5. Films as human rights: through the lens of Indigenous Peoples' forest food

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Abstract

Among various forms of communication, a combination of audio-visual formats like films is increasingly used in promoting human rights. Indigenous Peoples' rights to forest food in India are being amplified through a film, TARA *Alpinia nigra*. This article examines how common resources, such as wild edible forest food, when turned into commodities violate basic human rights to the culture and health of India's Indigenous Peoples. When a human rights violation happens, it means that person's humanity has been denied. Often, human rights violation is expressed in statistics (numbers) or via legal bindings (treaties, policies), which fail to have a human touch. Filmmaking on human rights violations touches that human element by shedding light, camera, and action by amplifying the voices of the 'human beings', the real protagonists. This article demonstrates the role of film in documenting the 'way of living and traditional right to sustainable forest food for Assam's – North-East province in India – hunting-gathering Indigenous communities. It elaborates how films can become a powerful medium when the human 'rightsholders' are given a space to voice their opinions in front of the lens. The conclusions point out two ways forward: (a) the films become a lens of justice by letting real people talk in front of the camera rather than voice-overs by the 'beholders' of human rights, and (b) Indigenous Peoples are aware of their traditional rights to forest food as commons.

Bart Wernaart (ed.)
Applied human rights
DOI: 10.3920/978-90-8686-943-5_5, © Purabi Bose, 2023

Key concepts

- Indigenous Peoples: the United Nations does not include a definition of Indigenous Peoples but refers to their rights to determine their own identity or membership in accordance with their customs and traditions – a distinct identity.
- Way of living: a historical continuity to maintain knowledge systems of hunting, gathering, or foraging food from mountains, forests, deserts, or water;
- Healthy life: for Indigenous Peoples this is intertwined with their traditional culture to access wild edible food and medicinal herbs;
- Human rights film: films that amplify the voices of the 'real people' to share untold and unheard stories of (in)justice;
- Human rights to health: are about how people perceive eating healthy food vis-à-vis having access to traditional food;
- Good health for Indigenous Peoples: means food that keeps them healthy and not just calorie intake, but full nutrition;
- Health disparities: Indigenous Peoples endure much undernutrition and food insecurity that stems from a lack of formal recognition of traditional food;
- Ethics of filmmaking means refraining from value judgement about right or wrong and letting the Indigenous Peoples define human rights to health;
- Films on human rights about Indigenous food and health are ways in which filmmaking augments the values of foraging wild edible food by Indigenous Peoples.

5.1 Food for health and filmmaking

access to traditional cultural food resources

A human right to food is an integral part of the right to health and adequate nutrition, including access to traditional cultural food resources (Article 11, ICESCR; UN Human Rights, 1966). Globally, there are about 350 million forest-dependent Indigenous Peoples, and most of them continue to rely directly or indirectly on wild edible food foraged from the forests. The study by Bose (2020) about the forest-food impact on relatively lesser-known Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups in India shows a lack of cultural acceptability in food policies, and commercialisation of wild foods as 'superfood' due to high nutrition value has meant that the tribal (or Indigenous) People lose out on their traditional foraged food and are left vulnerable to health issues, particularly at the time of COVID-19 pandemic. Then, the question is why the human rights to health(y) traditional food for Indigenous Peoples continue to be ignored, globally.

food for health

One plausible reason would be that health and food are regarded as two different disciplines – even from the generic human rights perspective (See Ayala and Meier, 2017). Limited scientific studies in identifying the intersection of food for health as a human right have so far had a limited societal impact. There have been various international initiatives upholding the rights of producers that to some extent provide a basis upon which the states can be resilient in adapting to global disruptions in food production. In recent decades, the human rights film festivals created a platform for portraying diverse perspectives, including the intersectionality of food and health. To illustrate, in 2021, the Human Rights Film Festival in Berlin screened films related to the theme, entitled 'Zero Chance for Zero Hunger?' Likewise, Ceres Food Film Festival highlights films on food in conjunction with the human rights issue.

filmmaking

Since the invention of film, filmmaking has traditionally been used to document and justify what is wrong in our society. For example, many films after World War II showed infringements of human rights by enemies. In recent years, the narratives have been changing with a rising tide of hate crimes, anti-Semitism, and racial and gender discrimination – so much so that it is good to be bad (hatred/discrimination) if it is good. To overcome this modern-day challenge, filmmakers are turning into vigilant defenders of human rights, becoming increasingly vocal in their expression through films and ensuring that the past is not repeated in terms of violations against humanity and the environment.

