since forevermore, the tribals know how to care for their land because of their profound relationship with it. The Baiga tribe of Madhya Pradesh revere the earth as Dharti Maa and consider it a sin to tear the breast of their mother with a plough¹, and hence are against settled agriculture. *Jhum* cultivation uses minimal implements, often the procedure is to dig a hole and plant maize, millets or cassava in it. The forest isn't a place to be cleared to cultivate fields. It is the lifesource of the Adivasi's. Hence they would practise this impermanent form of agriculture on the hilly forests, where the soil wasn't as rich as the fertile plains below. Today, the roads which lead to Chinturu in the East Godavari District of Telengana, are bordered on both sides by eucalyptus plantations or red chili ones, both cash crops, since the former is used in paper factories of Badrachalam and the latter is exported abroad and used in cosmetics. But occasionally one sees a small patch of chopped tree-trunks standing on whitish-grey soil, ash settled on mud, awaiting the rains so that some holes can be dug and crops be planted. This practice is now one of the past, one the Koyas reminisce about with nostalgia in their songs. Most of them today are agro-labourers rather than landowners of the fields, a land which they were once protectors of.

¹ Culture of the Baiga People published on 23rd August 2018 on Sahapedia.org by Riddhi Pandey



KOYA SETTLEMENTS

Major Koya settlements are found in Khammam, Malkangiri and Warangal districts. The village of Kommugudem in the Chinturu District is surrounded by groves of palm trees towering over fields, with the Papikonda (*konda* means hills in Telugu) range in the distance.



In their villages stand houses with huge roofs, which look like a big magician's hat is placed on a small child's head. These are often covered with dry palm leaves, whose brown is given life by the light green creepers of the bottle gourd vine which climb up till the tips of the roofs or wrap themselves around the boundary of the house.



The bottle gourd, known as *sorakaya* locally, is an indispensable vegetable for the Koyas. Apart from being prepared as a vegetable curry and pickle, its most vital role comes when it is hollowed and dried and forms a strong shell, which acts as a vase to carry country liquors like the frothing Tadi or distilled Mahua wine. This vessel is known as Burra, and found dangling from the waists of every man who climbs a palm tree to collect tadi or store honey or carry water. In some pockets of the region the shell is also being used to make string and wind instruments. The Gutti Koya also mix the oil from the gourd seeds with castor oil to be used as a cure for headaches. The pulp, on the other hand, is a cooling agent, used for blood pressure, indigestion, cough as well as an antidote for poison.



The Koyas are fond of decorating their homes as well as their bodies, but these decorations aren't merely superficial and stem from the soil of reason. Varying from village to village, some have their mud walls spattered with designs made by liquid rice flour being flung by jerky movements of the hand. Others may have influence from Gond art of pointillism and colours. Some make complex circular patterns which vary with every day and occasion at the center of the room or before the doorway of the house. The last kind, widely known as *muggu* in Telugu, hold deep ritualistic significance. They are to be made only in the mornings or at twilight, welcoming or bidding farewell to the sun. By using rice flour, it also feeds the ants, birds, and rodents, starting the day on a generous note. Having reverential qualities too, some make *muggus* near the chullas before cooking and the platform where they pray. They are only to be made by women, who stand with their knees parted and back bent from their hips, an act of humility as well as deep concentration. The symmetry in the design is meant to show a sense of cosmic equilibrium, one inspired by Shiv-Shakti's energies. Practiced in most south India states, some say it's origin is from Tamil Nadu, where it is called *kolam*. *Kolam* is also the name of a Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group (PVTG) found in the same region who make similar designs, but the correlations between the tribe's name and the artform is still irresolute. In the Koya language, these designs are called bottku, but because Telugu is encroaching upon their linguistics, these niche ethnic names are being forgotten.



Rice flour is also part of the making of the local rice beer made by the Koyas, called Landa, whose process varies from the Bodo's Jou or the Central Adivasi's Handiya.

