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"India has several tribal communities that have their own cultural practices... So, by interacting with these communities, we can understand their traditional astronomical knowledge and probably gain insights into their lives going back a few millennia," said Dr Aniket Sule.

Scientists are planning to visit tribal communities to record their knowledge and gain insights into astronomical beliefs associated with their cultural practices, for which the Infosys Foundation has granted Rs 10

lakh to Tata Institute of Fundamental Research (TIFR) for the study.

“India has several tribal communities that have their own cultural practices. Historically, these are related to calendars, directions, burials, sacrifices, and have some astronomical myths associated with them. So, by interacting with these communities, we can understand their traditional astronomical knowledge and probably gain insights into their lives going back a few millennia,” Dr Aniket Sule, reader at TIFR, told The Indian Express.

Prof Mayank Vahia, retired professor at TIFR who has worked with the Gonds in central India as well as Nicobarese tribes along with Sule, will conduct the study with tribes in Northeast India as well as some in western India (for instance, Warali or those in Dang).

“We submitted our proposal to the Infosys Foundation that sanctioned a grant of Rs 10 lakh for the study,” Dr Sule said.

Study researchers said the country had the richest group of isolated tribes with a memory

of past beliefs. For instance, the sun and moon are known to all tribes, but they do not notice that sunrise points vary over a year. Some tribes consider shooting stars to be fallen soldiers or discarded stars. Then, other tribes strongly believe that a shaft kept in a water bath will stand erect as long as the eclipse is on and will fall once it is over. They believe the direction in which it falls decides whether the eclipse is good or bad, Prof Vahia said.

Dr Sule said this is also a time for critical study as the younger generation in these tribes are less familiar with their own culture and more assimilated with the modern world. Thus, our window to document this knowledge closes with the older generation among these tribes, Dr Sule added.

Prof Vahia said isolated groups of people have looked at the sky from a unique perspective and interpreted what they see in a manner best suited to their culture and environment, and that a study of their astronomy provides a different perspective to human intellectual development.

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