The intersection of the right to food and the right to health is what the author argues in this chapter that films when used as a human rights tool for Indigenous Peoples can explain that a collective right to food and nutrition security needs to move beyond the conventional food of calories for survival and instead encompass the traditional access to wild edible nutrition necessary for health.

In this chapter, the author examines how films are used as a human rights tool to amplify the voices of Indigenous Peoples, with an argument that access to traditional cultural food resources as commons (instead of making it a commodity) is critical for their health and for the overall well-being of the environment.

Case 5.1. Super-Size Me: eat to live or live to eat!

The documentary Super-Size Me was released in 2004. Within six weeks of its screening across the United States of America, McDonald's had discontinued its supersize portion of fast food. The film is by and about director Morgan Spurlock's social experiment in fast-food gastronomy, seeing him subsist solely on food from McDonald's for 30 days. The film tracks his daily intake of McDonald's food and

beverage, weight gain, energy level, and all sorts of unexpected side effects. The film sparked debate about interconnections between the right to food and nutrition and health. What the film did by way of self-experimentation is showcase how industry-based fast-food consumption promoted XXL size at the expense of small size to increase the consumer's consumption, and in so doing damaging their health. The audience watches Spurlock's 30-day consumption of McDonald's food and the mental and physical health consequences it has on him.

Through this film Spurlock argued – though the lawsuit against McDonald's failed – that the same criticism levelled against the tobacco company applies to fast-food franchises for selling food that is both physiologically addictive and physically harmful. The impact of this film questioned the way the corporate food industry was promoting fast food. In the UK, due to this film, McDonald's added fruit and salads alongside regular fast-food products (Dodd, 2004).

Many Western films continued to follow the trend as discussed in Case 5.1, such as 'Food, Inc.' (Kenner, 2008) about corporate farming in America; 'More than Honey' (Imhoof, 2012) about the dwindling bee population and their impact on the world food supply; Cowspiracy: The sustainability secret (Andersen and Kuhn, 2014), which claimed that animal agriculture is the biggest threat to the environment; Soul Food Junkies (Hurt, 2013), in which the film director tries positioning the cultural implications of African-American soul-food against its healthfulness; or Food Beware (Jaud, 2008) about the organic food debate in France. Each of these film directors used their film as a human rights lens to showcase the unethical dimension of corporate food production and its implications for health mainly for urban and peri-urban citizens.

5.2 Indigenous Peoples' human rights

The phrase 'beauty is in the eye of the beholder' is a common expression implying that beauty is created by an outsider. Here, the reference to beauty is dependent on one who 'decides' how beauty is portrayed by the viewer. The role of the beholder or the viewer is clear – to judge and recognise the beauty. Let us re-phrase this by replacing beauty with the words 'human rights' and it will read 'the human right is in the eye of the beholder', whereby the beholder is given the duty to recognise the rights. On the other hand, the rights holders are 'dependent on others' decisions' to be recognised.

human rights

The issue of human rights has long been promoted by advocates and scholars as an interface between dominant understandings of institutions and structures such as colonialism, discrimination, and development. Many disciplines such as social and environmental sciences have explored how popular science

around the rights-based approach and environmental justice, such as films, social media, TV shows, advertisements, and photobooks reproduce dominant narratives and make use of dominant aesthetics. Representations of a beautiful environment in mass media can strengthen ideas on a particular issue, such as a snow leopard that needs to be saved, exotic tree species, forest degradation, and the ways humans conserve or destroy nature. The audience views the gaze of the outsider's camera to enjoy the beauty as well as the violence and conflict. The Human Rights documentary film festivals, for example, through visual and discursive approaches, encourage the viewers to identify with critical frameworks moving beyond propaganda-driven 'save the wildlife' or 'saving people' towards embracing complexity and problematising dominant colonial understandings, authoritarian agenda, and legitimising structural injustice.

