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A hamlet that thrives on the ancient barter system



Women from Naxal-hit Sukma region gather to exchange forest produce for rice and salt

The Edugurallapalli tribal shandy that gathers on Fridays is reminiscent of the ancient barter system, where tribals exchange forest produce for rice, iodized salt and other commodities. The shandy is in the Chintoor Agency.

A majority of those predominantly exchanging the forest products are Muria tribal women from Banda and Muriagudem areas in the Naxal-hit Sukma region in Chhattisgarh.

In the 'exchange trade practice', the middlemen have the privilege of deciding the worth of the forest produce, exploiting the tribals who run after them for various

commodities. The communication in the tribal language enables the non-tribal middlemen to convince the Muria tribe to sell the products at a throwaway cost.

Rice and salt

On March 19, this correspondent had documented the thriving trade practice at the shandy, where the tribals traded sesame seed, dry Mahua flower, tamarind seed, tamarind fruit primarily in exchange for two commodities - rice and iodized salt. Very few tribals are accepting money to buy other needy things that are not offered by the middlemen in the barter system.

Presently, one kg of mahua dry flower and sesame seed are being traded in exchange for 2 kg of rice or a few packets of iodized salt. The rice being traded by the middlemen is arguably supplied under the Public Distribution System (PDS). At ₹16 per kg, the middlemen are offering 2 kg of rice for the equal quantity of sesame seed and mahua flower. For tamarind and soapnuts, the tribals are offered either rice or salt as per their preference.

A group of Muria tribal women from Banda area in Sukma district told *The Hindu*: "Edugurallapalli is the nearest shandy, where we exchange mahua flower, tamarind and other minor products for rice and other commodities." The women sell other products including orange for cash to purchase something as per their need.

A majority of them are women who trade the forest products in the shandy.

On the condition of anonymity, two traders engaged in the exchange of goods said, "In summer, at least six products are traded in the shandy. The number of products traded here changes every season. In some cases, we offer whatever goods are sought by the seller."

Land of Mahua

Mahua is traded in the shandy round the year as the Muria tribe arrives here from India's Mahua Bowl - Chhattisgarh. Another trader from Sukma told *The Hindu*: "A majority of the mahua dry flower, bought from the Muria tribe in the goods exchange mode, will be purchased by the local tribes of Andhra Pradesh". The local tribes brew liquor from the flower for their family and community rituals".

Being a bastion for the Left Wing Extremists until Operation Green hunt, the shandy is run under the watch of the Central Reserve Police Force and AP Special Police that deploy armed men to keep an eye on the movements of strangers.

The Muria tribe attend the shandy in Chintoor agency by travelling for nearly 40 km and return by evening. Either the tribals or middlemen prefer not to interact with the

outsiders, given the existing conflict between the police forces and the Maoists in the Red Corridor.

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