A Lesson in Landa-making

First the paddy seeds should be taken one kg and washed clean. Take the washed paddy in a bowl and pour water till the paddy seeds are submerged. The paddy seeds should be kept in water till the sprouts appear. After three or four days the seedlings germinate well. Now the sprouted seeds should be dried in the sun for a whole day. Grind the dried rice grains with the help of a traditional mortar grinder. Put the grinded paddy seed flour in a landa basket. This Landa basket is made in the shape of a cone with bamboo wood specially made for the preparation of Landa. Put grinded flour in a half portion of the basket. Take a container or big pot with a large muzzle to fit the Landa basket. Half fill the container or large pot with water. Place a flour-covered Landa basket on top of this large pot. Water vapor comes out of the pot by heating the large pot well. The rice flour is boiled in a Landa basket on top of the large pot by water vapor. Put the cooked flour in another large pot and add enough water (5 litres) to the cooked floor. It can be stored for up to a day. A day later the fermented liquid in the pot is ready to drink with a sour taste. This liquid is called Landa, and is one of the liquors celebrated by the Koyas alongside Mahuli (Mahua wine) and Tadi/Toddy (Palm wine).

Koya houses usually don't stand alone. Because the animals they domesticate are essential to their daily lives and livelihood, they build special shelters for chicken, goats, cows and pigs. Hens in gestation periods are found resting in baskets hanging from the fence. Goats walk down a ramp from their split bamboo houses traditionally made on stilts to keep them safe from preying wild animals.



Kola-pakka or hen house



The goat-shelters, called *meka meda*, are usually built by weaving bamboo and covering the roofs with dry palm leaves. Seeing one being made by the wattle method, a man weaving the bamboo and an old woman bringing the bamboo split from one side to another, epitomised the truth of teamwork on which these tribes strive. Everyone has a role to do, and one ought to fulfil their duty in order for the next task to be done. It is a system which must be followed and respected for the smooth functioning of not only the home but also the community as a whole.

“*Jaanwar aur zameen hi humara sabh kuch hai*”, says a villager with a smile. “Our animals and our land are our everything”. They have shelters for their animals, as for their grain, it is stored

often in overhead granaries in the attics under the roofs. A ladder leads up to the dark space, where huge bamboo baskets, called *gummi*'s, filled with great white millets, paddy, dry chillies or kolad (urad) dal are stored. Great millet was the predominant staple of the Koyas in the past. The tribal king of their platters. But because it grows at a slower pace than most crops, it was replaced to keep up with the new world's swift needs. But in recent times, because it is a powerhouse of a cereal, brimming with nutrition and also because its price has surged lately, it is making its way back into their food culture.



From a dark corner, two glassy eyes glisten towards the home-owner. A feline body gracefully jumps on a jute bag full of grain and gets comfortable for the night. “She takes care of the rats, in case we have any”, smirks the man. They certainly have a *jugaad* for any challenge. Jawa, a porridge, is being prepared in the kitchen below the attic. It is made by grinding millets with some rice or dal or maize and is the staple food of the Koyas. It is enjoyed from infants to old-folk as wholesome meals which also keep them from dehydration, cools the body and eases joint pains. It is also enjoyed with the tanginess of tamarinds as a rendition in the village of Sinta Kunta, with *sinta* translating to tamarind in Koya, because of the abundance of the tamarind trees in the dusty village. This Koya settlement is a bit different from the others. The people living here have only been so for a few decades. They originally were from a village called Sukuma in Chhattisgarh, but after they were driven out because of clashes between Naxals and local authorities, they arrived here, where their ancestors had planted tamarind trees as relics, as breadcrumbs for them to follow.

Cattle also hold a sacred place in the lives of Koya. On sultry afternoons, one finds men or young boys in *ganji*’s (vests) with a thin cane in their hands, dust rising from their feet as well as the hooves of the many cows and bulls they follow on their pastoral duties. The word in the Koya language for wealth, *chom*, also means cattle, because in the Koya society a person without cattle has no status. During the Nava Khaai (New Harvest) pooja, the cattle and ancestors are first fed since “the cattle was moving ahead of the man when sowing took place and was essential in planting the grain we so gratefully harvest”, says Nehru ji, a resident of Bhadrachalam, who aspires to open *ghotuls* and revive Koya culture amongst his people.