Indigenous Peoples' human rights

In the late 1990s Indigenous Peoples' human rights were rarely a priority in the development sector, however, something improved post-United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) – an international instrument adopted by the United Nations in 2007. The UNDRIP is the most comprehensive international instrument on the rights of Indigenous Peoples. The declaration establishes a 'universal framework of minimum standards' for the survival, dignity, and well-being of the Indigenous Peoples of the world and it elaborates on existing human rights standards and fundamental freedoms as they apply to the specific situation of Indigenous Peoples (UN DESA, 2007). The Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC) is a specific right within UNDRIP that allows Indigenous Peoples to give or withhold consent to a project that may affect them or their territories. In other words, any development activities in Indigenous territories should first have their consent.

implementation

Often, international instruments like UNDRIP and FPIC are rarely implemented, which has resulted in human rights violations. The human rights violations against the Indigenous Peoples who represent about 6.2% of the world population mean that they continue to suffer civil and political rights violations, but also economic, social, and cultural rights violations. One of the most common violations of human rights for all Indigenous Peoples is their right to access ancestral lands and resources, and the right to self-governance. The key reasons include the lack of recognition of Indigenous Peoples' identity, corruption, an undemocratic system, and human rights support. At least 331 human rights defenders promoting social, environmental, racial, and gender justice in 25 countries were murdered in 2020, according to a report by advocacy group Front Line defenders.

human rights defenders

An unknown number of human rights defenders were beaten, detained, and criminalised because of their work promoting social, environmental, racial, and gender justice for Indigenous Peoples. These human rights defenders work

to uphold the traditional rights of Indigenous Peoples to land use and forests in the face of the corporates promoting conservation without the community's involvement, extracting resources leading to deforestation or engaging in plantations that are mono-culture creating Indigenous Peoples' food insecurity.

One of the research assumptions of this chapter is that people know best what their human rights mean to them. It is in this context that this chapter takes a people-centric approach by providing the 'right holders' with an opportunity to explore their rights by themselves. Based on this assumption, the author uses an applied human rights approach by giving the right holders a podium in front of the camera in an unscripted manner. Therefore, instead of communicating a predesigned narrative, the protagonists – the Indigenous men and women – express without fear what they think are their needs and desires, their relations to the forests they live in, and their notions of 'rights' to the forests and forest resources, food.

5.3 Filmmaking as a human rights lens – justifications

methodology

In 2016, after about 15 years of the author's professional work on issues of forests and Indigenous Peoples, one thing that remained constant in the field experience was the lack of voice of the Indigenous Peoples in a national or international forum. Human rights research is criticised for its lack of attention to methodology, which typically includes an analysis of legal standards to undo the human rights violations against victims (Coomans *et al.,* 2010). Though there is no single preferred method, we will discuss using anthropological as well as indigenous knowledge and wisdom in filmmaking as the hybrid tools in the section below. However, the core idea was to unlearn the conventional teachings about forest management to listen to first-hand experiences of the real guardians of the forests, Indigenous Peoples, and their 'way of living'. For filming, the author travelled all over India to the remotest part of the Indigenous territories to hear the stories of diverse groups of Indigenous Peoples practising traditional hunting-gathering living inside the diverse range of forest types from the northern rainforests to biodiversity hotspots in the south and east, or to dry deciduous semi-arid areas in the west of India. For the filmmaking, the author invested personal savings to create a non-profit communication initiative called Landing Together Films.[46]

[46] For further information: www.landingtogether.weebly.com

A photograph is worth a thousand words, and a film takes a further step forward in amplifying the voices, particularly of those who have not been heard. Since its invention, film has been used as a powerful tool for documenting the propaganda of world leaders, often human rights violators, and all for the wrong reasons. Even the films we watch for entertainment blatantly advocate violence, police brutality, and other human rights' violations. However, in recent years, with reference to Case 5.1 Super-Size Me, mainstream Hollywood filmmakers have been joining human rights movements. This has resulted in numerous changes in policies and attitudes, proving that films can be potential change-makers. The author had two key aims when using films for promoting human rights: first, to capture the real stories directly from the Indigenous Peoples, who experience that their human rights are not addressed and are marginalised by powerful elites; and the second aspect is to build the profile and promote dialogue on social dimensions of human rights across the globe.

