

# Wato ne hômpu ne kãmpa

## I live, I see, and I hear Mehi (Mãkrarè) life

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(translation by Coletivo de Tradutores Berkeley-Brasil)^

### Dedication

I dedicate this work to the Krahô people,  
to the Krahô young and old  
that survive  
the daily massacres that  
want to silence them.

### History of the gourd-women (Origin of the mehi women)

Every gourd has a different way and is a woman, all were made by the Sun. The woman (mehi) came from the gourd. The first woman (mehi) and the others emerged from the story that I will tell and along with them came the *resguardos*, the practices of caring for corporality, fundamental to the formation of the mehi person.

Sun and Moon were two friends, two men, only the two existed in the world. Moon is lazy, swears, argues and hinders, for his part, Sun works and organizes. They are not relatives (hõpin), but friends.

They made a farm and planted only gourds. Moon asked why Sun was planting only gourds. Sun said that he wanted a wife, because people originated from them. After Sun took a croá<sup>1</sup> seed and planted it in the same farm. Thus, half of the farm was gourd, and the other half was croá. Moon asked why Sun was planting croá, he said that they were the men.

Afterward, Sun left a mark on the future village of the gourd-women and the croá-men. This is the round circle, base of the Mehi villages, in the center of this circle is found the patio. Around the patio, Sun made several structures of straw, which are the homes of each gourd-woman. When the gourds were ready, good, mature, Sun

1. A plant from the pumpkin family

2. Fruit from a tree of the *Bixaceae* family.

3. A type of palm tree.

called Moon to go with him to the farm, but Moon was feeling lazy and didn't go. Sun went alone to the farm, walked through all the vines of gourds, looking at the gourds, it was morning. He found a gourd, very beautiful, he took this gourd, placed it in the water and said: "You will become a very beautiful woman". Sun continued saying that, in the afternoon, he had to be in his home. When the afternoon arrived, Sun and Moon heard someone making noise in the river, it was a mehi-woman. Moon told Sun that someone was making noise, Sun told Moon: "Calm yourself, don't be like that." Moon wanted to see who it was, but Sun told Moon not to go. Moon looked to the road. There came a woman with long hair, big, very beautiful. Moon said that the home of her husband was over there, so she went on to Sun's house.

When she arrived there, Sun received her and said that she was the wife that he wanted, then they slept together and, another early day, he went to hunt, but he went by Moon's house before and asked him not to go there. Moon told Sun that he wouldn't go there. When Sun disappeared in the forest to hunt the peccary, Moon went to his house and had sex with Sun's wife who was a virgin. After this event, she menstruated, when Sun came from the forest, the door had broken down, and his wife said that she was bleeding. Sun said that, from now on, the women would bleed every month. Sun took urucum<sup>2</sup> and painted her red, took some straws of pati,<sup>3</sup> and told her to stay seated, and said that while she was bleeding she could not bathe in the river, wet her head, she could only eat macaúba and corn. This was the first *resguardo* lived by the woman.

Sun divided the peccary in half and took one of the strips to Moon. He asked Moon why he had messed with his wife. Moon asked forgiveness and said that it had to be so, no one had to stay

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with only one wife. Sun said that he would make a wife for Moon. Sun went to the farm, took a gourd with a defined, long neck shape, not like the wife of the Sun. And he placed it in the water, then, in the afternoon, Moon's wife came out with ringlet hair, the thinnest neck, and a large head. Another day, he removed all the other gourds from the farm and threw them in the river. He took ugly and beautiful gourds, of all kinds, and placed them in the river. Sun told the gourds that they would all become women and that, when they left the water, they should go straight to their homes with their companions.

Sun returned to the farm, took all the croás and placed them, too, in the water, alongside the gourds. He said: "You are the men of these women that are here, each woman will come from the water and will take her husband". Each croá had a different type, blue, red, and green, there were beautiful, ugly croá of every kind. All were skinny, there were none that were thick.

Thus, each woman took hold of the arm of their men and the couple went walking in the direction of their straw homes, each home had a couple. And, thus, was made the village (Mehi). Sun said that the sign marked on the ground, the circle, was his sign. And he warned that if one day the sign disappeared, all would die and there would be nothing left.

