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PHYSICAL & ARCHAEOLOGICAL ANTHROPOLOGY

1. A genetic advantage inherited from Neanderthals could give some people a 22% lower risk of severe COVID-19

- Some people may have genes inherited from Neanderthals that reduce their risk of severe COVID-19 by 22%, a study found.
- But the same researchers previously found that Neanderthal DNA can also put people at higher risk of respiratory failure due to COVID-19.
- The inherited genes are more common in Europe and Asia.

As an emergency room doctor, Hugo Zeberg has seen first-hand how widely COVID-19 infections can vary in severity. So he started digging for answers in a place that was familiar to him: the genome of Neanderthals.

Zeberg works at the Karolinska Institute in Sweden, and for the last couple of years, has been studying the degree to which Neanderthals - an extinct human species that died out about 40,000 years ago - passed along genes to modern humans through interbreeding.

Scientists think Neanderthal DNA makes up 1% to 2% of the genomes of many people of European and Asian descent. That small fraction of people's genetic codes may hold important clues about our immune responses to pathogens.

In a study published this week, Zeberg and his colleague Svante Pääbo at the Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology suggest that some people may have inherited a genetic advantage that reduces their risk of getting severe COVID-19 by 22%.

The advantage comes from a single haplotype - or long block of DNA - on chromosome 12. The same haplotype has been shown to protect people against West Nile, hepatitis C, and SARS (another coronavirus that shares many genetic similarities with the new one, SARS-CoV-2).

"The protective effect of this haplotype is probably not unique to SARS-CoV-2, but a more general part of our immune system," Zeberg told

Insider.

Some Neanderthal genes are helpful, others are harmful

Zeberg and Pääbo found that the Neanderthal-inherited haplotype may have become more common among humans in the last 1,000 years. One possible explanation for this, Zeberg said, is the genes' role in protecting people against other diseases caused by RNA viruses.

For their new study, the team relied on the genomes of three Neanderthals - two whose remains were found in southern Siberia and one from Croatia. The DNA dates back 50,000 to 120,000 years. They compared those Neanderthal genomes to the DNA of thousands of people with severe COVID-19. The haplotype associated with less severe COVID-19 was found in all three Neanderthal genomes. It codes for proteins that activate enzymes that help degrade RNA viruses.

However, a prior study from Zeberg and Pääbo, published in September, showed that not all Neanderthal DNA confers an advantage. In that research, they found that some modern humans have inherited a haplotype on chromosome 3 that puts them at higher risk of respiratory failure due to COVID-19. That particular gene cluster was found in the Neanderthal from Croatia.

"If you have that variant, you have twice the risk of getting severely ill with COVID-19 - perhaps even more," Zeberg said.

Zeberg's research suggests that around 25% to 30% of people in Europe and Asia carry the protective haplotype, while up to 65% of people in South Asia and 16% of people in Europe carry the dangerous one. Unfortunately, he said, the protective haplotype doesn't offset the risk of the dangerous one for those who have both.

2. Neanderthals of western mediterranean did not become extinct because of changes in climate.

According to paleo climatic reconstructions analyzing stalagmites sampled in some caves in the Murge plateau (Italy), Neanderthals might's have become extinct due to Homosapiens employed more sophisticated technologies. The researchers focused on the Murge Karst Plateau in Apulia. Where Neanderthals & Homosapiens co-existed for all least 3000 years.

Study shows that this area appears as a 'Climate niche' during the transition from Neanderthals to Homosapiens. It doesn't seem possible that a significant climate change has occurred atleast not as significant that it can lead to extinction of Neanderthals.

How is it possible to reconstruct climate of such a remote period? Stalagmites.

These rock formations rise from the floor of Karst caves thanks to ceiling water drippings. Stalagmites are excellent Paleo climatic & Paleo environmental archives. The results of study seem to show that the hypothesis that climate changes responsible for extinction of Neanderthals could be ruled out. But the study also shows that Homo Sapiens hunted using technology that was more advanced than Neanderthals. This being primary reason for Sapien supremacy over Neanderthals.

3. ANCIENT APE WITH 'HUMAN LEGS' & 'ORANGUTEM ARMS'.

Ancient Ape with 'human legs' & 'Orangutem Arms'. moved like no other creature on earth. The scientists have learned about a new species of fossil ape discovered in Bavaria (Germany) from more than 11 million years ago. These ape creatures may have also used a weird locomotion never seen until now, shedding light on how the human ancestors have evolved. Paleontologists named this species 'Denuvius Guggenmosi'. Denuvius is derived

from the Celtic roman river god Denavius & Guggenmosi honours **sigulf Goggenmosi** the scientist who discovered the site.

Scientists say, '**Denavius is like an ape & a hominine in one**'. The slightly elongated arms of the four or more specimens of Danuvicus that the scientists unearthed suggests that **it could hang from trees just like modern great apes**. Still **it's fingers bones were not as robust as one would expect of Knuckle walkers**. Unlike other apes such as gibbons & orangutans, which don't use legs as much as their arms, Danuvius would have **held it's legs straight & could have walked upright** while moving around in trees.

They also **had grasping big toe** which means it **would have walked on it's soles**. Moreover, **it's elbows, lower spine & shin bones were more like** one might expect of a human. **All in all, Danuvius didn't favour it's arms or legs in movement but appeared to use both equally**. **Scientists say, this newly identified type of locomotion** (extended limb clambering) may be the ancestral form of movement of both modern apes & humans.

4. PRIMATE VOICE BOXES (LARYNX) ARE EVOLVING AT A RAPID PACE

Scientists have discovered that larynx of primates is significantly larger relative to body size and is under faster rates of evolution than in other mammals. Larynx has 3 major functions.

- * Protecting the airway during feeding
 - * Regulating the supply of air to Lungs
- Vocal communication

Because of its important role in socialization behaviour through vocalisation it is believed that larynx is a key area of evolution. Especially in species with highly developed vocal communication system. Researches made CT scans of specimens from 55 different species and produced 3D computer models of their larynges.

The study found out that for a given body length, primate larynges are on average 38% larger than those of carnivorans and that the rate of evolution is faster in these species. There is also more variation in larynx size relative to body size among primates, indicating that primates have greater flexibility to evolve in different ways.

While, Carnivorans follow more of a fixed larynx size to body size ratio. Larynx size was also found to be a good predictor of the call frequency of a species, which demonstrates the relevance for vocal communication of the observed size variations.

5. NEANDERTHALS MAY HAVE HAD A LOWER THRESHOLD FOR PAIN

People who inherited a special ion channel from **Neanderthals** experience more pain. **Pain is mediated through specialized nerve cells that** are activated when potentially harmful things affect various parts of our bodies. These nerve cells have a special ion channel that has a key role in starting the electric impulse that signals pain & **is sent to the brain.**

Study has found out that some people especially from central & southern America and also in Europe have inherited a Neanderthal variant of gene that encodes an ion channel that initiates the sensation of pain. The biggest factor for how much pain is reported to be as their age. **People with this gene variant are experiencing the pain that any other human** would experience if they were 8 years older than the man carrying that gene.

The Neanderthal variant of ion channel carries 3 amino acid differences to the common modern variant. The 3 amino acid substitutions leads to heightened pain sensitivity in present day people. **However, some scientists say** it is difficult to say whether Neanderthals experienced more pain because pain is also modulated in spinal cord & in the brain. But this research shows that threshold for initiation of pain is however lower in **Neanderthals compared to modern humans.**

6. Newly discovered African 'climate seesaw' drove human Evolution

While it is widely accepted that climate change drove the evolution of our species in Africa, the exact character of that climate change and its impacts are not well understood. **Glacial-interglacial cycles strongly impact patterns of climate change in many parts of the world**, and were also assumed to regulate environmental changes in Africa during the critical period of human evolution over the last 1 million years. The ecosystem changes driven by these glacial cycles are thought to have stimulated the evolution and **dispersal of early humans**.