Ethics is another critical element in filmmaking along with creative and aesthetic dimensions. One key justification for using human rights as a lens for filmmaking, by human rights activists or researchers, is film's ability to capture unheard voices and real experiences to create a powerful tool for democracy to highlight existing inequities. Filmmaking has the potential for social persuasion when the human rights' dimensions are projected equitably and in an unbiased way.

5.4 Human right to forest food

'*With COVID-19 across the globe, all our access is being cut off. Forest food has been our key source not only to keep hunger at bay but also to build our community's health and immunity. Indigenous Peoples' knowledge of forest food is the future of global medicine and overall health and well-being. This is our human right.*'

'This (COVID-19) crisis has proved why wild edible forest food is a safety net for Indigenous Peoples' livelihood. The cost of commercial food sky-rocketed leaving the economically marginal communities without any livelihood. Our rights to wild foraged food from forests help us, particularly in such crisis scenarios, particularly given that the state rarely gives priority to Indigenous peoples' rights.'

Above are the opinions of some of the Indigenous Peoples in India (to the author in 2020, Mumbai, India), in response to the new challenges the COVID-19 crisis has left behind. Globally, humans have shared a valuable link in foraging

forest food, although whereas in some developed countries it is a recreational activity, in the Global South for forest-dependent Indigenous communities forest food is a necessity for survival.

Most forest-dependent Indigenous Peoples have for generations been accessing forest foods – leaves, stems, flowers, fruits, and other resources like mushrooms, and honey without disturbing nature. Forest food provides a major source of nutrition to the communities and livelihoods of women and children. India does not recognise Indigenous Peoples although the country is a signatory to UNDRIP. Indigenous Peoples, the way this term will be used in this chapter to avoid any confusion, are commonly referred to as 'Adivasis' or Tribal People or the Scheduled Tribes. Traditionally they have managed and sustainably used forests and land, without any legal recognition even after 60 years of India's independence from British colonial rule. The Forest Rights Act (FRA), 2006, is regarded as legislation that undoes historical injustice by recognising the rights of the forest-dwelling tribal communities and other traditional forest dwellers to forest resources, on which these communities were dependent (Bose, 2012). In 2019, experts from the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) urged the Government of India to prevent the potential eviction of up to nine million forest dwellers and members of tribes. The experts warned that any eviction resulting in homelessness is a serious violation of human rights and that many Indigenous Peoples in India have already lost their homes in the name of conservation.[47]

Forest Rights Act

The other extreme of evictions is that Indigenous Peoples are denied access to any forest food as commons, which often fails to garner international attention but has negative consequences on the indigenous way of living.

5.4.1 SLOW living

The traditional 'way of living' of Indigenous Peoples is often referred to as sustainable 'SLOW' living that is changing due to the negative consequences of 'development'. The slow living concept is deep-rooted in the way it relates to nature, and the word 'slow' can also act as an acronym where the letter S refers to a Sustainable way of life, L refers to Local food instead of sources from other far-off geographical locations, O is Organic food that is devoid of any chemical fertilisers or pesticides, and the letter W represents Whole, that is whole food rather than processed. In brief, all this signifies the culture of a sustainable way of living for Indigenous Peoples across the globe. India's National Human Rights Commission has taken the view that the Right to Food is interlinked

'SLOW' living

[47] See https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2019/07/india-must-prevent-eviction-millions-forest-dwellers-say-un-experts?LangID=E&NewsID=24786

with a life of dignity, and Article 21 of the Constitution of India guarantees a fundamental right to life and personal liberty – therefore it makes the Right to Food a guaranteed Fundamental Right (NHRC accessed online in September 2022). The National Food Security Act, 2013, also known as the 'Right to Food Act' was introduced to provide subsidised food grains to approximately two-thirds of the country's 1.2 billion people. The Right to Food Act, with good intentions, has legal loopholes that made the implementation inequitable for Indigenous Peoples because the subsidised food was either of insufficient quantity for the entire family or could not be accessed when they migrated outside their hometown, or the subsidised food was simply unacceptable on a cultural level (Bose, 2019).

