

The Unseen and Unrecognized Village Indigenous People

The coconut plantations and the rice fields, two of the major crops that have sustained the people of coastal Goa are owned by land lords or jointly by the upper economic groups, a system that has been in existence for hundreds of years.

The cultivation, maintenance and harvesting however, was done by the indigenous segment of the population, relegated to living along the fringes of the society. They owned no land or houses of their own, and lived mostly as tenants of the landlords. They are the farmers, cattle herders, fishermen, toddy tappers and other manual laborers that sustained the local economy. Both, men and women labored from dawn to dusk for their lively hood. Until recently, they were the uneducated class of the society, and therefore forgotten and lost to history for their vital contributions to society.

These unsung heroes, mostly of the *Kunbi*, *Gauddi* and *Vellip* communities are the descendants of the original settlers and megalith builders who developed the land for cultivation after the onset of the Neolithic Age.



Fig.1. Plucking coconuts



Fig.2. Collecting toddy

Coconut Palm (*CocosNucifera*)

The Tree of Life



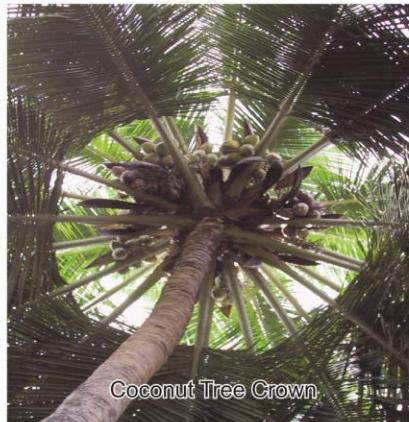
PABEJA
Harabedon em indonésia e espanhola por...
 Desenhos Históricos Usumano, LR. 367, Manuel de Cunha Makhado
 e Joaquim António Branco, *Uso e Costumes da Índia*, 1846-1847.



Arossim, Gansaulim, Velsao beaches
 viewed from Hollant Hills, Isorim



Local women collecting coconuts
 & firewood after a pluck



Coconut Tree Crown



Pluckers enjoying local brew "feni"
 and coconut water after work



Coconut Embryo - Morond



Coconut spoons



Husking coconuts for the trader
 The copra is sold for extraction of oil



Conddo

Themis D'Silva, 2013

Fig. 3. The fruits and useful products from their labor.

From the composite figure 3, it is apparent that the plucking of the coconuts was done by men and collecting the coconuts and the firewood by women carrying the baskets on their heads. At the end of the day the men enjoyed a complimentary glass of coconut *feni* or just quenched their thirst with coconut water. Their wages were often paid later after selling the coconuts.

Most of the coconuts were sold to an outside agent, where it was husked and the kernel dried and exported or/ and pressed for oil. The coconut shells could be fashioned as kitchen spoons. The palm leaves, when weaved, were used for roofing huts or made into a *condo*, used by women as a cover when working in the rice fields during the rainy season. The firewood was used as fuel.

Besides, selected coconut trees were also tapped for toddy, which when fermented produced vinegar or alcohol (coconut *feni*). This activity was carried by professional toddy tappers. Even though they were also landless, the trees were leased from the owners in return for a pot or two of toddy or *feni* a year.

To be a viable family enterprise the tapper required at least forty or more trees to be leased from several landlords. The tedious and dangerous job required climbing every tree three times a day. It was a man's job of climbing and collecting toddy and usually the women to fermenting and distilling at a facility adjacent to their homes. This cottage industry, has sustained many families in the village and provided toddy, vinegar and alcohol for generations.



Fig. 4. At the top of the tree



Fig. 5 Collecting from many trees



Fig. 6. Distilling *feni* at home

There were at least a dozen independent tappers in the village of Arossim in earlier times presently Jose Cruz is the last of his kind.



Fig. 7. Jose Cruz from Arossim

The many activities of rice harvesting are depicted in figs. 8- 12.



Fig. 8. Women harvesting



Fig. 9. Men bundling the sheaves



Fig. 10. Men trashing manually on a mat



Fig. 11. Secondary trashing by bullocks



Fig. 12. Winnowing and drying paddy

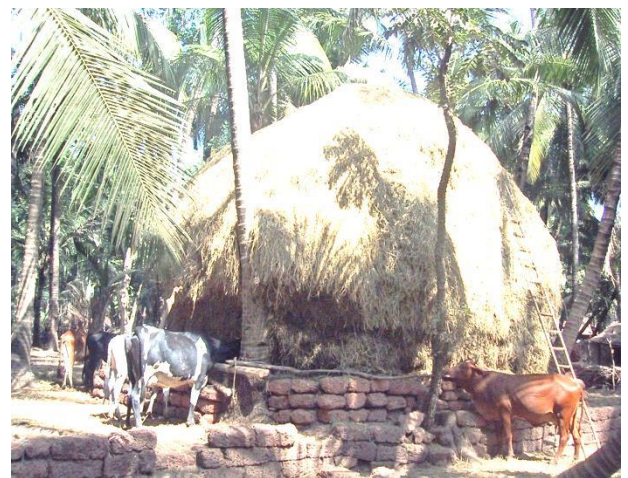


Fig. 13. Hay Stack for cattle during rainy season

The fishermen are also a vanishing breed. In earlier times, before the growth of tourism, deepfishing trawlers, the local fishermen enjoyed bountiful catch everytime they cast their nets. Their wives sold the fish locally throughout the village and the surplus buried as manure. Whatever could not be consumed within days was sun dried or pickled. Due to overfishing by trawlers, to cater for the resort hotels and export market, the local fishermen have been squeezed out.



Fig. 14. Local fishermen are readying to cast their net at Arossim beach.

With education and changing times, the younger generation with newly acquired skills, are moving to greener pastures, away from their traditional professions.

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