Researchers integrated 11 climate archives from all across Africa covering the past 620 thousand years to generate a comprehensive spatial picture of when and where wet or dry conditions prevailed over the continent. Researchers infer that the effects of the tropical Pacific Ocean on the so-called "**Walker Circulation**" a belt of convection cells along the equator that impact the rainfall and aridity of the tropics were the prime driver of this climate seesaw.

The data clearly shows that the wet and dry regions shifted between the east and west of the African continent on timescales of approximately 100,000 years, with each of the climatic shifts being accompanied by major turnovers in flora and mammal fauna. This alternation between dry and wet periods appeared to have governed the dispersion and **evolution of vegetation as well as mammals in eastern and western Africa**. The resultant environmental patchwork was likely to have been a critical component of human evolution and early demography as well. **The scientists are keen to point out that although climate change** was certainly not the sole factor driving early human evolution, the new study nevertheless provides a novel perspective on the tight link between environmental fluctuations and the origin of our early ancestors.

Many species of pan-African mammals whose distributions match the patterns researchers identify, and whose evolutionary history seems to articulate with the wet-dry oscillations between eastern and western Africa. These

animals preserve the signals of the environments that humans evolved in, and it seems likely that our human ancestors may have been similarly subdivided across Africa as they were subject to the same environmental pressures. **The scientists' work suggests that a seesaw-like pattern of rainfall alternating between eastern and western Africa probably had the effect of creating critically important ecotonal regions the buffer zones between different ecological zones, such as grassland and forest.**

Ecotones provided diverse, resource-rich and stable environmental settings thought to have been important to early modern humans. **They certainly seem to have been important to other faunal communities.**

7. Remains of nine Neanderthals found in cave south of Rome

Italian archaeologists believe most Neanderthals were killed by hyenas then dragged back to den. Italian archaeologists have unearthed the bones of nine Neanderthals who were allegedly hunted and mauled by hyenas in their den about 100km south-east of Rome. Scientists said the remains belong to seven adult males and one female, while another are those of a young boy. Experts believe the individuals lived in different time periods. Some bones could be as old as 50,000 to 68,000 years, whereas the most ancient remains are believed to be 100,000 years old.

The Neanderthal remains, which include skullcaps and broken jawbones, were found in the Guattari cave, which had already gained notoriety for the presence of fossils of these distant human cousins, which were found by chance in 1939. Since then, no further human remains had been uncovered in Guattari.

According to researchers a collapse, perhaps caused by an earthquake, sealed this cave for more than 60,000 years, thereby preserving the remains left inside for tens of thousands of years. Researchers found traces of vegetables alongside human remains and those of rhinoceroses, giant deer, wild horses and, of course, ferocious hyenas.

8. Earliest evidence of humans changing ecosystems with fire

A new study provides the earliest evidence to date of ancient humans significantly altering entire ecosystems with flames. The study combines archaeological evidence - dense clusters of stone artifacts dating as far back as 92,000 years ago - with paleo environmental data on the northern shores of Lake Malawi in eastern Africa to document that early humans were ecosystem engineers.

Mastery of fire has given humans dominance over the natural world. **The study combines archaeological evidence** - dense clusters of stone artifacts dating as far back as 92,000 years ago - with paleoenvironmental data on the northern shores of Lake Malawi in eastern Africa to document that early humans were ecosystem engineers. They used fire in a way that prevented regrowth of the region's forests, creating a sprawling bushland that exists today.

This is the earliest evidence researchers have seen of humans fundamentally transforming their ecosystem with fire. It suggests that by the Late Pleistocene, humans were learning to use fire in truly novel ways. In this case, their burning caused replacement of the region's forests with the open woodlands we see today.

The artifacts examined by the researchers are of the type produced across **Africa in the Middle Stone Age, a period dating back at least 315,000 years.** The earliest modern humans made their appearance during this period, with the African archaeological record showing significant advances in cognitive and social complexity.

The researchers discovered that the regional archaeological record, its ecological changes, and the development of alluvial fans near Lake Malawi - an accumulation of sediment eroded from the region's highland - dated to the same period of origin, suggesting that they were connected. **Lake Malawi's water levels have fluctuated drastically over the ages.** During the lake's driest periods, the last of which ended about 85,000 years ago, it diminished into two small, saline bodies of water. The lake recovered from

these arid stretches and **its levels have remained high ever since, according to the study.**

According to the researchers, the data revealed that a spike in charcoal accumulation occurred shortly before the flattening of the region's species richness – the number of distinct species inhabiting it. **Despite the consistently high lake levels, which imply greater stability in the ecosystem,** the species richness went flat following the last arid period based on information from fossilized pollen sampled from the lakebed, the study found.

This was unexpected because over previous climate cycles, rainy environments had produced forests that provide rich habitat for an abundance of species, researchers explained. **The pollen that we see in this most recent period of stable climate is very different than before, said researchers.** Specifically, trees that indicate dense, structurally complex forest canopies are no longer common and are replaced by pollen from plants that deal well with frequent fire and disturbance.

The increase in archaeological sites after the last arid period, paired with the spike in charcoal and absence of forest, suggests that people were manipulating the ecosystem with fire, the researchers conclude. **The scale of their environmental impact over the long term is something typically associated with farmers and herders, rather than hunter-gatherers. This suggests early ecological manipulation on par with modern people and may also explain why the archaeological record formed.** The burning paired with climate-driven changes created the conditions that allowed for preservation of millions of artifacts in the region, the researchers explained.

Previous transitions from dry to wet conditions in the region didn't yield a similar alluvial fan and were not preceded by the same charcoal spike, the researchers noted. **It's not clear why people were burning the landscape, researchers said.** It's possible that they were experimenting with controlled burns to produce mosaic habitats conducive to hunting and gathering, a behavior documented among hunter-gatherers. It could be that their fires burned out of control, or that there were simply a lot of people burning

fuel in their environment that provided for warmth, cooking, or socialization

One way or another, it's caused by human activity, It shows early people, over a long period of time, took control over their environment rather than being controlled by it. They changed entire landscapes, and for better or for worse that relationship with our environments continues today.

SOCIO – CULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY

1. Indian youth marrying later, but traditional attitudes remain

Lokniti-CSDS Youth Studies in 2016 and 2007 show the proportion of married youth decreased by eight percentage points from 55% In 2007 to 47% in 2016 .

As norms and values around marriage and family life change, the Indian youth too are being influenced by recent trends. Compared to a decade ago, youth are now marrying later in life. Lokniti-CSDS Youth Studies in 2016 and 2007 show the proportion of married youth decreased by eight percentage points from 55% In 2007 to 47% in 2016 .

As one would expect, the data highlight that a much higher share of young men were unmarried (61%) compared to women (41%) (Table 1). Educational attainment too is an important factor associated with marriage. One observes a decline in the proportion of married youth with successive levels of education

Marital preferences

In an age of online dating, growth of social networking and matrimonial sites, arranged marriages are still a preferred choice: 84% of the married youth in 2016 said their marriage was decided by families and only 6% reported self-choice

Unmarried youth too showed an inclination towards arranged marriages with 50% saying they would opt for this kind of marriage. Only 12% said they would opt for self-choice marriage. Surprisingly, the 2016 study indicates that a mere 3% of youth had placed a matrimonial advertisement.

The study also showed that 31% of the youth said their parents will have or had a lot of influence on their marriage decision. This influence was greater for women (35%) than men (28%). Moreover, data from a recent study, 'Politics and Society between Election', show there is some change in attitudes – if not in practice – when it comes to decision-making for women in marriage: 72 % support women's say in when to get married and 74 % in whom to marry.

There has been an attitude shift on the importance of marriage with an increase in acceptance of being single. Though close to 5 in 10 Indian youth said it is important to get married, this is much lower than 8 in 10 a decade ago (Figure 3, above). Barring non-literates, all other groups were found to be over twice more likely to express this sentiment than they were a decade ago.

Caste & religion

The Youth Study 2016 shows that marriage across caste and religion is still not accepted in an arranged marriage set-up (Table 2). Among the married youth, very few had opted for inter-caste (4%) or marriage outside their religion (3%). These were more prominent among love marriages (inter-caste 34%; inter-religious 12 %). However, the study showed that its acceptance was much higher than what was in practice. One notices an upward trend in acceptance for inter-caste marriages, from 31% in 2007 to 56% in 2016.