Right to Food Act

5.4.2 Forest food as commons

In the theory of the human right to food, one element is cultural acceptability. Bose (2019: 59) uses 'rights to forest food' as an analytical framework, and one of the three dimensions is customary culture. Indigenous Peoples have long been dependent on gathering and/or cultivating their food rather than buying it. Traditional foods include those foods that they can farm or wild harvest without having to buy with money or, on rare occasions, through bartering. This dimension of cultural acceptability – based on the way the wild edible food is accessed from the forests – has not yet been recognised compared to other dimensions such as religious (halal) or ethical (vegan). For most of the 10 million Indigenous Peoples living all over India, in addition to millions living across the globe in tropical forests, who are traditional hunter-gatherers, foraged forest food acts as commons and constitutes a major portion of their main nutrient intake (Bose, 2019). The growing recognition of the high nutrient quality of some of the commercialised wild edible forest foods as superfood commodities for the urban elite has led to an escalation in price and demand (Bose, 2016). With the increase in external demand and commodification of food that was previously common, Indigenous Peoples face the challenge of meeting their household nutritional needs and protecting their traditional rights to forests.

cultural acceptability

Many of India's traditional forest-dwelling Indigenous communities have a culture of 'offering' food to Mother Earth before it is consumed – in recognition of themselves as traditional guardians. Their role as traditional guardians of forests in protecting, sharing, and governing the forest resources collectively is based on the belief that it is essential for ensuring future generations' benefit from commons, such as fish stocks, pastureland, mountain resources, and forest food, from fungi to various roots and fruits. The commodification of these resources – food that is traded in a market with a monetary value, e.g. wild berries, wild bushmeat, mushroom, etc. – means that they will no longer

be available for these communities. In the theory of the human right to food, cultural acceptability has not yet gained recognition from the Indigenous Peoples' perspective. Forest food as commons for Indigenous Peoples is not limited to food security and nutritional intake, but also reinforces social relations and affirms their personal and collective identity to the land of their ancestral group.

The human rights 'lens' in this chapter is Indigenous Peoples and their rights to forest food – the wild edible food that includes leaves, tubers, stems, fruits, seeds, and mushrooms – that they forage collectively from their traditional forest land. The next section explains the methodology of how a film is used as a lens in amplifying the human rights of Indigenous Peoples for forest food as commons.

5.5 Methodology for films on human rights

One of the unique filmmaking methodologies used by the author was to avoid a ready-made script or select a pre-identified location, issues, protagonists, or any storyline in advance like most filmmakers do when making films.

5.5.1 Beholders of human rights

Making a film on human rights, as Figure 5.1 shows schematically, through the lens of Indigenous Peoples about their right to food has interconnections with cultural acceptability, but also with the protagonist's perception and the viewer's interpretation, which may (or may not) amplify voices for a social cause. Moving away from the traditional paradigm, based on the filmmaker's interpretation or filmmaker's ideology, the shift is towards the protagonist's and viewer's interpretation. In doing so, the filmmaker is not interpreting ideal human rights but allowing protagonists to express and push the audience or viewers to interpret without being guided or being told a moral story.

One of the core methods of human rights filming for the author emerges from the belief that Indigenous Peoples are aware of their traditional rights, but the mainstream narratives project them as ignorant. Therefore, a distinct methodological approach used was to listen to the voices of people rather than have them narrated by the external 'beholders' of human rights. In doing so, the human rights dimension was approached through the 'lens' of the real people – the Indigenous Peoples – amplifying their voices for justice. Thus, the approach we used in film through the lens of Indigenous Peoples adds an extra dimension because what the protagonists say in front of the camera is not just a story, but an expression of rights violations that the community has experienced. To reveal the identity (by showing the faces) of the protagonists

