

***Poda Thurpu* cattle**

Shared history of agro-pastoral communities, their tended crops or livestock, and inhabited landscape often provided unique rewards in terms of biological cultural diversity, be it an indigenous landrace of crops or distinct breed of animals. There are many such examples of shared history of communities and their unique bio-cultural resource. For example, pastoralist communities from various parts of the Indian subcontinent like Banjaras, Gaolis, Gujjars,



Lingayats, and Maldharis, are famous for rearing cows, or other animals like buffalo, camels or sheep. Some of their breeds are nicely adapted to the tough living conditions of the agro-pastoral systems as their herders. The mosaic skinned cattle of Amrabad district or *Poda Thurpu* is one such cattle that received the status of indigenous breed of Telangana by the ICAR's sister body, National Bureau of Animal Genetic Resources (NBAGR). That takes it to the podium of a small band of thirteen indigenous cattle breeds recognised by NBAGR. These animals, short and hardy with brown mosaic on body, found only in a few locations in Amrabad Tiger Reserve of Nagarkurnool district. That is the part of its official recognition of being a distinguished animal; but acceptance and reverence on the part of the local agro-pastoral communities has long been entrenched. That is reflected in the preference of the farmers as animals with high endurance both in black and wet soils. They have capacity to survive in the drought-prone areas of south-eastern India near the Nallamala forest where high temperature, low rainfall and overall arid atmosphere prevails, their potential as an apt draft power in the dry environments was also realised.

But the history of *Poda Thurpu* is also full of crests and troughs. It brings in the fresh memory of the long tussle between the erstwhile forest department and the rights of indigenous communities. The primary foraging place for the cattle is the Nallamala Forest which is also the common resource for the local pastoralists. The villages are located within the Amrabad Tiger Reserve buffer zone. And, they have been customarily using the grazing land located inside the forest for generations, say the community members. However, things turned fatal in 1983 after the establishment of the tiger reserve that grabbed an area of several thousand square kilometres of area in the Nallamala Forest ranges. It denied pastoralists and their livestock access to customary grazing lands and that in turn has cascading effects starting from fodder shortages. It snowballed into forcing many pastoralists abandoning cattle rearing and thereby a decline in their population. While the heat of the tussle is still being felt from both the sides; the recent recognition comes as a ray of hope and an encouragement to the communities compelling them not to give up to save and rear this rare beast.

Image: Nemani Chandrasekhar, RRA Network (<https://rranetwork.wordpress.com>)
Collector - Avik Ray