On the contrary, the acceptance of inter-religious marriage is much lower, with 47% approving of it and 45% considering it wrong. Youth who had an arranged marriage displayed more resistance towards the idea of inter-caste and inter-religious marriages than those whose marriage had been self-arranged.

Less than a quarter of youth consider love affair between two boys or two girls as right (24% and 26% respectively). Over half 53% in 2016 were opposed to dating before marriage, but this too has declined from 2007 (60%). However, 67% youth consider the idea of live-in before marriage wrong.

Life partner consideration

When it comes to characteristics one seeks in one's life partner, the youth seem rather vague. Close to half the respondents did not respond to the question. Among those who responded, 14% said their biggest consideration was that the person should have a good nature and simple personality; 8% gave priority to education and 5% each to being respectful and understanding and being traditional, cultured and having moral values. Another 5% said looks and skin colour were their biggest consideration. The spouse's profession and salary were important to about 4%.

A higher proportion of men gave primacy to qualities such as education and looks, especially skin colour.

Young women, on the other hand, were more likely to give importance to profession and salary compared to young men. On most other parameters, there was no striking difference between men and women.

To sum up, the youth are marrying late; the institution of arranged marriage is still intact; marrying across caste or religion is still not much accepted; and overall, attitudes to marriage remain within the boundaries of traditional thinking.

2. Music is Human kind's Universal Language - Study

Songs spanning different languages & ethnic groups across the world exhibit common behavioural patterns, according to a first-of its kind study which suggests that human culture everywhere is built from common

psychological building blocks. **The research, reports the 1st comprehensive analysis of the similarities & differences** in the types of music produced by various ethnicity around the world.

The research has been carried out on more than a century of historical & cultural context of music or ethnomusicology, of more than 300 societies. The results, of study reveal that across the societies music is associated with behaviours such as infant care, healing, dance, love, mourning & warfare.

According to research these behaviours are not too different among societies. While examining these music genres, they found out that **songs sharing similar behavioural functions had common musical features. The distinct similarity in the music produced by different societies** is evidence that human culture everywhere is built from common psychological building blocks.

INDIAN & TRIBAL ANTHROPOLOGY

1. In Ganjam village, a frog dance to woo the rain gods



Frustrated over lack of adequate rain, inhabitants of Masiakhali village in Odisha's Ganjam district on Thursday resorted to the traditional ritual of 'bengei nacha' or frog dance to appease the rain gods.

Despite the onset of the monsoon, several areas in Ganjam district have not received proper rain. As a result, the villagers of Masiakhali have not been able to start work for the kharif season.

Now, the villagers are trying out an old tradition, involving frogs, in the hope that it would bring rain. According to them, the croaking sounds made by frogs during the ritual would alert rain god 'Indra Devata' to the lack of precipitation in the village.

As per tradition, two big frogs were snared and then bathed with turmeric water and smeared with vermilion. They were then tied to a long pole with a piece of new cloth and carried around the village to the beat of traditional drums and cymbals. The carriers of the frogs danced to the drumbeats, making the frogs jiggle inside the cloth bundles.

Throughout the journey, the womenfolk poured turmeric and red water on the frogs. "It was as if the festival of Holi had revisited the village along with 'bengei nacha'," said a villager.

The procession culminated at the Kali temple in Masiakhali, where a special puja was performed. Later the frogs were released in the nearby fields.

Jamula Suresh of the Humanist and Rationalist Organisation, Odisha, termed it superstition with no scientific basis as "rains and frogs have no connection", and called upon the villagers not to torture the poor creatures.

2. We break indigenous societies and yet are scared of 'them'



Two tribal rights activists urge civil society to protect indigenous families facing the onslaught of inhuman greed and extreme apathy We (you, I and them) are all tribals by origin. Over the years, we have lied to ourselves and conveniently believed that we are not tribals and that we were never tribals. A lie repeated constantly becomes the truth. In the last seven decades and more, after many 'convenient' map makings, we have been trying our best to destroy tribals and their lives. Still, they hold the keys to our rental economy, specifically for Odisha, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, parts of Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra and the North East. The platitudes related to a trillion dollar economy are majorly based on the mines and minerals in custody of our indigenous peoples.

The tribals, whom we left behind and set out in pursuit of creature comforts, remain the guardians of flora and fauna, below which lie the sparkle of billions of dollars. In our interest, we have ensured that they get relegated to being defined as 'backward communities' so that we can intervene with our largesse, which we think they need but they \ know they don't. This is akin to us rushing back to our paternal property for an emergency bail out, when we are choked by our debt-ridden city existence. Déjà vu. It is becoming increasingly chaotic for tribal communities in the mineral haven of Koraput in Odisha. The haven has attracted ravens. We (you and I) have been successful in finally 'breaking' them. If we do not

make cohesive communities fritter away, we will be rendered jobless, penniless, and worthless. For example, the non-profit sector has to play the tribal story, year after year, for their donors to keep them alive. Jargons like 'capacity building' and 'community empowerment' are their lifeline. Sporadic cases of tribal 'development' or tribal youth making it big is media-hyped.

So much so that it is like being euphoric. Taking a selfie with a chimpanzee. **Noble Savage? Really?** There always had been a disciplined and organised leadership style in these communities, till we tampered and wrecked indigenous societies. A new village was typically established as Ektaguda – which literally means a village discovered by one person. The word Ekta here does not signify unity but 'singular'. When there is any calamity in a village, people tend to shift to a new place because they believe they have incurred the wrath of their deity. Any community adversity like an epidemic or fire or ill-health of children is a bad omen and the elders in the community are convinced that the deity wants them to abandon the village.

Accordingly, the enterprising of the lot, ventures out to find a new place. He explores, discovers, starts a new settlement and becomes the obvious choice for the village headman. He becomes the Nayak and the system becomes hereditary. This system of village administration need not fit into our description of governance but it always provided three crucial elements: Unbridled independence to villagers, including exemplary gender equality Community living, with no individual asset holding Collective livelihoods mechanisms like community farming The indigenous communities thus are much more united and bonded than we are.

We should envy, obviously. With technologies, we have further divided ourselves and all our algorithms are aimed at profiling, dividing and creating a new world of fakes. Our divisibility exposes our hypothetical 'mainstream' – where there is hardly any stream and there is nothing called a 'main' because there is unruly wrangling for freedom. From the United States to Belarus, about 25 per cent of our time is spent on the streets protesting. Still, we bracket indigenous people as PVTG –

Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups. Who is vulnerable? You know the truth. ଶୁଣୁ ଶୁଣୁ ଶୁଣୁ ଶୁଣୁ ଶୁଣୁ ଶୁଣୁ - this is an Odia saying whose literal translation could be something like “who can wake up someone who pretends to be sleeping while awake?”. Our machinations have brought in complications in their lives. Gender-based violence was never known among indigenous communities because there was never any segregation – because there was no individual property or family entitlements or self-imposed, hypocritical rituals of fidelity.

It was simple, commune living. Many of our Gurus later on replicated commune living in western countries, which has been hailed as ‘magic’. But we, with the help of statutes, are bent on obliterating pristine life in its most original form. We were always meant to be like this. Crime against women, burglary, cheating were never known in the communities. They did not use money and did not have any need for lust. All their needs were met by their Supreme Lord and provider, their forests – perennial streams, abundance of fruits, spices, mushrooms, wild tubers and roots. The mix of native millets, pulses, legumes and oil seeds grown on small shift-and-burn patches on hill slopes, locally known as dongar (the clear patches) made their diets super healthy. Non-communicable, lifestyle diseases were not known, as recently as a few years ago. They depended on the valley – the outside market for cloth, salt, kerosene and the delicacy of dried fish, intermittently.