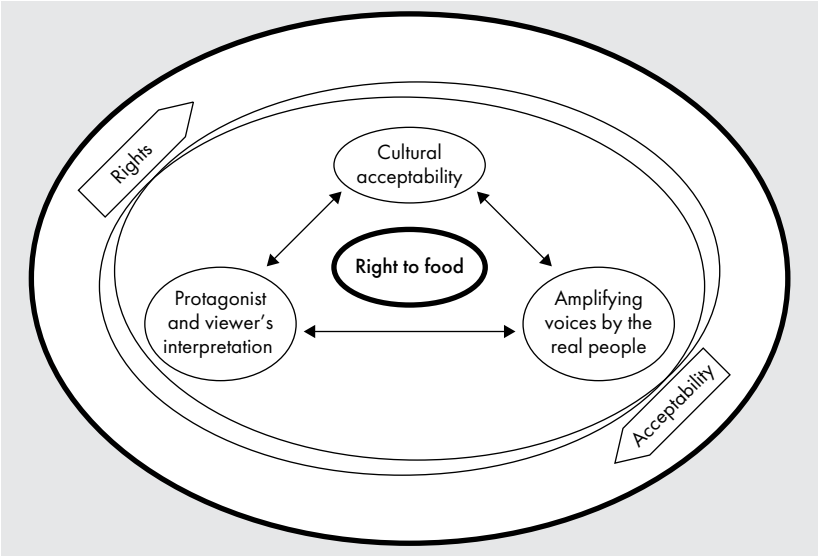

Figure 5.1. Forest food as commons for Indigenous Peoples – as a lens for human rights film.

and have them open up about being victims in the film, by challenging the human rights holders for not fulfilling their rights, might put them and their families at risk of being attacked. On the positive side, they become anchors of directly sharing their opinions bringing social change. That is the true beholder of rights. This is what makes the documentary a powerful communication tool for human rights advocacy – stories that are personal and global in significance and that are often ignored by mainstream media.

5.5.2 Ethics and authenticity

The human rights topic involves upholding ethics. The consent of protagonists was the most important part of the methodology used in filmmaking. Ethics, which is the core element of human rights is a critical aspect of filmmaking. In my methodology, the ethics included explaining why we were filming and how it would be used, getting the protagonist's permission to film, letting them speak without any influence, and editing without distorting the original message and without dramatising the events with background music or other film edit effects.

authenticity

The authenticity of the protagonist is maintained – they are not paid actors nor politically inclined or forced to say anything. Rather, the approach was simple, to listen, to record in audio-visual the real voices of the people from their perspective, and to understand how they visualise their traditional rights to food foraged from forests. The key tool that documentary filmmakers often use

is 'voiceovers' in the form of narration. The author argues that the voiceovers are nothing but the subjugation of human rights – where the mainstream filmmakers think that viewers need excellent English language narrators who will translate what the protagonists are saying.

Voiceovers mean that the viewers do not hear the protagonists' voices – the local Indigenous languages, their expressions, or their tones of emotions. The author avoided superimposing protagonists' speech with voiceovers. Instead, the film's process reflects the author's journey to give voice to the forest-dependent hunter-gatherer-nomadic people and their traditional knowledge about forests and way of living sustainably. The method of approaching the film was not naively looking through the lens but acknowledging that the lens is consciously aware of two things – that the audience is smart, and the film's protagonists are real people. By not 'feeding the audience' with information, the author wanted them to decide for themselves what the real issue is, by listening to the voice and sometimes silence, and by listening to words that are not English or familiar.

human rights and arts

The methodology thus highlights the interconnection between human rights and arts, whereby, the real people speak in their voice and language (or dialect) narrating their story the way they want to – without having a predesigned narrative or without an overpowering voiceover. The films the author has produced on human rights have the authenticity of emotions – fear, anger, sadness, and confidence of expression through diverse dialects and languages.

5.5.3 A step forward from the 'fly-on-the-wall' method

Films are regarded as one of the important performative social science tools. In academic research, it is not well known that the origins of documentary filmmaking were in science and anthropology, before it was adopted and popularised for mass media such as television. For example, the visual anthropology school of thought includes filming certain ethnographic events in culture and sharing them with an audience through film. Often, complex ontology is needed compared to how a traditional anthropologist observe a society. Here is how the methodology as a researcher differed – breaking the naïve barrier of anthropologists' fly-on-the-wall method (www.landingtogether) https://landingtogether.weebly.com/films.html.