The roles of cattle herders are more than they seem... by walking to new and faraway places they also act as explorers, finding new water holes, searching for footprints of animals for hunts, observing and trying herbs and roots for medicinal purposes. It is a rite of passage for many boys and some take it up as young as six to eight years.

Towering over some houses one will see sticks pierced with strips of meat, mostly *bakka chiyya* or beef, as a method of preservation. Some turmeric and chilli powder is coated on it before it is hung on a bamboo pole and dried for 4-5 days in the sun. During monsoons, this outdoor practice is turned into an indoor one, with the strips being placed above the *chulla* for the same amount of time. The dried meat can be stored for 40-45 days and is usually consumed within 30 days.



A KONDA-REDDY IN KUTURU

Kuturu is the local baazar held once or twice a week in Adivasi areas. Since the concept of money wasn't necessary for them before, these markets were a place for barter. Now they are held in convenient places, midpoints between many Koya villages for the exchange and sale of surplus grain and vegetables, forest produce, handicrafts, amongst other things. They are held from early morning to mid-afternoon, after which one sees the women, who are predominantly the vendors, cover their heads with their saris and walk homewards.

In one corner of the makeshift market, a woman will sit with a large steel pot in which she will serve Tadi to passing women and men in plastic cups, those who have beads of sweat trickling from their foreheads. Under the shade of colourful polyester sheets, a woman will showcase all possible varieties of fish and eels found in the nearby region, all dried, some still with the petrified look on their faces from the moment they were caught. An old man looking bored will sit in front of a hill of dried tobacco leaves and display some handmade cigars he rolled earlier in the day. Vegetables like tomatoes, gourds, bringals and chillis brighten up the marketplace. One man who stands out is a moustached man in a loincloth, a long machete tied on his waist. Even though older than most, his thighs and arms are robust with muscle. The other tribals also look at him as if he is a rare occurrence as he buys a shirt from the textile shop, a packet of Marie biscuits under his arm and a cigar under his left ear. "He is a Konda Reddy", says the woman selling Tadi. "They hardly come to the baazar, or even to the plains. They stay in the deep interiors of the jungles, a three-day journey inwards, accessible only on foot. They mistrust everyone, from the government to even other tribal people. Really on the margins of society... even tribal society." After buying some vegetables and cigars, he walks towards the woman for a glass of Tadi on this hot day. He will need it, it is a long, long way back home.

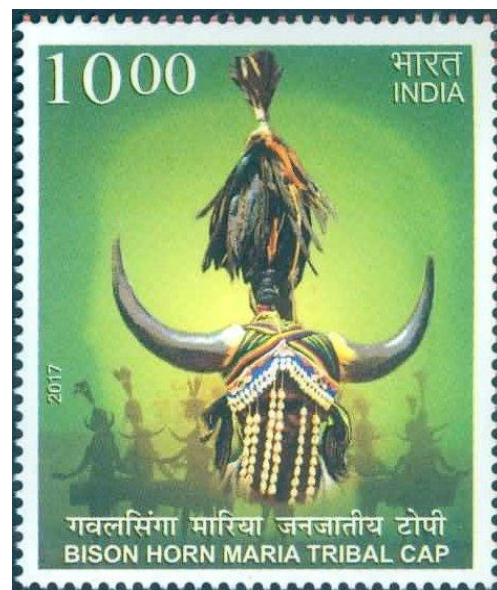


THE DANCE AND HUNT OF THE WILD BISON

The two beasts' eyes are interlocked as they slowly move in circles in anticipation of a predatory pounce from either side. They yowl and growl, furrow their brows, their eyes with a glint of madness, attempting to intimidate their opponent. Suddenly one will lower his head, which has two sharp horns emerging from it, and charge at the other, a cry escaping his mouth. The pride of peacocks dancing around them are feeling the tension, the apprehension, and their movements grow frantic too. The enemy, alert on his heels, will dodge him at the very last moment and run to where his opponent was. The dangerous

dance continues as they circle each other once more... a dance from which only one emerges victorious.

