

A taste of forest food and adivasi tradition

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Visit Bhopoli village in Palghar district of Maharashtra to de-stress from urban pressures and to go back to nature

Just 80 km from the hustle and bustle of Mumbai, nestled in the foothills of the Western Ghats, lives the indigenous Warli tribe. Every monsoon, after the rice has been transplanted, the women of the house, armed with sickle and stick, venture into the nearby forest to collect forest produce. Tender bamboo shoots, spine gourd (kartol), various types of tubers and roots, different tender leaves, wild mushrooms and fruits from the trees growing in the forest are all brought back. These are then cooked following traditional recipes that have been carried forward from one generation to the other.

In an effort to bring this rich tradition and exotic food to the city dwellers, the Dr M L Dhawale Trust at Bhopoli organises the Phulora festival in August every year. Into its third year, this festival invites people from the city to come to Bhopoli Village in Vikramgad Taluk, Palghar District, Maharashtra, and enjoy a day full of fun and activity with the adivasis living here. This year, Phulora saw a registration of over 200 participants.

Women from 67 Self-Help Groups (SHG) collect the forest produce and cook up a traditional meal. These SHGs are spread across 25 villages in and around Bhopoli. This year, the women rustled up around 30 varieties of dishes that they displayed and offered to the guests to taste. They shared the recipes and the medicinal benefits of the forest produce.

Food as medicine

Lata Rahane, a tribal, points to the kharsinga and says “The juice of this fruit is a cure for all stomach ailments.” She also discloses that the seeds of the Takla plant and the Kardu plant are used to dissolve kidney stones. She says, “kartol is a very good preventive, for fever.” Each vegetable, root or tuber has its own use and has been deployed as traditional medicine for years.

A lunch with a few selected dishes made from forest produce was served with traditional rice and nachni (finger millet) bhakris.

A small exhibition with stalls displayed the traditional Warli art and artisans demonstrated the art of painting on wood and fabric. Interested guests were encouraged to pick up the brush and try their hand at this unique style of painting.

Besides, there was information shared on the Trust’s work in the fields of healthcare and education. There was a display of organic farming activity and various products, by a team of organic farmers. Products like vermicompost, sprays like cow urine, dashaparni and jeevamrut were available for sale. Hand-pounded rice and organic mustard and a few vegetables too were on sale.

Guests had an opportunity to see various farm implements that were on display and many posed with them for a photo shoot. The stone grinder (jata), bamboo raincover (virli), the wooden plough, the rice thresher and various equipment like sickle, axe and others on display caught the eye.

The visitors were treated to a cultural programme of dance and music. The traditionally clad adivasi women performed the Taarpa dance and many an enthusiastic guest joined in to try and match their movements, swaying to the music being played on the traditional taarpa, a wind instrument.

This was followed by the Dhol dance where the women danced to the tune played on the drum.

The brightly-clad adivasi men, wearing marigold garlands round their neck, then walked on to the ground to perform the Tipraa dance.

In tune with nature

Dr Sujata Goda, one of the organisers, said, “Our attempt is to show the city people that healthy, seasonal and tasty food exists in nature. We also hope that the demand for such forest produce will increase, so the tribals get some income from it. I hope city people realise how far away from nature we have moved and that being close to nature is possible, as shown by these tribals.”

Dr Nandini Vallat, accompanied by her 85-year-old mother and son Zeus, came from Mumbai to attend the festival.

She said, “It was heart-warming to see the tribals come together and work so hard to showcase their traditional knowledge and culture as a community. It was a wonderful experience for us.”

At the end of the lunch, a farm visit was organised. Around 100 people visited a nearby village to meet an organic farmer and see his field and understand what he grows.



Mordina



Kosaba



**Ranchiku
(Alava)**



Ransuran



Ambadi

Subash, an organic farmer, showed his vermicompost pit, rice fields and the organic vegetable plot. He also demonstrated the use of various equipment that he used on his field, like the weeder and rice thresher. He showed various seeds traditionally saved by him, for the next season.

In the midst of the rush and stress of city life, events like Phulora are like a breath of fresh air. The visitors loved the experience and promised to return next year for another round of traditional food and rich adivasi culture.

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