The home is the woman's (mehi), it is her who does everything. She makes the life of the Mākrrarè, people who originated the Mehi. They maintain the home, the rituals, the parties, the social relations. The women do and the men follow. The rituals and parties happen when there is some *resguardo* to be made with a person of a home. Thus, when this happens, communication is made by the caller-man in the center of the village to the other men, who pass on this information in their homes. Thus, all the women of the village initiate the organization of the party.



This is why I decided to tell this story from the gourd-women and croá-men. People are born undefined—without the gender defined—and they need to protect themselves to become mehi women and men. The word gourd (*cukôn*), in the mehi tongue, is masculine and *croá* (*pàhxô*) is feminine. Each *resguardo* emerged with the history of a gourd-woman or croá-man. These elder men and women, that guide me, told me that I should take care of the gourd-women since being a woman, I should bring a story or narrative of women.

I present the gourd-women as holders of knowledge, which may seem strange to the *Cupen*<sup>4</sup> who have always heard this narrative from men. But, I emphasize here that it was these elder men and women, who authorized me to bring the narrative showing the knowledge of the Mehi woman. Bringing this version with a focus on women is not a problem for any Mehi elder man or woman.

Along their life, the Krahô person should perform many *resguardos*, which are practices of care for the body. The *resguardos* speak of the correct way to live, to eat, to maintain sexual relations, to plan children, to perform their daily activities. There are always rules that we should follow. If the person does not make the *resguardos*, they will no longer know who they are, they will not have memory, since to keep the teachings and the right way to be Krahô, the person has to live, hear, practice, speak, share. This knowledge is not in books.

From the gourd-women, following the vine of the gourd and the croá, each gourd-woman brings a collection of *resguardos*: Gourd-woman, the wife of the sun; Gourd-woman, maintaining life; Gourd-woman, completing *resguardos* and starting others; Gourd-woman, funeral ceremony; Gourd-woman, the *resguardo* of memory; Gourd-woman, renewal of life; Gourd-woman, teaching the men. The *resguardos* take care of the knowledge about the body, the land, and wisdom. And all of this is important for school.

I live in the state of Tocantins. I live in Aldeia Sol. I was born in the Galheiro village, on February 5, 1971, at noon, close to the foot of a jatobá<sup>5</sup> called “*tehcré*”, where my suffering life in this world began, since it is not easy to be an Indigenous woman. I wanted to breastfeed all the time and my mother wanted to sleep, but she couldn't because she had to take care of me. She

wanted to see me grow, so she took care of me, she made the necessary *resguardos*, and I grew.

I'm 1.58 meters tall, light, brunette, black ringlet hair, today, I am a Krahô woman. And thus, I was a child, I was a young girl, I became a woman, the mother of three beautiful daughters, and I even had time to have a husband, a husband with a very golden head of nature, pure. This woman went walking, “*hunting*” a better life for her population without rights to life, with the right to be a person in the world in which we live, living to escape from a hand that clenched our fist. I was and I am in search of rights which our ancestors did not live, like the right to education and health.

Today, I have a busy life, I studied in the state of Tocantins, I studied teaching and I finished. I thought that I couldn't study any more, but someone told me again: “Go, you can do it!” And I said: “No”. They insisted again: “Go and study”. And once again I went and passed the test. I had to leave my family in our home. I took my suitcase and left thinking about the why of it all, to leave my children with their father and thinking whether he would care in the way that I care.

At times I cried with much pain in my heart, so much so that it was tight like a rope around my neck, I left crying inside my heart, I went away from people so they wouldn't notice that I was crying. Again, I passed the exam at the Federal University of Goiás and 5 years went that way, I never got used to it, but I finished the course with a lot of courage. I learned a lot with the suffering, many times without resources to eat on the trips from the village to the city.

In the city, there were times in which I didn't eat good food, because I didn't have a way to eat, I didn't have money. There were occasions in which I didn't have money, I didn't have a scholarship, I didn't have anything, I was just left watching my friends eat. Sometimes, some well-intentioned colleagues would offer. That's how I lived with my friends. After I got used to them, they sometimes helped me by sharing almost everything with me. I became very happy with my non-Indigenous friends, with the *cupen*. They are difficult times leaving your home, from your land to study or work. Like I said previously, there is no space in the city for the Indigenous person and life in the city becomes very complicated.