They had everything and so did not ever need money. We are jealous, quite naturally. We are poverty-stricken but we run programmes to eradicate their poverty. Hopeless sadism and nauseous guile. I and my civil society are squarely responsible. **Wrecked societies** With our public schemes and the lure of money, the community became political. Today, the community leaders are trained to engage in bitter, schismatic and corrupt governance. We need them and so we penetrated their self-sustained system, created artificial needs, peddled ‘development’, and finally got them addicted to our tokenism. Tokenism is the new opiate of life. We have successfully spiked credulous lives with the poison of deceitful politics. If development was well meaning, then there was no place for politics. Why do we have tribal youths going out as migrant labour? In the last seven decades and

more, how many community livelihood programmes have provided sustainability to the indigenous communities? Where is the mainstream? Do you see that animal anywhere? Is holding a smart phone, riding a bike, or getting glued to porn in the name of OTT, development? The ward member in a village has all the whereabouts of girls being trafficked out of the village or youths getting into organised crime.

How do we sensitise the ward member that due to his or her complicity, a whole generation in getting wiped out? Do our civil society organisations go and spend time with the community leaders? Do our Harvard heading 'smart fellows in public policy and governance' care to work with them? Do we discuss threadbare the issues of the communities in our endless, wisdom-spewing Zoom meetings? Talking and talking and talking, we achieve nirvana. While post-retirement wisdom is flowing unchecked, the extraction industry has already extracted our native lives from us, natives. Some day, we will realise, if we are left alive and soon the forest Lord will seek His abode on another planet. Mythologies are no more myths – I am the asura and am scared of tribals because I am lowly. Gadadhar Parida is Director of the Tribal Museum at Koraput

3. Any exploitation of Sentinel Island will wipe out tribals



In a recent **policy document**, the Anthropological Survey of India (AnSI) has mentioned that any commercial exploitation of the North Sentinel Island of the Andamans will endanger the survival of the Sentinelese tribes.

Who are Sentinelese?

- They are the **occupants of the Northern Sentinel Island** and have a population of about 50 to 100.
- They are a **negrito tribe** and have not faced incursions and remain hostile to outsiders
 - The tribe has been categorised as **particularly vulnerable tribal groups (PVTG)**.
- The inhabitants are **connected to the Jarawa** on the basis of physical, as well as linguistic similarities.
 - They speak **their own language** and the translation of their language cannot be done till present day.
- Based on carbon dating of kitchen middens by the Anthropological Survey of India, Sentinelese presence was confirmed in the islands 2,000 years ago.
 - Also, Genome studies indicate that the tribe could have been on the islands even 30,000 years ago.
- They have been **contacted by anthropologists through 26 expeditions** since the 1970s.

Protection Status:

- The Govt. of India has issued the **Andaman and Nicobar Islands (Protection of Aboriginal Tribes) Regulation, 1956** to declare the traditional areas occupied by the tribes as reserves.
 - The regulation **prohibits the entry of all persons** except those with authorisation.
 - **Photographing or filming** the tribe members is also an **offence**.
- **Other provisions** for their **protection** :
 - Restrictions under Foreigner (Restricted Area) Orders, 1963.
 - Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989.

- Visa Manual Conditions/Passport Act 1920, Indian Forest Act, 1927 and Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972.

Know About Andaman and Nicobar Islands:

- It is a **Union Territory** and located in the Bay of Bengal.
- The **capital is Port Blair** and it covers an area of 8,249 sq. km.
 - Many **islands are uninhabited** and the inhabited islands are also sparsely populated.
- The **main islands** are North Andaman, Middle Andaman, South Andaman, Little Andaman, Car Nicobar, Little Nicobar, Great Nicobar.
- The **Andamans are the extension** of the Arakan Yoma Mountain range (Submerged) of Myanmar and **the Nicobars are extensions** of the Mentawai Islands of Sumatra.
- **Important Channels :**
 - - - **10-degree channel:** It separates the Andaman Group of islands and the Nicobar group of islands.
 - **Duncan Passage:** It separates the South Andaman and Little Andaman .
 - **The Grand Channel:** It separates the Great Nicobar islands and the Sumatra islands of Indonesia.
 - **The Coco Strait:** It separates North Andaman islands and the Coco Islands of Myanmar.
- **Tribes:**
 - - Onges Little Nicobar ; PVTG
 - Sentinelese Sentinel Islands ; PVTG
 - Jarawa Middle and South Andaman ; PVTG
 - Andamanese Strait Island

- Shompen Great Nicobar
- Nicobarese Great Nicobar

About Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group (PVTG):

- It is a **classification by the Government** for more vulnerable tribes among the tribal groups.
 - The tribe has a **declining or stagnant population**, low level of literacy, pre-agricultural level of technology and are economically backward.
 - They **generally inhabit remote localities** having poor infrastructure and administrative support.
- **At present**, the Ministry of Home Affairs has classified **75 tribal groups Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTG)s**

4. TRIFED joins hands with The LINK Fund for tribal development



Recently, the **TRIFED** and **The LINK Fund** have entered into a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for **tribal development**.

Key Highlights

- The MoU is aimed at **employment generation by providing support to tribals** for increasing value addition in their produce and products.
- It has called for **sustainable livelihoods and value addition for increase** in income and employment generation through technological intervention for efficiency in value addition for MFPs.
- Both the organizations will also work together to **creating women-centered infrastructure** and innovation and entrepreneurship.
- The LINK Fund is excited to **commence the intervention working in close coordination with TRIFED's leadership team** and to draw out Detailed Project Implementation Plan, Estimate budgetary estimates for impactful interventions and to mobilize funds etc.
- The aim of MoU is to **pooling strengths together and undertakes work** that will help in boosting the income and livelihoods of the tribal people.

What is The Link Fund?

- It is a **practitioner-led fund** headquartered in **Geneva, Switzerland**.
- It works to **end extreme poverty** and mitigate the effects of climate change.
- It bridges the **gap between the financial and philanthropic worlds**, providing an optimal solution both to funding and implementing integrated development programs.
- The Fund addresses **basic human needs** - food and nutrition security, education, women's economic empowerment and large-scale infrastructure.

What is TRIFED?

- The **Tribal Cooperative Marketing Development Federation of India (TRIFED)** came into existence in 1987.
- It is a **national-level apex organization** functioning under the administrative control of **Ministry of Tribal Affairs**.
- The ultimate objective of TRIFED is **socio-economic development of tribal people** in the country by way of marketing development of the tribal products on which the lives of tribals depends heavily.

5. Odisha's Bonda tribe sees rise in 'distress migration'



While the youth have abandoned villages for work in distant towns, children have dropped out of schools after pandemic

Perched at a height of 3,500ft above sea level in the hilly Malkangiri district of Odisha, this village is difficult to access and so are its inhabitants – the Bondas, a particularly vulnerable tribal group, known for their secluded lives away from the mainstream.

However, the lack of access has not prevented young Bondas from being forced leave their pristine hamlets for low-paid jobs in distant towns of Andhra Pradesh, Telangana and States even farther. The coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic appears to have quickened the ‘distress’ migration.

Sombari Muduli, 60, has visited the Malkangiri district headquarters, 80 km from her village, just once in her life. However, her 16-year-old daughter Gurubari has crossed State borders to work in prawn processing plant in Visakhapatnam.

Without waiting for the COVID-19 pandemic to abate, Gurubari left her single room hut months ago. In her neighbourhood, Pradan Batri, 16, and Khuji Sisa, 17, too migrated to Andhra Pradesh immediately after the lockdown.

The disturbing trend of distress migration has also caught up with Bonda students who were studying in residential schools before COVID-19 pandemic.

According to Sada Hantal, a resident of Andrahal, students sat idle for months as they could not pursue their education due to lack of online facilities during the outbreak.

“The moment they came in contact with labour agents, they did not take much time to decide. They brought down the curtain on their studies. Arjun Sisa (Class 8) and Krushna Sisia (Class 9) have already migrated to work,” Mr. Hantal said, adding that the list of students dropping out of school was growing.

Markets closed

Though the pandemic did not have much impact on Bondas as they mostly depend on government food subsidies, many were not able to sell their farm and forest produce as the weekly markets remained closed for months during lockdown period.

“I sell cashew nuts in bulk which takes care of our cash needs for round the year. Now, our needs are increasing too. To arrange more cash, my daughter had to migrate,” said Ms. Muduli.

