



THE JOURNEY OF MANYAM MILLET RUCHULU

Tribal Women Aspiring for Change

Every day, children from nearby villages eagerly line up at the **Peddarama Millet Kitchen** to buy fresh, nutritious Millet snacks. The Millet Kitchen sells about Rs.200 worth of millet snacks to these kids daily, says Nimmaka Annapoorna who runs the Millet Kitchen. The **Peddarama Millet Shakthi Sangham**, a group of tribal women initiated the Millet Kitchen successfully integrating it into the local ecosystem. They also operate sales of evening snacks on the main road of the village. The Peddarama Millet Shakti Sangham is a group of women in the village Peddarama, Seethampeta Mandal in Parvathipuram - Manyam District of Andhra Pradesh.



This daily scene is not just about a food enterprise; it represents the ambition of young tribal women to learn, compete and grow in an enterprise space given an opportunity and some support!

With neatly covered heads and hands skilled in preparing traditional millet delicacies, the women of the Self-Help Group (SHG) take pride in their work. Their efforts have not only won the hearts of young consumers but have



also sparked a shift in local food habits. Their own children now prefer these wholesome, locally sourced treats over processed snacks—a small yet powerful sign of change. More energy, more enthusiasm, and higher aspirations qualities shine in the eyes and body language of these tribal women.



These kitchens were set up with initial financial support for infrastructure from a project of HDFC Bank- Parivartan program and training on millet recipes. The project was facilitated by WASSAN. Millets Festivals and cooking competitions were organised in the villages with a view to revive millets back into the food and agriculture systems. Women with culinary skills were identified and trained in snack making. These women formed their enterprise groups and started off in a small way.



Another Millet Kitchen run by Boddaguda Millet Kitchen Sangham in the Neighbouring Bhamini Mandal went a step ahead. The Sangham proudly branded their products as Manyam Millet Ruchulu. They built a shed for their Millet Kitchen, sourcing wood from the forest and collectively contributing Rs. 30,000 for its construction. Their husbands stood by their side, helping establish this community-driven space, solidifying the role of women-led enterprises in the village economy. These symbolize the aspirations of women striving for financial independence and better livelihoods.





A training organized in Institute of Hotel Management, Bhubaneswar on basic hygiene, operating a kitchen, millet recipes and enterprise development brought necessary professional attitude. Exposure visits to Millet Shakti Cafes run by women groups as a part of the **Odisha Millets Mission**, helped in shaping their entrepreneurial vision. These sessions covered hygiene, food safety, recipe preparation, and storage.

Practical demonstrations, industry interactions, and a visit to the **Millet Shakti Café** of the SHG Federation in Odisha instilled confidence in them to build their own enterprise.

A CHANGE STORY

Young women who were once bound by social and economic constraints are now stepping into entrepreneurship, blending traditional knowledge with newly acquired skills in millet-based food production.

Among the eight women managing the millet kitchens, only two have studied up to 12th grade, yet formal education has never been a

constraint to their ambition. For the first time in their lives, they travelled beyond their district, traveling to Bhubaneswar by train. This milestone was not just about learning new recipes. Their first train journey was an experience filled with excitement and a newfound sense of confidence.

Now, with neatly covered heads and skilled in preparing delicious traditional millet delicacies, these women take their responsibilities seriously. One member from each group maintains accounts. They have also shown a keen interest in learning financial accounting and record keeping. To ensure financial transparency, they are now taking steps to open organizational bank accounts, in addition to their existing SHG and personal bank accounts.

GROWN AND RECOGNITION

In just six months, these groups have made remarkable progress. They have received orders from ITDA (Integrated Tribal Development Agency) for the Adivasi Divas celebrations and various departmental



meetings. They are frequently invited by government departments and other agencies to set up stalls at events like Republic Day, Women's Day, and Independence Day celebrations. Their ability to secure large-scale catering orders, including an impressive 10,000 laddus for a temple event, is a testament to their capability and quality. They also receive small catering orders for local weddings. In Boddaguda village, the kitchen group has also started making Korra (foxtail millet) cakes for birthday celebrations.



MILLET – BASED PRODUCTS

Currently, the groups are preparing a variety of millet-based products, including:

(A) Dry Savory Snacks

- Ragi Mixture
- Ragi Muruku
- Ragi Badam Pakoda
- Sorghum Namkeen
- Bajra Pudina Sev

(B) Dry Sweet Snacks

- Ragi Laddu

- Ragi Karanji Pitha
- Ragi Arisa Pitha
- Sorghum Balushahi
- Sorghum Mysore Pak

(C) Hot Cooked Foods

- Ragi Soup
- Little Millet Khichdi
- Foxtail Millet Payasam
- Sorghum Manchurian
- Sorghum Rava Halwa



STRENGTHENING LOCAL CIRCULAR ECONOMIES

Tribal villages depend on local towns for meeting their processing needs travelling long distances even for small quantities. A



participatory exercise with community leaders, SHGs, Gram Panchayat representatives facilitated by WASSAN on circularity in local economy led the community to identify the demand for various processing units for local consumption. Small processing hubs were promoted as Adivasi enterprises with support from the HDFC Bank Parivarthan program.

Promotion of millets in the cropping systems, millet processing hubs and Millet Kitchen enterprises, brought in circularity in the economy. The snack food is now competing with the local consumption expenditure on packed snack food brought from outside!

The health of crops, soils, and people is strengthened, and the husk and other residual material goes into feeding poultry and livestock! The Millet Kitchens are a good complement to strengthen local circular economies.

DREAMS AND DETERMINATION

The women are not content with their current success; they dream bigger. The Boddaguda group aspires to earn Rs. 30,000 per member per month and envisions acquiring machines once their income stabilizes. The Peddarama Millet Kitchen Group aims to achieve Rs. 10,000 per member per month.

THE ROAD AHEAD

With renewed energy and enthusiasm, these women are determined to expand their businesses. Their journey is not just about selling millet-based products—it is about reclaiming their agency, challenging societal norms, and setting an example for future generations.

As organizations like WASSAN, with support from HDFC Bank Parivartan, explore ways to support these micro-enterprises, the story of Manyam Millet Ruchulu will continue to unfold, inspiring many more women to embark on their path to self-sufficiency and empowerment.



THE JOURNEY OF MANYAM MILLET RUCHULU

Tribal Women Aspiring for Change



FOR CONTACT INFORMATION, PLEASE MAIL TO

MR. J. V. JAYA PRAKASH

Program Manager, Watershed Support Services and Activities Network (WASSAN)

Email: jayaprakash@wassan.org | Website: <https://www.wassan.org>