After contact with non-Indigenous people, we came to suffer to learn the culture of the *cupen*

4. Non-Indigenous.

5. A tree from the Fabaceae family.



(non-Indigenous). This seems not to happen with many cupen, who are not interested in knowing us and, thus, respect us. I'm trying very hard to seek to understand the *cupen* way to think and live. The majority of the *mehi* women do not speak the Portuguese language, but they understand. We search and we fight for means to learn something different, the life of the *cupen*, but despite the strong presence of the *cupen* we should never lose or forget who we are, we are *mehi*.

We are fighting to learn something different, but, despite mixing with the *cupen*, we never lose our ways of being and living, and in that way, we do not forget our knowledge of being *mehi*, as the *resguardos*. We still have marked in our bodies our parties, singing, running, hunting, fishing, body painting, basket weaving. We are *Mãkraré*, but the whites, non-Indigenous, call us *Krahô*.

And for us, the woman never leaves her family like this, therefore, everything that I am going through is very hard. But at the same time, as it was encouraged by my husband, a special person, and my daughters, I had to leave to study, often crying from my home, because I didn't want to leave them. They knew that the study would allow me to gain important and necessary knowledge about the *cupen*. My daughter kept encouraging me and said: "Here comes the master's exam". My daughters, together with my friends, now were the people who were encouraging me, and not just my husband. It is only in this way that it is possible to leave the community, with all this support from my people.

I want to continue studying with the primary goal of helping my people, who almost do not have any "outside" knowledge. We, *mehi*, study to defend our people. Some relatives are not aware of our rights and are afraid of being enslaved, they are afraid of the *cupen* doing them harm, of losing their territories. As a teacher, I can deepen the knowledge we have about how to fight to guarantee this feeling of safety among the *Krahô*. This is sustainability. I want my relatives to feel safe among the *cupen*. I am the first *Krahô* woman to graduate from a university, and I want to continue my studies.

I was very criticized for being an Indigenous woman learning the Portuguese language. The *Krahô* men said that I could end up leaving my *mehi* way of being and leading other women down the wrong path. But, after having lived all of this, I never changed my way of being a warrior

woman among men, always fighting to improve some things in the life of the community and the *Timbira* of Tocantins and Maranhão. That's why I am always striving for my studies.

I lived and learned a lot from the old *Krahô*, and with this coexistence, I understood the good ideas of *Krahô* life. Today, there are few elders alive and without them we are losing a lot of knowledge and because of that I want to research and record with equipment and pen what they have to say. I intend to keep these memories, to value their thoughts to the world. I want to keep informing and amplifying my perception to continue my work as an educator in a truly differentiated school system; I want to continue to teach in my mother tongue with other methodologies and where our knowledge system is valued.

Facing this difficulty that I experience in my wanderings and knowing about the presence and importance of the *Krahô* woman, these were my main interlocutors for this work. For this research, I talked especially with the old women. They suffer the effects of a partner who will go to the city and fails to comply with his *resguardo*. These women are involved with the children in schools, and they know about the problems that school can have/create.

The *Krahô* people speak the *Mãkraré* language. Linguists affirm that we are from the *Jê* linguistic family and we speak the *Timbira* language. We have as a second language a borrowed language, Portuguese. We use the term *Mehi* (son of emu) as a self-designation, and we call the non-Indigenous *Cupen*. According to the 2013 *SESAI* census, the *Krahô* numbered 2,800 people. We, the *Krahô*, are also called *Timbira*.

We are a people who, in the village, wake up early in the morning every day, and in the late afternoon, we gather in the courtyard to share and plan the following day's activities. The *Krahô* women encourage this practice of getting together at the end of the day to keep the village's movement firm.

We live in the *Cerrado*<sup>6</sup> and have a vast knowledge and relationship with the animals, plants, roots, and fruits of this environment. We keep a relationship with the said environment which, for us, the *Krahô*, is full of creatures that must be respected as we respect a person, that way, we ask permission to enter the home or territory of a plant or an armadillo. Therefore,

to plant, harvest, hunt, fish, we establish a relationship with the beings that dominate these worlds. In this way, our narratives and rituals count on the presence of all of the beings in the universe.