Former Malkangiri district collector Manish Agarwal, however, said the administration could not prevent individuals from migrating for better opportunities as long as the migrations are not distressed or under duress.

“Bondas are extremely cautious about preserving their unique culture and tradition. We will take action if Bondas are being taken away for cheap labour,” Mr. Agarwal said.

Given that the highland tribal community are extremely vulnerable, the Odisha government had set up a micro project to ensure focused development of Bondas as early as 1976-77. The Bonda Development Agency (BDA) covers 32 habitations (21 under Mudulipada, 9 under Andrahal, and one habitation each from Rasabeda and Baddural gram panchayats) in total from four gram panchayats. There are 1,919 Bonda households living in high reaches of Malkangiri.

Little improvement

However, despite years of government intervention, there has not been much visible development among Bondas.

As per latest an evaluation conducted by Odisha's Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes Research and Training Institute (SCSTRTI), although ₹18.23 crore have been allotted to the BDA in last five years, only ₹11.57 crore have been spent, leaving ₹6.66 crore or 36.52% unutilised.

It clearly shows the BDA does not have capacity to spend funds even though the livelihood options for the Bondas have reduced. One of the major reasons has been the lack of coordination with other departments to improve the life and livelihood of the group. Of the 32 habitations, 16 villages do not have all weather roads and hamlets can be accessed only by rough footpaths.

“If migration is taken as the single largest indicator to assess the livelihood status of a community, it is seen that the incidence of migration has increased over the years amongst the Bonda households,” the SCSTRTI said.

“The data collected from the BDA sample villages indicates that during the last four years, there has been an increase in the trend of migration which is indicative of the fact that the income opportunities in the area are not adequate to provide employment to the Bondas,” the study added.

As per the study, 221 Bondas have migrated from 7 sample villages in 2019-20.

6. Concern for PVTGs in Odisha as test hesitancy poses hurdle



Thirteen of the 62 tribal groups in Odisha have been identified as PVTGs, which are given special protection because of their dwindling population. Their current population is 2.14 lakh, spread across 11 districts.

WITH NEARLY 55 per cent of the Covid cases in Odisha being reported from rural areas, there is growing concern in the state regarding the safety of the Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs).

Thirteen of the 62 tribal groups in Odisha have been identified as PVTGs, which are given special protection because of their dwindling population. Their current population is 2.14 lakh, spread across 11 districts of the state.

In the second surge of the pandemic, several people from these communities have tested positive for Covid. As of Tuesday, 49 members of the PTVGs from Rayagada, Malkangiri and Mayurbhanj districts have tested positive.

While there are fears of further spread of the virus in the communities, authorities in the districts are facing a serious challenge in detecting it as the community members are hesitant in getting themselves tested.

After 19 members of the Dongria Kondh tribes in Niyamgiri hills of Rayagada district tested positive recently, the district administration set up a testing camp at the foothill to detect and arrest the virus's spread. However, on the first day of the testing camp on Monday, no one turned up.

“During the first wave, no one was infected here. Now they are scared that if tested positive they will be taken to the hospitals and might not return,” said Jitu Jakasia, a Dongria Kondh leader from Niyamgiri. “They are not aloof from the news of deaths due to the virus. They are also worried that their livelihoods will be affected. Since there is no mechanism for home isolation in their single-room thatched homes, they will have to be moved to isolation centres which they are not ready for. We have been spreading awareness but they tend to close their doors and not come out.”

After the first four cases were reported last Thursday, 13 tested positive on Sunday and two others tested positive on Monday. A total of 2,461 Dongria Kondh families, comprising 9,597 people, reside in 102 villages situated in the Niyamgiri hills.

On Tuesday, after repeated interventions by local leaders, 62 people, who were close contact of an earlier detected case and showed symptoms, were tested for Covid in Gandili village of Bissamcuttack block.

In Malkangiri district, 12 members of the Bonda tribe have tested positive so far. In the first wave of the pandemic, 35 people from the community were infected.

In Mayurbhanj district, 16 Khadias from Lalpani area of Similipal have tested positive. A door-to-door survey was initiated in villages across Similipal inhabited by members of the Kharia tribe. Cases were reported from Lulunga, Kakarpani, Kochilaghati, Tarajodi and Gadipokhari villages.

“Lack of awareness is a major challenge for us. Cold and fever when the season changes is considered normal. So they refrain from approaching health facilities. But they live in close proximity and as a close-knit group. Spread of infection is more likely in such cases. We have launched awareness programmes with their own community leaders,” said Uttam Kumar Das, head of a medical team supervising testing amongst the Khariar tribe.

Meanwhile, demands to prioritise vaccination amongst the PVTGs has also gained momentum. Congress MP Saptagiri Ulaka has urged Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik to prioritise the vaccination in the 18-44 groups. At present, vaccination in the said districts are underway for people aged above 45. The state government on Monday approached the Centre with a demand to aid in vaccinating the PVTG population in the state.

“Through the state government we have approached the central government to help vaccinate all the PVTG members. Their immunity is a major concern and we are pushing for vaccination,” said Project Director of Odisha PVTG Empowerment and Livelihood Improvement Programme P Arthanari. The department is also setting up local quarantine centres close to the villages of the PVTGs for isolation and immediate treatment. “These villages are mostly in secluded areas or hill tops. The nearest Covid care centre is also far and the people have also shown resistance in getting admitted at the hospitals in the district headquarters. So we are setting up these isolation centres,” Arthanari said.

7. Ladakh: Dard Tribe in Aryan Valley preserved Dard Culture for centuries despite several challenges



In Ladakh, Aryan Valley is fascinating for its tribal culture, custom, epics and languages which are different from the rest of the union territory. Aryan Valley is home to Buddhist Dard Tribe that live in five villages. People have preserved the Dard Culture for centuries despite several challenges. All India Radio, Leh is celebrating 50 years in June this year. AIR Leh Correspondent reported that this Isolated Community Aryan Race has unique Cultures to offer to the world with Dardi as its language.

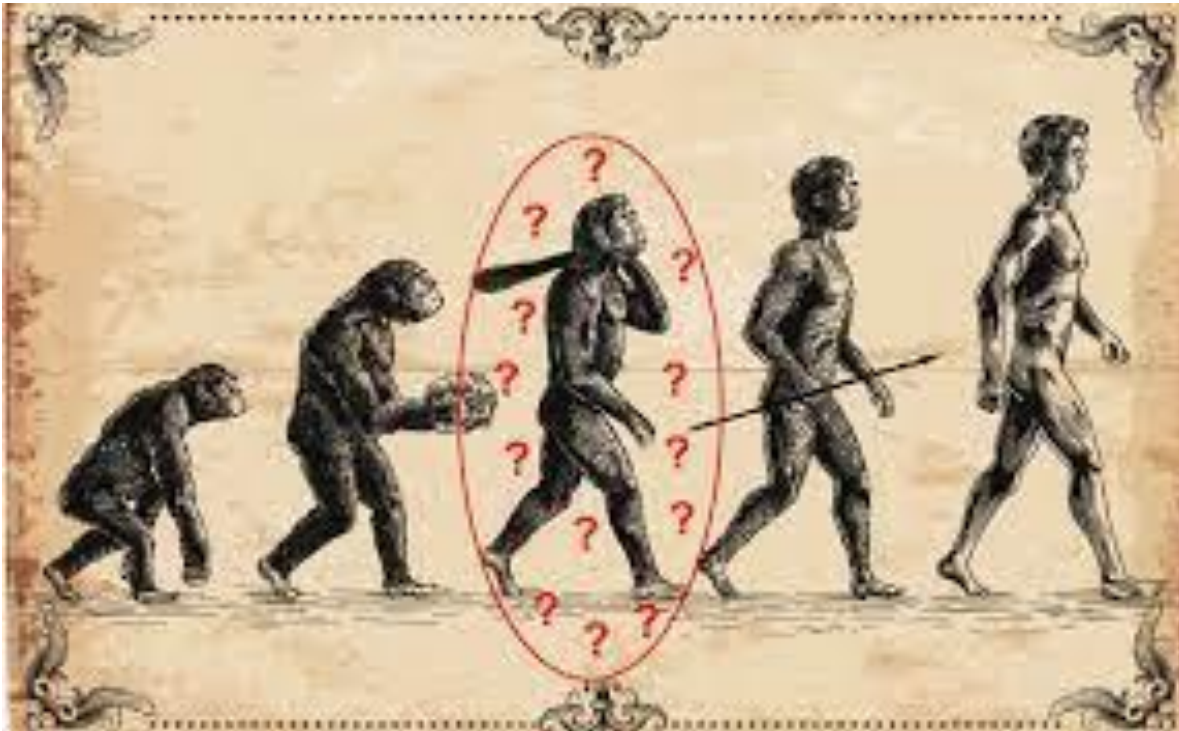
Dardi is sub language of Indo-Aryan language. Aryan Valley is tourists destination with restricted movement. Young generation of Arayan Valley working to preserve the Identify of the Dard Community with population of more than two thousands at present. Dard Community has its own folklore, epic, folk songs, language, custom and all together, they are Known as Arayan Culture.