What is described here isn't a scene between animals, but one between the Kommu or Perma dancers of the Koya tribe, where the men re-enact two bison's in a head-on battle, with elaborate headdresses, and the women put peacock feathers in their hair and dance around them. The wild bison or the Indian Gaur is one revered by tribes of the Godavri region, from Koyas to the Bison Horn Marias. A hill range is also named after the brawny beast called the Bison Hills, where the Kondareddy's reside. In these hills, the gaurs are the rulers of the jungles, feared and respected by the people and animals alike, and hence, whoever brings the creature's head is believed to be the hero, the Hercules of the village.



Imitation of animals is practiced in folk dances across the country. In the Bodos of Assam's Bagurumba dance, the women sway their arms like butterflies. In regions of Rajasthan, the Kachchi Ghodi dance imitates horses, in Orissa, men paint their bodies in yellow and black stripes for the Baagh Naach in order to actualise a tiger. As for the Perma dance, the men, carrying huge dhols hanging from their shoulders, whose drumskin is made of cow hide on one side and goat hide on the other, wear elaborate headdresses made out of the horns of the bisons they hunt. T.S. Elliot once wrote that, "All art emulates the condition of ritual. That is what it comes from and to that it must always return for nourishment". The ritual of hunting the beast in the forest is re-enacted for the women and children, who hold curiosity for the dramatic encounters held in the deep canopies of the jungles. Men also wear tooth-shaped pendants around their neck, which were previously the teeth of the beasts they hunted, while women, who resemble the onlooking peacocks, tie red ribbons around their forehead and stick in long peacock feathers in them. These decorations, although having aesthetic appeal, also act as camouflage during the real hunt. The method to capture the bison, a hunt which can prove fatal too, is to climb a strong tree and spot the animal, which is followed by a bow and arrow chase.



The bison horn headdress is an emblem of respect, strength and valour. The word, Gaur in Hindi translates to the same: respect and purity. "Have you seen the Indus valley seals? That of Lord Pashupati (King of the Animals)? You can see the bouquet of peacock feathers sitting on the bison horns, the same headdress as ours.", says Nehru ji, indicating how ancient the adivasi culture is.



The Kommu dance is their most beloved dance, one they enjoy performing with their heads held high in pride. It is part of most of their celebrations, from weddings to all their festivals and their large-scale pooja's and mostly, all their happy moments.

PANDUGAS, GOTRAS AND SHIKAARS

The Koya-folk undoubtedly love their food culture, evident in the fact that most of their festivals, or *pandugas*, revolve around grains, fruits, leaves, vegetables and the seasons they flourish in. Some of these are:

1. Paccha panduga - when leafy vegetables like tummi, pachcha, pindi and gangabayal leaves are most abundant. Occur through the months of August to September.
2. Kurmin panduga – From September to November when maize is in the season.
3. Chukkudu panduga – Period of availability of *chukkudu kayalu* (broad beans) from January-February.
4. Thadin panduga- December to April is the period when “Kallu”, which is the alcoholic drink from the fermented sap of the palm tree, is celebrated and relished. Kallu differs from Neera, which is the fresh sap collected from the tree and which is consumed in the first six hours of its collection. Both Neera and Kallu are forms of Tadi.

5.Eppa panduga - Eppa flower, or the famous Mahua, is in its ideal form to consume in its flower wine glory in the month of April-May. It is the only panduga to be celebrated twice. Once, as March comes to an end, when the flowers blossom and are collected from the forests. Then towards the end of April, the onset of May, when they are ready to be alcoholified.

6.Kiker panduga or fish festival- The time of catching fish in the pond, when the fish aren't breeding. (February-March).

7.Mango festival- In either April or May, when the mangoes are ripe, sweet and ready to eat.

These festivals also act as initiation ceremonies for consuming the food, since eating them before their assigned time is considered unholy and inauspicious. The rest of the year is the period for the sowing, breeding and growing of the plants and animals, a time when they must not be disturbed. This displays the innate respect the tribe holds for what they eat and their 'there is a time for everything' philosophy.