Fly-on-the-wall

Fly-on-the-wall is a style of documentary-making used in films whereby events are seen occurring normally – like a fly on a wall might see them. The filmmaker tries to be the fly on the wall, but at the same time is reappropriating different forms of understanding of what is real or societal reality. The reality of the twentieth-century consumer-centric economy has led to serious poverty. This

reminds us that the rich have no direct or indirect priorities towards those who find themselves in poverty, forgetting our core human rights values and our day-to-day realities. The author proposes a methodology whereby this complexity is what is needed to reflect on when making a film on human rights – for Indigenous Peoples. Therefore, the author transcended the rules and regulations, and accepted a more complex view of the world and a more complicated view of notions of 'reality' and what is real.

The idea was not to produce a film that is arts-based on research – using tools from the arts, making a film, and calling it research. Rather, the author uses an anthropological ethnographic approach to collect data, where the world is not static but moving around in the process of filming. This is different from the methodology of the filmmaker who uses a camera like a magnifying glass to move around the world.

5.5.4 Avoiding post-production edits

A key element in using real protagonists for human rights films should be producing a natural flow without creating a dramatic effect to show how the protagonists – the Indigenous Peoples – face the camera for the first time to voice their rights. The post-production methodology was to not create a scene but to use instincts to let the protagonist shape their storyline – thereby helping the author as a filmmaker to frame the dialogue. The editing of the film was minimal, keeping in mind how the Indigenous Peoples wanted to respond, and what they wished to show as a background or in terms of the forest foods they were referring to.

subtitles

In editing the film, English subtitles were used, not voiceovers. After all, the protagonists were not directed. The editing of the film was a fusion of their emotions, voice, and the real environment: the forests that they have been living for generations. This method gave the protagonists the power to face the camera, to take the camera where they wanted to, and in film-editing, the constant factor of power was maintained by ensuring that the story as narrated by Indigenous Peoples was not altered.

5.5.5 The film: location and Indigenous Peoples

In 2016 and 2017, the author along with a filmmaking crew covered remote tribal districts, crisscrossing India. In 2017, based on the data collection or footage, the first film was produced, TARA *Alpinia nigra*. This is the film under discussion in this chapter. The film takes the audience on a tropical forest walk with two key protagonists, Sunita Itipi and Basavu Ronglangpi – Karbi Indigenous women. Among other things, while forest foraging, they are

looking for wild edible 'Tara' – a Karbi Indigenous language term for *Alpinia nigra*, an herbaceous food with medical properties. The short film of 29 minutes covers diverse Indigenous Peoples from different forested landscapes: Eastern India state Odisha's Paudi Bhuyan, Central India Chhattisgarh state's Baiga, a hunting-gathering particularly vulnerable tribe, Jharkhand state's Gond tribe, Western India state's Thakkar tribe as well as North-east India state's Karbi tribe. Each of these Indigenous communities shared their stories of wild edible forest food as common and the challenges of diminishing rights to access this traditional and culturally acceptable food for the community (as further discussed in Case 5.2).

Case 5.2. 'TARA *Alpinia nigra*: a film about Indigenous Peoples' right to forest food.[48]

The two protagonists, Sunita Itipi and Basavu Ronglangpi – Karbi Indigenous women, living in the remote dense rainforest of Assam – are traditional forest food foragers. The forest food for all the protagonists from all over India constitutes almost 80% of daily intake – and is supplemented by buying the government-sponsored subsidised food through the Public Distribution System (PDS), such as wheat, lentils, rice, oil, and sugar. None of these Indigenous communities have managed to gain recognition of the Forest Rights Act of 2016 for their traditional collective forest rights – to manage, access, and collect forest resources for their livelihoods.