For instance, the festival of harvesting has more than 40 songs and all the songs and folklore are passed from generation to generation orally. However, the young generation of the community are working to get

recognition of the identity of the community and Dard language by promoting their culture and community level mobilization for its preservation.

Government has started an initiative to preserve the Arayan Culture. With aim to promote tourism in the valley, the Tourism Department has started Arayan Festival from the two years. The Academy of Arts, Culture and Languages organising workshops on folks songs and dance among the children.

8. No, Humans Didn't Evolve From the Ancestors of Living Apes



The last ancestor that we shared with apes had its own set of traits, and was different from both us and modern apes.

The truth is that we don't know where we, *homo sapiens*, came from. In his 1871 work, *In The Descent of Man*, Charles Darwin speculated that humans originated in Africa, and that we evolved from an ancestor who was different from any currently living species.

Now, a new study by an international group of paleoanthropologists, with a wide range of specialties, have backed up Darwin by concluding that it is likely that the last ancestor that we shared with apes had its own distinct set of traits that are different from those of both modern humans and modern apes.

Who was this ancient ancestor?

Chimpanzees, with whom we share 98 percent of our DNA, are in genus *Pan*, while humans are in genus *Homo*. Humans diverged from chimpanzees between 9.3 and 6.5 million years ago.

Historically, two major approaches have been used in analyzing human ancestry:

- Top-down - uses living apes, especially chimpanzees, to reconstruct our origins
- Bottom-up - uses the fossil record of both humans and apes; it shows multiple possibilities both for what the LCA looked like, and where he roamed.

In reviewing the studies surrounding these diverging approaches, the authors of the paper argue that there are limitations to relying on just one or the other of these opposing approaches. This is because the top-down studies often assume that modern ape species share habitat and features of earlier groups, while bottom-up studies tend to give individual fossil apes a more important evolutionary role than may be warranted.

In an attempt to reconcile these approaches to identifying our ancient ancestor, the scientists looked at what the environment must have been like for the Pan-Homo last common ancestor, or LCA.

The Miocene epoch existed from around 23 to 5.3 million years ago, and a number of fossil ape genera from that era have been found. However, they show a combination of features common to both "orthograde" (upright) and "pronograde" (walking on all fours) body plan, which has led some scientists to exclude the Miocene apes from the human lineage, and there is no scientific consensus on the evolutionary role played by these fossil apes.

9. Call for action to protect Odisha tribes



- More than 100 tribals among 10 out of 13 Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs) in the state of Odisha have been affected by COVID-19.

Details:

- Amid the concerns over rising COVID-19 positive cases among PVTGs, activists and writers have urged the Odisha government to take immediate steps to prevent loss of lives among the PVTGs like the Dongria Kondh and Bonda due to COVID-19.

Challenges:

- There is a **heightened sense of hesitancy among the tribal** to use allopathic medicines. The tribals have been reluctant to even undergo the RT-PCR tests.
- The measures announced to contain the spread of COVID-19 like **home quarantine would not work among the tribals** as privacy and isolation hardly exist within the tribal culture.

Recommendations:

- **Door to door surveys** must be undertaken by a team of trained local volunteers for regular monitoring of symptoms, and reporting of any suspected cases.
- The government should set up **quarantine centres** exclusively for tribals within 2 km of their settlements.
- **Health kits** consisting of three layered masks, necessary medicines and vitamins must be distributed among the tribal communities.
- The government must ensure **upgradation of all primary health centres** located in tribal areas and also ensure adequate provisioning of manpower, medical equipment, medicines and other infrastructure in these PHCs.
- The vulnerable tribals must be provided with a **special livelihood relief package** as compensation for their agriculture and minor forest produce (MFP) which have come to a standstill.

10. Fearing exclusion of smartphone-less tribals, Jharkhand seeks to use own app for vaccination



It has been made mandatory for people in the 18-45 age group to register themselves at Co-WIN to get the vaccine.

RANCHI: Fearing exclusion of a large chunk of the tribal people in the ongoing vaccination drive against Covid-19 due to non-availability of smartphones among many of them and access to internet in remote areas, the Jharkhand government wants to use its own "more user-friendly" app for registration. It has been made mandatory for people in the 18-45 age group to register themselves at Co-WIN to get the vaccine.

Jharkhand government officials, however, said that JHAR-WIN, the state's app, has an edge over Co-Win in many ways and it is suited for a state where a large number of people are poor tribals living in villages. The JHAR-WIN app works both online and offline and is backed up with a call centre to facilitate registration of low-digitally literate population group and can provide on the spot registration at vaccination centres, officials said.

Considering the issue of non-delivery of SMS/OTP and to make it more user-friendly, OTP authentication has been removed in JHAR-WIN which is available in both English and Hindi, they said. "The Co-WIN platform and the process of registration by design perpetuate digital exclusion and inequality especially in a state like Jharkhand. With a high tribal and marginal population mostly in rural areas and the rising threat of the virus in villages, it is necessary to ensure no one is left out, an official in the Chief Minister's Office told PTI. Jharkhand has one of the largest tribal populations in the country inhabited by over 32 Schedule Tribes and other marginalised indigenous people.

According to the 2011 census, the state has 86.45 lakh tribal people, 27 per cent of the total population of 3.29 crore. "The state's application/portal with a dedicated call centre and help desk will ensure each person is included irrespective of digital literacy or skill," the CMO official said.

The Jharkhand government has filed a plea in the Supreme Court praying for a direction to the Centre to allow the state to use its own app and portal for registration for Covid-19 vaccination, the official said. The official said that following the commencement of Phase 3 vaccination for the 18-45 years age group, Jharkhand is facing a major difficulty in registering potential beneficiaries as there are issues of digital literacy and digital exclusion, apart from glitches in the portal especially in rural areas.

Unlike Co-WIN where slot booking is made mandatory for getting the jab, JHAR-WIN allows a person to directly reach the nearest vaccination centre and avail facility, the official said. The option for walk-in, as was available in case of vaccination for 45 years plus population, is not there for the age group of 18-45 years which comprises approximately 1.4 crore in Jharkhand.

The state says that its application for registration for vaccination is user-friendly, more practical and best suited for Jharkhand as its scheduled areas have seen low human development indices, backwardness, remoteness and poverty, and social indicators in its tribal pockets are inferior to the state average. "Being a state with heavy forest cover and tough terrain, Jharkhand has many villages that comes under network shadow area. Unlike Co-WIN, Jharkhand's State Portal

(<http://amritvahini.in>) will support people in the remotest of the areas irrespective of network connectivity. "Rural and tribal population of the state can easily reach vaccination centres and get benefits of it with the same ease as urban population making 'vaccination for all' true in both letter and spirit," the official added.

Unlike Co-WIN that mandates Captcha authentication which is image-based and requires a good internet connection and a tech-savvy person, Jharkhand's state portal has removed it making it faster and easy to use, he said.