This philosophy is also backed by the fact that their folk, origin and clan stories, whose narration can run for days, cannot be recited casually or to anyone. Only during specific festivals or death ceremonies does this passing on of traditional knowledge and wisdom happen from the older generations to the younger ones. Coming back to the pandugas, these food-based festivals are mainly to honour the ancestors and encourage people to eat seasonal food, staying more aligned with the workings of nature rather than manipulating them in-order to serve mankind. No one is allowed to eat a mango before the mango festival, and on the day of the festival, it can only be consumed after being offered to the ancestors first. As Rajendra Prasad Payam ji strolls through a village, he points at a mango tree. , a tribal social activist from Koyagudem, "The vijju gaadu (magic man) might have casted a spell to harm anyone who touches the mango tree before the festival".

Another method of ensuring that an ecological balance is maintained is by the totem which is assigned to each gotra (clan). A totem, in the Adivasi's of India, is usually an animal (and plants), which the clan believes are their ancestors and hence do not consume whatsoever. The Payam gotra, to which Rajendra ji belongs to, cannot consume the tortoise. In this way, their ecospheres are protected from overconsumption along with the fact that each clan worships and respects another species who contributes to their lives.

Bhumi Panduga, or the Earth Festival, marks the beginning of the farming activities for the Koyas, and is a time for ritualistic hunting. The Koyas are keen hunters, using bows and arrows, spears and knives as well as catapults as weapons. Boys are taught from a young age to hunt small birds and animals like wild buffaloes and pigs, rabbits, lizards, herons, and parrots.

*O Spirit of the Hills,
Re relarerela, rerela rela rela.
O Galali, the spirit of the hills,
Bring out herds of Kutra
Bring the herds towards them.
O spirit of the hills
Bring out herds of deer before them
Bring the herds of deer.
O spirit of the hills
Bring out herds of wild pigs
Bring out herds of sambar
Bring out herds of wild buffaloes
Herds of rabbits
Herds of wild goats.*

This song is recited on the occasion of ceremonial hunting during the Bija Panduga or the Seed Festival.²



² Mahapatra, Sita Kant. "Koya Folk Songs : The Social and The Magical." *Indian Anthropologist* 36, no. 1/2 (2006): 141–45.

"In my childhood, we used to go hunting in the jungle for birds, pigs, and other animals with bows made out of bamboo. As I grew up, I was selected at school levels, with my first trial for selection being that of a bamboo bow. My training in the jungle and in childhood made me a better archer, as did my tribal ancestry," says Gondi Marrapa, who is an international level archer and a teacher in an all-girls sports school launched by the Integrated Tribal Development Agency (ITDA) in Kanchanpalle. His excellence in the art took him all over India as well as Greece, Italy and other countries.

Although a senior player, his efforts were forgotten by the authorities, after which he took up his role as a guru for these girls. He still faces problems due to the lack of machinery and untimely payment. He says that no one is taking the responsibility for taking the children to higher competitions, but he feels that it is his duty to pass on his knowledge of the traditional sport, and it is this that keeps him going.

He says he feels very good while shooting. "My focus stays on what I shoot", he says as he takes aim with a bow and arrow at the target with a modern 3-finger grip on a modern bow. He mentions Jawa , Joma, and Ragi were his go-to energy drinks and that's what kept him going through time and the arrows struck just on the side of the main target as little girls from different age groups cheer for him while taking their stance and shooting as he looks at them and corrects their grip. (edit further)



In another institution, 200 kms to its east, in Bhadrachalam, young tribal girls and boys study various subjects, ranging from psychology, philosophy, mathematics and bioscience, in order to receive their BED degrees from a college run by ITDA. They will be future educators of the community, the torch bearers for a lightful future. Rajula Swapna, a student at the institute, whose grandfather back home is the medicine man of her village, is studying bio-science in the college. Armed with both the traditional knowledge by her ancestry as well as a command over modern naturopathy, she has all her weapons sharpened to excel in this study. These students, away from their villages, are also developing a critical eye towards their culture, becoming aware of issues like alcoholism, marriage at younger ages, dropping out of school and open defecation. "The lack of education leads to lesser communication skills. They cannot interact with outsiders because they only understand the Koya language, so the outsiders exploit them. This also leads to them being unaware of the laws and acts of the forest which disempower them as well as the government schemes launched for their empowerment", says Kirti Priya, who's father aspires to open a school in their village.

