

## STICKINESS OF THE *HALASINA HANNU*

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The *halasina hannu* (in Kannada) or the jackfruit is native to the Western Ghats and is found in southern India. Growing up, I was told that *halasina* refers to the root, 'of the roots' - the bark that extends its fruits from the tree. The word *hannu* means fruit. In some Kannada dialects, *halasu/halasi* (pronounced with a deeper stress on the 'la') refers to the process of decay, rotting and/or fermentation. Before I go any further, I must acknowledge that there are different explanations to what and how the word *halasina* comes into being and what it means. The speculative connections between concepts that are made in this piece are a result of situated narrative and description, hinting at one possibility of how one may perhaps understand sticky relations. At my grandmother's home in southern Karnataka, there are quite a few jackfruit trees. The oldest one, north east of the house still occasionally, after many generations produces some of the largest jackfruits I have ever seen. The tree is right by a stream. There tend to be anthills in its vicinity. Dense foliage. Wetness on the barks. Ferns. Moist air. In this corner of the land, the air is always sticky. Even in peak summer, a few minutes by the big *halasina mara* (jackfruit tree), will show you air that is cooler than the air you felt in the yard. The lifeworld around the *mara* (tree) like a membrane for winds that move through it, conditions it, thus changing it. In the briefest of moments, that change is felt by the breeze of decay - the *halasu*. It is amidst the orienting air of this deep rot, decaying its vibrant fragrance into the air, that an interesting encounter of concepts can be found. The *halasu* of the *mara* is not just the atmospheric condition that it spatio-temporally shares with those that find themselves in its company but is a matter of deep more-than-organic reasoning as to why they exist. I seek to articulate an enlivenment of the air that is specific to those grounds but is not because of what is in the ground alone but is entangled in the condition of *halasu* - suggesting a possible theory of stickiness. In reading aliveness, Puig de la Bellacasa (2019) argues that descriptions and reinterpretations of aliveness need to address what is more than 'the soil' Soil is not simply the description of ground and affect but about figuring "a relational key to the. aliveness of the more than human-soil community: it is not in 'the' soil" (:401). Puig de la Bellacasa views this attunement of reading soils not just because it could be an ethical practice but because the soil is already alive. It is not alive independently as Puig de la Bellacasa stresses but is part of dense material and multispecies communities. To think with the ground,

therefore, is to bring into consideration how these grounds complicate the sticky affectivities of our understanding the *mara*, the *hannu* as tiny arbiters in an entrenchment of *halasu*.

The *halasu* is therefore in this context, not the rot in a conventional modern sense referring to binaries of good and bad, and the *halasu* is definitely not the decay or ferment of stagnation. It is not a process of something getting spoiled or losing its functional properties. The *halasu* is superficially a description of process but it is conceptually an ontological state. In-fact, the *halasu* has no productive function although its deep capacities can be cultivated. As an ontological state of lifeworld it does not conceptually fit in with life-death binaries. As Puig de la Bellacasa (2019) notes: "Thinking with soils, aliveness moves, transitions, circulates, revealing a common entangled fate that blurs human-soil ontological boundaries"(401). It can be argued that my description of the jackfruit and the *halasu* are in-fact descriptions at the boundaries of exposure and meaning. What the state of stickiness I otherwise like to think of as the *halasu* is the fragrance of possibility - of deep organics entangling a million worlds in the eventual attempt at writing the most mundane boundary description of something that does not constitute the object but is flesh that is afforded to become part of human community (and activity). The task here is still not to extend the force of description as a mere aesthetic but to invite the methodological possibility of the flow of *halasu* to guide thinking on the *halasina hannu* and the *halasina mara*.

Like the thud. Thud! As the fruit falls in all its might from the *halasina mara*. Often the fruit is already consumed by other critters. When we do find one for the house, its presence is felt in the placement on a gunny sack, in a corner by the lobby. That sense of air's density that the *halasina hannu* emanates is an aroma without pretense: it is social knowledge that an event will soon be enacted. My grandmother, uncle and aunt scout the room to sense the possibility of its consumption. Outside by the bay next to the kitchen, a *katti* (knife) affixed/soldered to a low stool sits next to utensils with water and some coconut oil. My grandmother takes her seat and lifts the jackfruit, in one deep breath, and drops it onto the *katti* (knife). And the process of the cut begins. It's a slow and attentive process. Having oiled her hands, she carefully plucks out the pods and separates them from the fabric of gums, sticking into everything that it comes in contact with. The texture of the *katti* has inscribed in it- the leftover stickiness of jackfruits of the past. It's impossible to completely scrape off the gum of the open jackfruit. In order to avoid a reaction with the human skin, the latex that drips on the exterior of its green body is carefully negotiated with. As the pods are carved out, plucked and, separated from the seeds inside - some into a bowl of water - you see the dance of viscosity and stickiness: one describing the other, letting one take form, slipping in interactions that are otherwise sticky, muddled in the most intricate of movements, fleshed

out for ritual, culture and cuisine. An ontological boundary is sensed in its aroma and stickiness, as an atmospheric embodiment in the corridor entangles with the air.

My grandmother shares her excitement of how ripe the fruit was. She exclaims that this was indeed the right moment to cut the fruit open. Its affectivity of stickiness retains the force of the monsoon, akin to the maturity of the *mara* itself which uses that time to flourish. Despite being a *mara* of the monsoon, the jackfruit tree is known to be drought tolerant by local farmers. Opening up the *halasina hannu* and tasting the ripe pod: an explosion of sticky flavor - honey, pineapple, custard, caramell, mango oozing out as one chews through its fiber. This is not a speculative enchantment. It is the literal interactive temporality of stickiness conditioning the nature of liveliness, parceled by one brief version of description. The jackfruit tree is a life of monsoon grounds but it is also a living theory that affords us the importance of thinking with/through ontological stickiness. The *halasu*, i.e. the material of stickiness is also a material of reading the condition of stickiness. Parceling the metaphoric and material meaning of wetness from the air, soils, multispecies communities and others, the *halasu* as the living organics of what makes the *mara* part of the local lifeworld, is one entry for theory to speak from monsoonal grounds. It is also a hint for a knowledge system of stickiness that inherits the monsoon as a figure of time that makes the world what it is. Sticky relations are therefore not just material causal links of more-than-organic connections but are attuned to conceptually sticky matters of the time of the monsoon. The monsoon as a force that makes *halasu* possible is exactly what affords it the ontological capacity to be a possible theory of stickiness. Without the monsoon, there would be no or rather a very different speculation of *halasu*. The monsoon makes the *mara* and the condition of *halasu* (the roots, the rot, the deep decay) affords us the sticky joys of *hannu*.

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All photos and images are by the author unless otherwise stated.

## REFERENCE

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