Battling a sharp surge in COVID-19 cases during the second wave, the state government has extended the lockdown till May 27. The state continued to show easing of coronavirus rage with the state reporting 60 new COVID deaths and 2,056 positive cases on Friday, a health department bulletin said. The total fatalities have risen to 4,714, while the state's caseload spiked to 3,24,884. Till four-five days back, the state was logging more than 100 casualties due to coronavirus and around 5000 infections daily.

The recovery rate among coronavirus patients in the state now stands at 90.38 per cent, better than the national average of 86.70 per cent.

Capital Ranchi which has been struggling with a high number of cases saw 14 deaths while East Singhbhum which has also been consistently recording high fatalities reported eight deaths. No deaths have been reported from Dumka, Latehar, Pakur and Simdega during the last 24 hours, the bulletin said. The mineral-rich state now has 26,511 active COVID-19 cases, while 2,93,659 patients have recovered from the infection, it said. Fatalities in Bokaro were recorded at 9 during the last 24 hours while four deaths were recorded from Khunti. Giridih and Godda saw three deaths each during the last 24 hours.

Dhanbad, Garhwa, Gumla, Hazaribag and Jamtara recorded two deaths each while one death each was recorded in Chatra, Deoghar, Koderma, Lohardaga, Palamu, Ramgarh, Sahebganj, Sariaakela and West Singhbhum. Battling a sharp surge in COVID-19 cases during the second wave, the state government has extended the lockdown till May 27. Restrictions with stricter provisions, including seven days mandatory

quarantine for people visiting the state, are now in place. Altogether, 79,44,728 samples have been tested for COVID-19 in Jharkhand thus far, including 50,504 since Thursday, it added. The mortality rate in the state remained higher at 1.45 per cent as against the nation's 1.10 per cent. Battling a severe second wave of COVID-19 pandemic, the Jharkhand government has set up a task force at block level to map and more effectively contain the virus. Adopting a multi-pronged strategy, it began the massive public health survey exercise Wednesday which will be carried out till May 25. In a bid to protect its citizens from the deadly virus, the Jharkhand government had on May 14 launched a free vaccination drive for people in the age group of 18 to 44 years.

11. Revealed: Bolsonaro's plan to wipe out "the world's most vulnerable uncontacted tribes"



The Brazilian government is planning to open up the land of uncontacted tribes to deadly exploitation, by scrapping the emergency orders that currently protect their territories.

Experts say the plan could drive several uncontacted tribes to extinction, and destroy around 1 million hectares of rainforest – an area twice the size of Delaware.

These tribes are especially vulnerable as their territories are not officially mapped out and protected. Currently the only thing standing between them and well-funded and heavily-armed loggers, ranchers and land-grabbers are the orders (known in Brazil as “Restrições de uso” injunctions).

Seven territories are currently protected by these orders, most of which have to be renewed every few years. Three of them are due to expire between September and December 2021, and are particularly vulnerable.



The Kawahiva are one of the tribes whose territories are covered by the Land Protection Orders. Still from unique footage taken by government agents during a chance encounter.

One of these protects the forest home of the last of the Piripkura tribe – after a series of massacres only three members of this tribe are known to exist, though some studies indicate others may still survive in the depths of the forest. A recent study by Brazilian NGO ISA showed that 962 hectares

of forest in the Piripkura territory were razed last year, the equivalent of more than 1,000 football pitches.

President Bolsonaro and allies are targeting these tribes' territories, which remain vulnerable until they are fully demarcated as indigenous lands. A Senator close to Bolsonaro, for example, is demanding that the Ituna Itatá territory be dramatically reduced in size, while state and federal politicians allied to powerful logging, ranching and agribusiness interests target other territories. President Bolsonaro is highly sympathetic to these deadly land-grabbing efforts, and has explicitly said he wants to open up all indigenous territories for exploitation.

COIAB (the Coordinating Body of Indigenous Organizations of the Brazilian Amazon), OPI (Human Rights Watch of Isolated and Initial Contact Indigenous Peoples) and Survival – today launched a new video to expose Bolsonaro's plan. They're calling for the Brazilian government to renew the Land Protection Orders; evict all invaders; fully protect the territories; and #StopBrazilsGenocide.

Angela Kaxuyana, one of COIAB's Coordinators, said today: "No more massacres! We won't allow any more invasions! It's vital that indigenous peoples and the organizations of the Amazon, and all civil society, mobilize to prevent the territories where the isolated indigenous peoples live from being handed over to loggers, land grabbers, gold miners and other forest predators to destroy. If the Bolsonaro government ends the Land Protection Orders, it will be yet another disaster and attack against the lives of these peoples, which is part of the grand plan to dismantle the indigenous policy in our country.

"We need to prevent more lives from being lost in this (un)government, we'll carry on defending our rights to life, and those of our relatives who live autonomously in their territories."

Fabício Amorim of OPI said: "Land Protection Orders are a cutting-edge tool of public policy in Brazil, which can be deployed quickly to safeguard the lives and land rights of uncontacted indigenous peoples. They're the highest expression of the precautionary principle, provided for in national and international laws. Doing away with them will mean the extermination

of indigenous peoples, or some groups of them, without there even being time to recognize their existence in order to guarantee their rights. It will silence little-known lives and impoverish humanity. Therefore, it's vital to strengthen these instruments, start demarcating these areas and remove all invaders."

Elias Bígio, former head of the Uncontacted Tribes unit at Brazil's Indigenous Affairs Agency FUNAI, said today: "The Piripkura's land has been occupied by aggressive and violent people who are destroying the environment and threatening everyone.

"The uncontacted Piripkura have shown that they don't want contact. They don't have the security of contact with 'our' society, given the traumatic relationship they've had with the invaders. They're there in the forest, and they've devised strategies to protect themselves and survive. They've managed to survive and are there, hidden, restricted to a small territory, and claiming this territory for themselves."

Sarah Shenker, Coordinator of Survival's Uncontacted Tribes campaign, said today: "The future of several uncontacted tribes living in territories shielded by emergency Land Protection Orders will be decided this year. They have already experienced land theft and appalling violence and killings at the hands of outsiders. The orders are currently the only thing standing between them and certain death.

"The ranchers' and politicians' plot to rip up the orders, steal these lands, and wipe out the uncontacted tribes who live there, is one branch of many in the Bolsonaro government's genocidal attack on Brazil's indigenous peoples, and it must be blocked. Over the coming months, uncontacted tribes' allies in Brazil and around the world will be campaigning non-stop for the orders to be renewed, all invaders evicted, and the forests to be fully protected. Only then can the uncontacted tribes survive and thrive."

12. 21 more members of vulnerable tribal groups test Covid positive in Odisha



Twenty-one more members of the Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group (PVTG) in Odisha have tested positive for Covid-19, taking the total number to 45.

Twenty-one more members of the Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group (PVTG) in Odisha were afflicted with coronavirus, taking their number to 45, official sources said on Sunday. The PVTG is a classification by the central government for tribes based on their relative physical isolation, declining population, low levels of literacy and pre agricultural stage of the economy such as hunting, food gathering and shifting cultivation. Before 2016, PVTGs were known as Primitive Tribal Groups.

While the number of PVTG people infected with Covid-19 was 21 till Friday, 10 more members of the Bonda tribe and 14 of the Dongaria Kondha community tested positive for the virus since Saturday, officials said. A total of 19 people belonging to the Dongaria Kondha tribe living at Pakeri village in Rayagada district are now affected by the disease, they said.

The Dongaria Kondha tribe lives in Niyamgiri Hills on the border of the Rayagada and Koraput districts. They live on hilltops and rarely come to plains. A report from the Malkangiri district said that 10 more members of the Bonda tribe have tested positive for Covid-19, taking the number of such patients to 12. Some of them have already recovered and others are in home isolation.

"Health condition of the affected persons is being closely monitored by our rapid response team and required medicines are being given," an official said. He said that the first case of Covid-19 among Bondas was recorded on April 26. Bonda is one of the ancient tribes of Odisha and the community is divided into two groups, the Lower Bonda and the upper Bonda. While Lower Bondas live on the foothills of Bond hills, the Upper ones, mostly untouched by the modern civilization, live in the hill range in the Khairaput block of Malkangiri district.