Polavaram is a village in the West Godavari region of Andhra Pradesh and it sits on the bank of the mighty river, surrounded by the Pappikonda hill range. An under-construction irrigation project called the Polavaram Project undertaken on a national scale by the government of India, is one in the making since its ideation in 1940. The purpose of the project is to channelise water from a surplus source, which is the Godavari, to a deficit one, which is the Krishna River basin. The reservoir's backwaters extend up to Chhattisgarh and Odisha, who suffer as their lands are getting submerged by the project. The governments of the two states have filed a petition to the Supreme Court stating that the project is being taken forward by the union government without necessary permissions from the Environment Ministry. There is also a national park in the area whose biodiversity will be affected by the submerging lands. The Koya tribal folk are being drastically affected by this project, as they are being forced to leave their villages to move into the rehabilitation centres provided by the government. The Chintoor district, whose villages are where most of this data is collected from will be 'non-existent' in a few years, say members of the AADHAR (All Adivasis Duly protecting Human Acts and Rights) Society in Hyderabad. They estimate that 400+ villages will be lost due to this project in which reside either adivasis or farmers. "Even if they are asking us to leave the land our ancestors roamed for centuries, why don't they rehabilitate us in the places which benefit from this project, rather than those dry, garbage lands they are throwing us in?", is a reasonable question raised by the Mr. Hiranya, a fellow member. Displacements like these kill the food culture of the tribes, since their diets, which form themselves depending on the geography or seasons of a place, are forced to drastic and irreversible changes.

Che Guevara's books translated in Telugu are found in Podugu Srinath sir's house, a senior advocate from the Koya community. "Sand is exported from the Godavari's banks to Hyderabad with adivasi's as labourers, and they get paid next to nothing for it." He says that many of the educated tribal folk who make it to high positions in the government enjoy and exploit more than uplifting the community. "They take bribes and allow over-felling of trees". But he is trying to do his part by educating and practising to make more adivasi's aware about the laws, policies and schemes which affect them. There is another storm coming for the Koya tribal-folk, and perhaps they need to

retaliate with another rebellion, just as their ancestors did. But instead of one with bows and arrows, this one seems to use pen and paper as their weapons. The spirit to fight was seen in the defiant eyes of every young student, middle-aged farmer or old educator we came across.



'Ko-' is a prefix found in the names of many tribes, from the Koyas in the Godavari region to the Koli's of Maharashtra or Koch's of Assam-Meghalaya. Mr. Nehru believes that the prefix is derived from the word, 'Kokh', which translates to 'womb' in Hindi and has its roots in the ancient Sanskrit language. "It is our first home, both as individually and as a species", also referring to it in a different sense, of the 'womb of humanity' being caves. The first place early man took shelter in.

The Kachargarh caves, which lie spot at the conjoining state border of Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh and Chhatisgarh, is a place of pilgrimage for the Gond's as a whole. It is believed to be their *utapatti sthaal*, or their place of origin, where they got initiated to the Gondi way of life. Where the children were divided into different clans and assigned specific social roles. During the Panduga's, on nights when they intoxicate themselves on Tadi or Mahua or Landa, they narrate to their children that these are the caves they emerged from. The word '*koyatur*' in Gondi literally means, 'one born of the womb'. Now as these 'people from the womb' are being coerced to leave their lands, being snatched away from the breast of their Mother Earth, there is a mountain unlike any other they have roamed. It is unforgiving in all senses and will take every ounce of their adivasi, raw strength to conquer... yet their journey needs assistance and guidance, like all of our journeys do.

To help Koya adivasi's and petition against the Polavaram Project, you can