We have a classification proper of the many environments of the Cerrado: *iomré* (small bush), *iomcati* (big bush), *hawen* (vegetation on the top of the ridges), *hare* (pathways), *ken* (ridges) and *hakot* (bush). Our territory is located near the tributaries of the right bank of the Tocantins River. Our time is divided between the rainy season and the drought. During the rainy season, we fish and hunt. During the drought, the parties happen. There is the party of *kwyrtti* or *papa rout*, of the cashew, *bacaba*, honey, coconut, the *amjikim* of *tére*, the *tep*, the *ketuwajê*. These parties start in the month of April, the beginning of the drought. The fields are prepared in May, June, July, and August. We have log races for each village, which happen in the afternoon.

Our Indigenous Land is called by us *Mãkraré* and is located in the state of Tocantins, in the cities of Goiatins and Itacajá. The *Cupens* called our Indigenous Land *Kraôlândia* and later *Krahô*. Despite having a territory of about 3,200 kilometers demarcated, in 1944, by the government of the state of Goiás, with the rich native cerrado preserved and a good water supply, several issues really concern us. In the 1988 Constitution, we earned many of our rights, but, upon laws made by the *Cupen*, we have been finding only suffering. Not even the right to land is respected today.

To pass on the knowledge about the *resguardos* the person must get involved in doing or experiencing the *resguardos*. This is the way to keep in the body, in the person, your memory, who you are, who your people are. The person has to live and to live among the Krahô is to share the knowledge of the ancestors. Many changes have happened and are still happening in the lives of the Krahô, the problem is when these changes end up nullifying Krahô knowledge and imposing other ways of knowing the world.

Today, in the Krahô villages, there are schools and writing in the Krahô language, which are helping and creating a new way of recording this knowledge. In this movement, children and young people are getting to know the world of non-Indigenous people. The Krahô believe that the school must follow the Krahô way of passing on knowledge. However, care must be taken

so that the time-space of the school does not conflict with the Krahô way of being and living. It is clear that, currently, the way the school works and its teaching dynamics are removing young people from this Krahô space-time. The school has a non-Indigenous logic that was imposed, and this is being problematized by Indigenous teachers.

To alleviate this other logic, I and some Krahô teachers are thinking about dividing the school year between five months of classes with non-Indigenous teachers, who teach subjects in Portuguese, and seven months of classes taught by the Krahôs in the Krahô language, which would involve the children and young people in the music, history, subsistence activities (hunting, farming, fishing), in camping in the forest to get to know the Krahô world.

Inserting the school in these activities that are being lost and affected by the school would be a way of combining the dynamics of Krahô life with the school. The idea of having seven months with the Krahô Indigenous teachers arose from an attempt by the teachers to combine the time-space of the school with the way in which the Krahô pass on knowledge and reinsert them into the Krahô learning dynamics with intense participation of the elders.

Teachers know that the school year must be completed to have the educational training that the state of Tocantins requires, but the question is how to make this work in the "hands" of the Krahôs, that is, based on the Krahô way of being. The way the school is structured forces Indigenous teachers to stay in the classroom and follow a class program imposed by the state of Tocantins. Since 1992, the school has been removing children and young people from Krahô experiences and sociability. This is an element that has caused the body's *resguardo* and care to be forgotten. School is a right earned by the Krahô people and should not be used as a way of violating them in their territory. It is worth noting that this change in the way the school operates is an initiative of Krahô Indigenous teachers, and it is still under discussion.

Since 1994, I have worked with education among my people. I want to build a school in the way of the Krahô people, that is, more reflective of Timbira's values. Our education is differentiated, but in practice, this has never happened.

I think that the relationship between the social context, territory, different formative processes,

and pedagogical practice must be strengthened, there can be no separation between one thing and the other. I am working on the Political Pedagogical Plan (PPP) for my village, where I intend to make sure that formal education respects our traditional system of education and knowledge. In our worldview, we split the world into several halves. In the dry season, the Wacmejê half takes place, when the main parties begin, so classes would take place in this environment, in the courtyard, together with the elders, *pajés*,<sup>7</sup> singers, hunters, and other traditional experts. During this period, students could closely monitor every detail of these movements. In the rainy season, when the Catamjê half takes place, we would stay in the classroom more, studying writing in Portuguese, which would not prevent us from having the elders explain how society works and is traditionally organized. In both periods, evaluations and records would be carried out with teachers and students.

