

Rice and Millet Cultures in Highland Odisha

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Abstract:

From a lowland perspective Adivasi food patterns in the highlands of south Odisha may seem distressingly simple and monotonous. Locals do not usually consume eggs, milk or butter; they eat little meat, they do not make bread. Their first meal in the morning is identical to their second in the evening: rice with vegetable broth, followed by a big bowl of millet gruel. While indeed in culinary terms highland foodways cannot match in any way the sophisticated cuisine of the plains, it would be quite misleading to conclude from this that highland food would be simple in cultural terms (see Berger 2016). Far from it, in many ways food and food practices epitomize society. Accordingly, my talk will focus on the intricate meanings and implications of rice and millet for the highland cultures. By introducing some of the ritual uses of rice and millets I will show that these cereals are very different cultural resources. I hope this talk will contribute to an interdisciplinary dialogue on foodways and how they change – involving economists, botanists and ecologists, among others –, as such an approach is crucial to do justice to these complex phenomena.

Reference

Peter Berger 2016 Good to eat, Good to Think and Good to Study: Food (and Drink) in Indian Tribal Societies, *A Journal of COATS (Council of Analytic Tribal Studies)*, Vol. 4 (1): 5-23.



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