

# Food fest to revive tribal cuisine

Author - Mayuri Phadnis , Published on - 15.10.2015

Maharashtra's strong tribal culture and cuisine are under threat from the junk food revolution. The veritable vada pav and bhel have replaced the more nutritious wild food tribals are accustomed to. In a bid to preserve their culinary art and imbibe a sense of pride in their own delectable dishes, **Kalpavriksha**, an NGO working towards forest preservation, is organising a 'wild food festival' at Bhimashankar on October 25.

"Earlier, if the tribals were asked about their cuisine, they could speak of at least 50 different vegetables. Now, they can hardly tell the names of three or four and, that too, after much thought. The food festival is a way to revive their knowledge, which is now eroding. It is this food that kept them healthy," said

Pradeep Chavan

from

Kalpavriksh

a. This food festival is to be conducted by local self-help groups.

Tribals have traditionally been eating tubers, various wild leafy vegetables, wild fruits, wild grain among other foods, collected from the forests itself while gathering firewood. For non-vegetarians, it was mostly seasonal fish and crabs, which they found in the local waterbodies. The fish and crabs are still popular among them, but the tribals have lost out on the vegetables. A prime reason is that they have lost touch with the jungles, which has reduced the collection of such indigenous produce. Moreover, the weekly markets are increasingly becoming accessible for them, thus exposing them to junk food like vada pav and bhel. As a result, their traditional food, which fulfils their nutritional needs, is falling behind.

"Fortunately, they are not yet exposed to pizzas and burgers, but some of the youngsters have definitely taken to chips and other junk food. Yet another problem is that they think lowly about their food at times. So, this food festival is to make them feel good about their own food, so that they can get back to it with pride," Chavan added.

Elaborating on the psychology behind this shift to urban popular cuisine by the tribal youths, Sali Palande-Datar, an environmentalist from the city, said, "Just like we have a tendency to veer towards exotic food in the city, the tribals have similar urges. We see an unhealthy trend of tying one's status to the kind of food one consumes. For tribals, the wild food suited their health just fine, but they got lured by commercial things. We are also holding a wild food competition for the women in Chowkul and Amboli in the end of October. Our plan is to make them cook without any purchased masalas, just with the raw material they gather from the forest. They will also be asked about what benefit the recipe has and how much of the raw material is to be harvested. We will also enquire if any particular method of cooking is to be followed. This will also help in their food security as, during the monsoon months, it rains so heavily in the Western Ghats that venturing out is quite a task. During such times, they can locally source the raw material." First published in [Pune Mirror](#)