Health in an Indigenous area, as it is structured, also does not fit into the Krahô logic or with respect to this logic. One of the problems is having only the figure of the Indigenous health agent (AIS) and no other Indigenous professional, who could be more likely to act and modify the work routine. Without the Indigenous nurse or doctor, health professionals do not understand nor respect the Krahô. This is the reality that prevails in general, with some small exceptions of professionals "open" to dialogue.

Therefore, health professionals often do not take into account the care practices of *pajés*. For example, they do not wait for the *pajé* to "see" the person in the process of becoming ill and "act", they insist that the person must be moved to the city and be seen by a doctor. This all happens within Indigenous territory, disqualifying one of the greatest Krahô authorities. Sometimes the doctor does not know everything. The person stays in the hospital for a long time and they do not let the *pajé* enter that environment, and they do not let the person return to the village when they no longer want to submit themselves the hospitalization process.

There is an insistence on taking the person to the hospital, and when they are in the hospital, it is difficult to control their return, even if the person wants to go home. There is no participation of the Krahô in the treatment being carried out.

They don't let the Krahô take the medicine they made to the hospital. The problem lies in the lack of dialogue and the possibility of the Krahô participating in the treatment. There is no respect for the Krahô's care practices and the Krahô's choice of how to care for themselves. They do not respect the *pajé* who knows various types of illnesses and the movement of the person's body throughout their life cycle.

In the village, the *pajé* accompanies the person who becomes ill and performs therapeutic procedures that the doctor is unaware of; health professionals do not believe in the *pajé* and do not respect him. In the current scenario, it is possible to state that the majority of people who work in Indigenous health among the Krahô are going against the National Policy of Attention to the Health of Indigenous Peoples, of 2006, which states that traditional health practices must be respected and coordinated with official services. Furthermore, they end up patronizing the Krahô when they want to decide on the best treatment for the person and impose it. They treat the Krahô as if they were children, not respecting their decisions and choices, deciding their lives.

Both the right to education and the right to health for Indigenous peoples were achievements of Indigenous peoples that are not being properly carried out and end up taking place in extremely violent and racist work processes in Indigenous territory. In cities, when they are in city health services, the Krahô also suffer from disrespect and neglect.

The Krahô Indigenous Land currently has problems in its surroundings with the presence of soybean and eucalyptus monocultures that are very near and can impact the forests, rivers, and our farms within the territory. In addition to the animals, the Krahô themselves may suffer from the presence of these large monocultures. Many knowledge transmission practices, especially in the male universe, take place when men, children, young people, and old people go walking and camping in the cerrado. Without the presence of this territory, this knowledge is threatened.

Life in the city can be a problem for the Krahô, especially due to the abuse of alcoholic beverages, the Krahô people need to find a limit, which I believe is in strengthening the Krahô knowledge that must be lived to be learned by these people. Therefore, it is important to practice

7. Shamans.

the *resguardo*. The problems the Krahô face drive people to drink. The city attracts with drink. The space in the city for the Krahô is the "street", when they are in the city, they are frowned upon. There is a lot of prejudice against the Krahô way of life and the Krahô people. And in the city, the space given to the Krahô is violence. These are serious problems that end up making it impossible for the Krahô to live their knowledge and care for life, which is being called *resguardo* here.

I went to learn-research about how the Krahô woman lives with the *resguardo*, how she feels without or with the *resguardo* in place, how important the *resguardos* are for the woman. To do this, I sought to understand *resguardo* for all Krahô (men, women, children, young people, adults, old people).

*Resguardo* is understood here as all care in the life of the person and their family members, it involves knowing what to eat, what to wear, how to paint, cut your hair, whether you can work, fish, run log races, go to the farm, have sex, take a shower together and what to sing. It also involves care at important stages of life, such as, for example, when giving birth and menstruating, which must be maintained by the woman-person, her partner, her other children, and her parents. So, it is a family care that needs everyone in the family to happen.

In the *resguardos*, there is care for the body. In the case of children, care must be greater and involve the people with whom they interact. In this way, this happens more intensely, with the mother, father, siblings, and other closest relatives. Thus, for example, if a child gets sick, all the relatives keep waiting and cannot eat a certain food. This shows that everyone participates in the child's pain. Among the Krahô, care is collective.

