

AN ODE TO MARANG BURU – THE GOD OF FOREST

Set in the backdrop of Orissa's forest tracts, in the Eastern India, the film "AN ODE TO MARANG BURU – THE GOD OF FOREST" chronicles a whole range of stories, legends, myths, songs, dances, riddles, proverbs, metaphors and such other aspects of their culture which evolved in the bosom of the forest and are in their memory and handed down from one generation to other. These sources of their unwritten literary world speak of their happiness and their sorrows, their spiritual world and their living relationship with the eco-system around.

This film is an attempt to bring together the cultural, social and religious practices of various such forest dwelling – tribal and non-tribal communities in the state of Orissa, an eastern state in India, having long standing history of community forest conservation and management practices that is reflected in their socio-cultural way of life. It is an effort to internalize the age old heritage of socio-cultural practices and religious behavior that was influenced by and has influenced our living environment since ages.



These reveal an attitude of deep attachment to life, with all its pleasures and ecstasies as much as its anguishes and tragedies. Here, poetry and ritual go hand in hand and serve an intimate and social objective. The anonymity of the song makers is a remarkable phenomenon. What are important are the song or the art, and the community joining in its celebration in a spirit of joy and solidarity and in each of these acts rejoicing its relationship with forest, environment and the almighty. It is common knowledge of communities that forests are intricately connected to their livelihoods; they provide timber, non-timber forest produce and a host of non forestry services- climate control, water recharge, fertility and nutrient balance etc.



The eco-centric outlook of people living in and around forest views human beings as only one component in a biotic system of complex inter-relationships between plants, animals and physical forces. Some tribal groups view themselves as keepers of the forest heritage, passed down by their ancestors and are to be perpetuated through generations of posterity. Since forest serves as the very life support system, the social control, taboos and prohibition, manner of utilization of forest products, their myths and legends reminding them of consequences of any harm done to the nursing mother, reinforce the symbiotic relationship for their existence in peaceful harmony with nature. The customs of tribal life including their religious practices, arts and artifacts, social fabrics and folklores have been nurtured and enriched by forests in which they are living in virtual symbiosis from the dawn of human history.



Being an important part of their taboos, totem, riddles, festivals and decorations, the trees are



beneficial to humanity. To protect them became a religion for these forest dwellers and the trees were converted into the abode of spirits, called *Vanadevata*, the forest God. Thus MARANG BURU, the presiding deity in the Sal grove holds a place of veneration and ceremonial worship by the Santhal tribes in many part of India .To cut down a tree meant depriving the spirit of its home. Very often if it became imperative to cut down any tree, special prayers for forgiveness of the tree spirit were performed before a tree

was cut down or another abode offered to the *Vanadevata*. Thus the worship of forests, plants, trees and animals and appeasing them are still in vogue and forest is being treated as divine.



Ancient forests link the past with the future and whisper the words of centuries. They are true living wonders of the world. Ancient forests must stay forever, as the inviolable thicket where there are wandering sacred animals, as the dwelling of old-time idols, as the shelter of anchorites, great breath of the earth and living song of eternity. Forests have the right for life, for renewal, for water and light, for good soil. It is in this context that traditional ecological knowledge and resource management systems, practiced by the indigenous communities since ancient time, need to be properly understood and revived in order to conserve relict vegetation. It



is now an acknowledged fact that conservation and enrichment of the environment can never succeed without the willing support and active involvement of local communities.

The skill and technique they have developed provide valuable information to the global community and can serve as a useful model for formulation of bio-diversity conservation. If we are to survive, our philosophy of life must be rewritten not in words or ideas, but in terms of the ancient cultural mores & folkways to replant us firmly into the earth under the shady

trees for-"Trees mean water, water means bread and bread means life."

Let us strive towards strengthening these systems/institutions, making them dynamic and vibrant, before the celebration of life is frozen in the contours of time and space.