

## Two illiterate Koraput tribals shine at Science Congress

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5 January 2012

BHUBANESWAR - What have illiterate tribals from remote Koraput district in Orissa got to do with eminent scientists in India? Well, there is a connect and this was revealed at the ongoing 99th Indian Science Congress when the Koraput tribals rubbed shoulders with the who's who of the Indian scientific community.

And the tribals were there because they had earned the pride of place with their unique efforts towards conservation of bio-diversity and development of climate-resilient farming systems. It was indeed a proud day for Raita Mudill and Chandra Pradhan — two tribals from Koraput district — as they were felicitated for their global achievement in the area of application of traditional knowledge systems.

And it was no less a person than Prime Minister Manmohan Singh himself who gave them certificates of appreciation after inaugurating the five-day Congress. The tribals hailing from Orissa's most backward district received the GIAHS citation of the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO).

Koraput has been recognised among the world's 20 "Globally Important Agricultural Heritage Systems" (GIAHS) sites. Forty-two-year-old Chandra Pradhan and 28-year-old Raila Muduli (28) have been using traditional farming methods to promote food security and bio-diversity in their villages. The region is home to one of the oldest gene pools of rice.

Manmohan Singh, congratulating the Koraput tribals for their efforts in conserving the local bio-diversity and developing climate-resilient farming systems, said it was important to explore and revive traditional knowledge systems in the areas of agriculture, architecture, handicrafts and textiles.

The prime minister said: "One needs to go no further than the tribal communities who live in the deep forest areas of Mayurbhanj and have a reservoir of knowledge on medicinal usage of locally-available plants."

Renowned agricultural scientist Dr M.S. Swaminathan, who has been working closely with the tribals of Koraput for the last 20 years, said: "The FAO's recognition is a tribute to the agricultural practices of the tribals. According to research findings, their practices are more than 3,000 years old. Their traditional knowledge helps them to conserve the genes, seeds, grains and water."

Swaminathan, the father of India's green revolution, said that his M.S. Swaminathan Research Foundation had decided to replicate the results of Koraput model in other tribal regions of the country.

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