



# Koya Tribe Conflict Over Sacred Mahua Flowers

## Why in News?

In **Godavari valley**, the **Koya tribe** faces a cultural crisis as raids by the **Special Enforcement Bureau** threaten their cherished tradition of **Mahua liquor consumption**.

## Key Points

- Mahua, a tropical tree scientifically known as ***Madhuca longifolia***, plays a crucial role in the traditions of different tribal groups in India.
  - Among the Koya community, the tree is revered and plays a significant role in various ceremonies. The blossoms emerge in the beginning of summer and are mainly utilised for making alcohol.
  - Dried flowers are a key source of revenue for those who gather them. In the Godavari Valley, the Koyas produce **cooking oil from Mahua nuts**.
- It is a **prominent forest tree in tribal areas of Bastar (Chhattisgarh)** and plays an important role in the rural economy.
- The mahua flowers are a **rich source of sugars** and are said to contain **vitamins, minerals and calcium**.
- The flowers are fermented and distilled yielding spirituous liquor also known as '**country beer**'.
  - An **estimated 90% of the annual production** of Mahua flower is used in the process of brewing beverages.



## Koya Tribe

- Koya are one of the few **multi-racial and multi-lingual tribal** communities in India.

- They live in the forests, plains, and valleys on **both sides of the Godavari River**, in the states of Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, **Chhattisgarh**, and Odisha.
- The Koya are said to have migrated to central India from their original home in **Bastar, northern India**.
- **Language:**
  - The Koya language, also called **Koyi**, is a **Dravidian language**. It is closely **related to Gondi** and has been strongly **influenced by Telugu**.
  - Most **Koyaspeak** either **Gondi or Telugu, in addition to Koyi**.
- **Occupation:**
  - **Traditionally**, they were **pastoralists and shifting cultivators**, but now-a-days, they have **taken to settled cultivation** supplemented by **animal husbandry and seasonal forest collections**.
  - They grow Jowar, Ragi, Bajra, and other millets.
- **Society and Culture:**
  - All Koya belong to one of **five sub-divisions called gotrams**. **Every Koya is born into a clan**, and he cannot leave it.
  - The Koyas have a **patrilineal and patrilocal family**. The family is called "Kutum". The nuclear family is the predominant type.
  - **Monogamy** is prevalent among the Koyas.
  - The Koya practice their **own ethnic religion**, but also worship a number of **Hindu gods and goddesses**.
  - **Many Koya deities are female**, the most important being the "mother earth."
  - **They maintain community funds and grain banks at the village level** to help the needy families and provide food security.
  - Koyas either bury or **cremate the dead**. They erect menhirs in memory of the dead.
  - Their main **festivals are Vijji Pandum** (seeds charming festival) and **KondalaKolupu** (festival to appease Hill deities).
  - Koyas perform a robust, **colourful dance called Permakok (Bison horn dance)** during festivals and marriage ceremonies.

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