Notable in the *resguardo* practices are the body painting, the use of *Crow* (*buriti* log),<sup>8</sup> and the Krahô songs. It can be said that these are three central pillars in every *resguardo*. Paintings present many meanings, for example, when done vertically or horizontally, such as the rattlesnake painting, which will have a certain meaning. The drawing of the Cerrado *jabutí* tortoise is used on children of 2 to 12 years old. Adults use other paintings such as hawks or vultures. Painting and *resguardo* go together, they are never separated. When a person finishes some *resguardo*, they have to be painted to free themselves, if they do not paint

themselves, the person may suffer. Each painting has its time, history, and origin. Each painting has an animal, plant, song, and specific protection.

In turn, the *Crow* is the *buriti* log. This log also accompanies the *resguardo* and the paintings. *Crow* is life, it is the spirit of the people. When someone is cured of an illness, this process must end with a party with the log. When a person dies, it is also necessary to have a party for the deceased and the *buriti* palm tree must die too. *Crow* is present at central moments in the lives of the Timbira. All *buriti* is a life of a human being, it has life. It is a characteristic of the Timbira, the log race and, to carry it out, *buriti* logs must be removed. This process must be done with great respect for the plant.

The songs also play a central role in the *resguardo* practices. All the songs come from nature and follow the movements of the community. There are songs for fishing, hunting, weddings, and food consumption. Thus, the school needs to encourage young people to learn about music organization. I believe that the school can play an important role in documenting this singing. For this reason, I started the use of a methodological tool with students that consists of transcribing and drawing these songs at school that bring a series of information that young people do not know. It is a good way to teach through joint construction with students.

In this community movement, each family always participates in the construction of knowledge, each one building daily activities. The processes of initiating girls and boys into adulthood require the participation of families and the involvement of everyone. The *resguardo* practices must be observed during this transition to adulthood. Boys and girls need to go through the *wyhty* process, an initiation ritual, to define their belonging in the social environment.

Doing this study was important to record this knowledge for people who do not know about the *resguardos* of the Krahô people. Mainly, it should be left to the Krahô children, as the older ones, who have the knowledge, are dying and the younger ones are not interested, so this work can be important material in schools. I want to insert Krahô knowledge into the school's study dynamics. This work also ends up being important because it has the perspective of the Krahô woman.

8. A type of palm tree.



To execute this research, I talked and listened to people, elders, adults and young people. I observed the *resguardos*, the few moments in which they are still alive, because many Krahô no longer want to do the *resguardos*. For *cupen* science, it can be said that this research had an anthropological approach, since I sought to understand the way the Krahô think, feel and live their lives, their social relationships, how they understand their world and the events in the *resguardos*.

The elders guided me, I did not do this research alone, they gave me directions about how to explain something so grand and complex, which is the *resguardos*. I realized that the research carried out by a Krahô, like me, does not happen alone, it is not done only by me but involves old men and women, they are my guides, they tell me the path I should follow.

To reach the Krahô's understanding of the *resguardos*, the elders told me about the history of gourd-women and croá men and guided me on how to organize all the information I collected. According to this story that deals with the first *mehi*, — this is how the Krahô are called, in the Krahô language — the gourd-women were the first people who learned from the Sun, our creator hero, about the *resguardos* and, thus, this knowledge was being passed on. Everything happened in that first village, and this knowledge was mainly with the gourd-women, and they passed it on.

Besides conversations with the elders, another way of collecting data was by participating in events alongside my people, observing how they make and live their *resguardos* in certain situations in life. I went to the woods with the old men and boys to see how a hunter is trained, I had never had this experience before. The Krahô old men and women care about the young and like to record interviews with stories and songs, they want to leave a safe path to the next generations that they learned from their fathers and grandfathers.

I need to emphasize that I managed to gather several moments when the *resguardos* are experienced, but this does not mean that they are happening. Every day that passes there is a distancing of the Krahô, especially the men, from

living the *resguardos*. Men are increasingly in the city, women are giving birth in the city, all of this makes it difficult to live Krahô care. And the school takes children away from the *resguardo*.

The participation of *mehi* women so that the *resguardos* remain in the lives of the *mehi* is very important. It was important in our history, of our ancestors and continues to be important to this day, given the absence of men in this process who are being attracted to the city, gourd-women continue to transmit this knowledge.

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