



Ethnobotany of the Kondh, Poraja, Gadaba and Bonda of the Koraput Region of Odisha, India. F. Merlin Franco and D. Narasimhan. D. K. Print-world (P) Ltd, Vadasri, F-395, Sudarshan Park, New Delhi 110 015. 2012. xiii + 254 pp. Price: Rs 1250/US\$ 50. ISBN 13:978-81246-0619-3.

Articulate converting his doctoral thesis into a book, Franco and his supervisor Narasimhan have brought out the phytotherapeutical practices, rituals and habits of Odisha. Primarily based on 6 years of ethnobotanical exploration, this book under review documents the ways in which the selected four tribes from Koraput and Malkangiri districts use, manage, name and classify plant species growing in the region. Pointedly, the title of the book does not include the Malkangiri district. It seems that the authors have used the word 'region' in place of 'district' encompassing the Malkangiri district also (earlier within Koraput district).

Nearly each chapter begins with an apt quote aligned to the chapter heading. Chapter 1 (Introduction) describes the ethnobotany, tribes and communities in national context quoting references from recent past. Chapter 2 (locality, communities and method of study) gives an account of the temporal progression of formation of state as well as delineating the percentage of tribal community and their linguistic affinities. Franco and Narasimhan have justified the taking up of four tribal communities for the study as two each are from the Dravidian (Kondh and Poraja) and Austro-asiatic linguistic groups (Godaba and Bonda). Here, the authors have described the culture, social organization and religion of each tribe taken into consideration. Any digression observed with respect to earlier reports of that region by other ethno-

botanists, they have not hesitated in reporting it. The study has brought out some interesting facts about the socio-cultural depositions of the tribes. However, using the Forest Survey of India (FSI), 2003 data for stating the topographical boundaries seems rather outdated as the latest one from FSI is freely available. In chapters 3 and 4, Franco succinctly lists out the species (210) identified during the field visits and the detailing about each species that too tribe-wise is noteworthy. After explaining about tribal taxonomical system, Francis and Narasimhan have also classified the species accordingly. Contextually, this is the most expedient information provided for future researchers.

Chapter 5 is associated with healing, the involved practices and collection of plants. A revelation he makes is that 'knowledge is largely not common to all communities' though living at very close proximity. It is distinct for each community barring a few exceptions, proving that traditional knowledge is intrinsic and confined within the boundaries. Moreover, he has also performed a comparative analysis (depicted through tables) on the plants tapped by the communities on the basis of taxonomy and its purpose of being used. This elaborates his findings and brings forth the picture in a more clear form.

Forest and Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFP) of the region have been taken up as a separate chapter (6). The community protection system and the penalty imposed on violators have been presented. The documenting of NTFP collected from the region is worth mentioning with the inclusion of grubs of



Bonda women are known for their elaborate ornaments. The more the number of osangoo (neck rings) that a woman wears, higher is her status and pride. Their shaven heads are decorated with colourful beads. The younger generation adopts a blend of modern attire and traditional ornaments.



Xylia xylocarpa – seeds are roasted and consumed.

Rhyncophorus ferrugineus, red ants and winged termites which were not considered as NTFPs in Odisha till now. Reflecting that inventorization of NTFP is one of the key missions undertaken by the MoEF, this book will certainly be an aid to them. In chapter 7 (Agrobiodiversity), Francis assesses the agri-pattern describing the land-use pattern, its management, traditional knowledge, rituals and festivals associated with agriculture. Apparently, the authors have not left a single stone untouched, making this chapter quite holistic. Lastly, chapter 8 (Indigenous technologies) details the method of churning out oils and preparation of liquors traditionally. This short chapter in my opinion could have been merged with another chapter.

Within eight short, but crisply worded chapters suffixed with 111 photographs, Francis and Narasimhan have covered topics on practically all aspects of ethnobotany with veritable sources of references. Similar to good ethnobotanists, the authors have defined the problems, provided background information and offered specific solutions that drive the tribes. All the chapters are well-written, with the information presented in language that is easy to follow. Three missing references in the bibliography, no sequencing of figures in text, replication of captions in figures (figures 12 and 13) are some of the minor mistakes. Otherwise, the book is nicely crafted and useful for ethnobotanists, NGOs and policy planners. In conclusion, it can be said that the tribes of Odisha are enduring people and this book does them honour!

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