The film narrates the story of these two indigenous women protagonists, of how traditional sustainable foraging is becoming unsustainable due to an increase in demand by urban elites for nutritious wild organic food from forests. The other protagonist in the film, the Paudi Bhuyan tribe, recounts that forest food, such as wild mushrooms and bamboo shoots, have suddenly been in demand due to their newly acquired taste by non-Indigenous communities living outside the forest. Despite their resistance to selling the bamboo shoots, the traders manage to steal them, which upsets the Paudi Bhuyan protagonist couple. The bamboo shoot is cut and dried, like a mushroom, and preserved for lean seasons when forest food is in shortage. The protagonists – unconsciously – juxtapose the action of the wife cutting freshly foraged bamboo shoots collected from forests for drying and preservation, while the husband is talking about outsiders stealing their food. This might be seen as scripted for an uninformed audience, but this was natural for the protagonists – talking about the food they have just collected and how their rights to that food are being denied.

[48] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pURE1p_DIWQ.

The other protagonists in the film, such as the Thakkar tribe in western India, are engaged in making leaf plates – using leaves from the forests and using plant needles to form bowl or plate shapes. This Indigenous youth group expresses their disappointment with the materialism of urban society, which diminishes the role of Indigenous communities in safeguarding the wild biodiversity of food. The film continues to evolve around the dynamics of land-use change and conservation-led displacement faced by the Gond and Baiga tribes, respectively. The possible re-housing of the Indigenous Peoples due to wildlife conservation or mining activities means forgoing their traditional food that was accessed as commons from the forests they inhabited for generations.

The film ends with the Karbi protagonists selling their foraged wild food on the street in the town away from their village and forests to urban dwellers, oblivious of the Indigenous Peoples' right to food.

5.6 Discussion

In the theory of the human right to food, one element is cultural acceptability – so far, it has been understood from a religious perspective – halal and kosher, but rarely from forest-dwelling or dependent Indigenous Peoples. The film, TARA *Alpinia nigra*, brings the human rights dimension and connection to the right to food and the culture of the right to live in and around forests and to eat wild edible nutritional forest food. Just as for religious reasons, there is a need to understand that Indigenous Peoples' right to forest food is not about queuing in front of a food bank or ration shop to get subsidised food. Instead, their resistance to buying government-subsidised food is about their cultural acceptability and right to forage forest food. For hunting and gathering in the semi-nomadic Baiga tribe, food is eaten with minimum cooking techniques such as that of modern kitchen equipment like stove cooker or utensils. Thus, boiling the subsidised lentils, for example, is culturally unadaptable and acceptable to the Baiga tribe's notion of the right to food.

A culture that is intertwined with forest food is not just about nutritional security, but their livelihoods and way of living. When the government with good intentions provides subsidised food, it does not meet the cultural acceptability of the Indigenous peoples. The subsidised food might be a solution, but for the human rights of Indigenous communities, it not only changes the dietary intake but imposes changes on their way of life. A way of mainstreaming them is by turning traditional hunting-gathering people into sedentary people, because 'others' believe Indigenous Peoples have housing rights and prepare food in the kitchen and eat food in the routine of breakfast, lunch, and dinner, rather than the routine of nature (seasons, sun/moonrise).

The film with human rights as a focus therefore helped in the realisation that human rights are about the essence of a human being. The fact that Paudi Bhuyan protagonists on camera wanted to narrate the story of 'outsiders' stealing the bamboo shoots explains who the outsiders are from their perspective. The non-traditional dwellers entering the forest are not viewed as a threat, but rather there was a need to explain that Indigenous Peoples are often blamed for deforestation while the real culprits – the outsider traders – get away.

5.7 Conclusions: future of human rights films

As a filmmaker, the author considers sociological and anthropological disciplines with qualitative methodology critical in upholding human dignity. The future of producing and using films about human rights discourses will have to meet certain expectations. These include:

- the ability of the filmmaker to realise that the real people should speak for themselves;
- the protagonists give their Free, Prior and Informed Consent (also known as FPIC) during filming and screening – all consequences should be discussed in detail with the community before requesting consent; and
- the story is not edited to make it appealing to the audience, rather the story is woven along with the protagonists' understanding of their rights (or lack of rights).

One of the fears of using film as a human right is whose perspective matters. The fear is whether the film(makers) manipulate the public in the name of national development to deforest the Indigenous territories. On the other hand, there is hope that filmmaking becomes a transdisciplinary approach involving human rights activists, scholars, legal experts, and policymakers to contribute towards a collective goal – ensuring the traditional Indigenous Peoples' right to forest food is recognised.

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