Asked how the Bondas got infected with the virus, the official said, "After the Odisha government closed the weekly markets, a group of Bondas had visited a nearby market at Anakadil in Andhra Pradesh. It is suspected that they got infected from there." He said that the district administration has decided to seal the road connecting Bonda Hills to Anakadil.

Apart from Bonda and Dongoria Kondha, Covid-19 cases have also been detected in other PVTG communities, said Project Director of Odisha PVTG Empowerment and Livelihood Improvement Programme, P Arthanari. Members of the PVTG had remained untouched by the virus during the first wave of the pandemic last year, he said.

Of the 62 tribes of Odisha, 13 belong to PVTG. Though tribal people constitute 22.8 per cent of the state's population, the number of PVTG members is only 2.14 lakh, officials said.

The PVTG people love nature and prefer to spend time in forests and springs instead of visiting urban pockets and their unique lifestyle also keeps them healthy, said Dr AB Ota, director-cum-special secretary of SC-ST Research and Training Institute.

13. An Indian Adivasi community is divided by scripts



Santali is one of India's many Adivasi languages. Today, seven different alphabets are used to write in it. Some argue that this great variety does not help the community's development.

Script is important for the sustainability and development of a language. In the long-term, writing requires a codified grammar, precise definitions of what words mean and standardised spelling. Without those rules, texts are hard to read. They become established as a literary tradition evolves. At the same time, that literacy tradition helps to define the values and norms of the people whose mother tongue this language is. Writing thus shapes the identity of the community concerned. All of these trends are reinforced if and when a formal education system uses a written language.

For us Santals, however, the debate on what alphabet to use has become divisive. We have too many options for writing in our language.

Among South Asian Adivasis, we are the largest homogenous group. More than 10 million people belong to Santal tribes in India's eastern states as well as in Bangladesh and Nepal. Our tribes are outside the Hindu caste system and have been marginalised historically.

Santali, for example, has survived and evolved over the millennia in oral tradition. It is an Austro-Asiatic language that is related to Vietnamese and Khmer, but not to the Indo-European languages prevalent in our part of South Asia.

In the 1890s, Christian missionaries found it helpful to write in Santali. They used Roman (Latin) letters. This alphabet, of course, has been used in many parts of Europe since the days of the Roman Empire. The missionaries wrote down folktales in Santali and documented traditional medicine as practiced by our community. They codified the grammar of the language and compiled dictionaries. Moreover, they designed reading primers, especially in order to teach Santal children.

The seventh alphabet

Education began to spread among Santals, and was not only driven by Christian missionaries. Typically, people opted for the scripts that were predominant in the region. Where most people speak Bengali, Santals used the Bengali alphabet. Where Hindi or Nepali are more common, they opted for Devanagari, which is related to, but differs from the Bengali alphabet. Where Oriya is the lingua franca, however, that language's script was chosen, which is entirely different.

The sad truth is that Santali language and literature started to develop in six different scripts. To some extent, those alphabets were modified to better suit our language, but none of them accurately reflects Santali phonemes. The more depressing problem, however, is that Santal writing in different alphabets does very little to unite our community across the regions. It neither helps us communicate among one another nor does it foster a stronger sense of self-confidence.

This pattern persists however. The main reason is that it makes sense for a minority community to use the regionally prevalent script. In West Bengal, most Santal children attend state schools where Bengali is the language of instruction. In the neighbouring states, other languages are prevalent. At the same time, Latin letters are still in use as well, not least because some of the books prepared early on by the missionaries are still in print. They are indeed very useful.

Things have become even more complicated in the past two decades because government agencies started to approve a seventh script. It is called Ol-chiki and was designed to more accurately represent Santali phonemes. Since the turn of the millennium, state institutions have been promoting this innovative alphabet consistently, and they now consider it the only legitimate way to write in Santali

While many Santals wanted that to happen, the results are unconvincing. It is ironic, to put it mildly, that many well educated Santals who assertively endorse Ol-chiki as a token of Santal pride prefer to send their own children to schools that teach in Bengali or English. They know that their kids will have more opportunities in life if they are taught in Bengali, Hindi or English.

Our choice

The community-based organisation I work for runs a non-formal school for Santal children. We have chosen to use the Bengali alphabet. We know for certain that our pupils will have to be able to read Bengali later in life, and we do not want to burden young children with learning more than one script.

When they start school, we introduce Bengali letters and numbers for Santali words, and once they comfortably read the primers we have designed, we gradually move on to teaching them Bengali and later English as well.

We do our best to make them proud of our culture. We teach the kids traditional songs and dances. We regularly take them to a museum of

Santal culture which we have set up in one of our villages and which displays more than 150 artifacts Our curriculum covers topics that pertain to our village lifestyle, including organic farming, fisheries, vegetable gardening, beekeeping or herbal medicine. Of course, Santal history figures too. We want our young generation to be rooted in our specific culture and to have good opportunities to take their fate into their own hands. Using our language is essential. What alphabet we use in school, matters less. We tell our students about Ol-chiki – encouraging, but not forcing them to learn it.

14. Chhattisgarh's Sitanadi Udanti tiger reserve: Tribals seek forest rights, officials cite core area rule.



Despite the Congress-led Chhattisgarh government's promise of recognition of community resource rights, these villagers are facing bureaucratic hurdles, largely based on interpretation of law.

THOUSANDS OF tribals living in villages located in the core areas of Sitanadi Udanti Tiger Reserve are demanding that their Community Forest Resource rights be recognised. Despite the Congress-led Chhattisgarh government's promise of recognition of community resource rights, these villagers are facing bureaucratic hurdles, largely based on interpretation of law.

On February 16, residents of one of the villages, Bahigaon, submitted a letter to the Sub Divisional Magistrate, asking for a special gram sabha to facilitate the recognition of Community Forest Resource rights provided under the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006. The letter said despite receiving

communication from the state tribal department, “officials have stopped the process and are illegally thwarting” the process of rights recognition.

What the law says about the rights

SECTION 3 (1) (i) of the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006 gives right to protect, regenerate or conserve or manage any community forest resource which the tribals have been traditionally protecting and conserving for sustainable use. For recognition of Community Forest Resource rights, traditional boundary of a tribal village is recognised, empowering the gram sabha of the village to take decisions on protection, regeneration, conservation and management of the forest and its produce.

Manoj Shakshi, a zila panchayat member, who has been a part of several such protests in villages inside the Sitanadi Udanti National Park, said, “The district authorities are telling us that our rights can’t be recognised as we are in the core areas. The forest officials say the rights do not apply in the core areas, which is against the Act.”

Residents of more than 10 villages are trying to get their resource rights on the forest around them from authorities of the tiger reserve and district authorities of Dhamtari and Gariaband. Local officials said the villagers’ community rights should be discussed only when they move out of the core areas. “In the core areas, even grazing is not allowed. The villages want the resource rights so that they can get roads and other amenities that can’t be built inside the core area,” an official said.

Dhamtari Collector J P Maurya had sought directions from the tribal department for these villages in October 2020. “I sent letters to the departments and we received directives that it is not possible to go on with the rights recognition process at this time.”

A letter dated December 9 from Secretary (Tribal) D D Singh said: “This fact has come to light that in Critical Wildlife Habitat/Tiger Reserve, due to some reasons, recognition of Forest Rights are getting delayed. According to the Act’s Section 4(1), notwithstanding anything contained in any other law for the time being in force, and subject to the provisions of this Act, the

Central Government hereby recognises and vests forest rights under Section 3(1) of the same Act.”

“In the letter, I have quoted what the Act says. Its interpretation would be done by the officials on the ground,” Singh told The Indian Express. On the protesting villagers, he said, “I am not aware about the ground realities, but giving community resource rights there seems difficult as the management of such areas need to be done by skilled people.”

Shakshi and other villagers believed that the officials cannot take this decision. Gariaband-based activist Benipuri Goswami said, “The Act states that rights of tribals be recognised in any type of forested area. Officials think they can manage the forests better than the tribals who have spent generations inside the forest. It shows lack of trust, but tribals are involved and employed by department for the upkeep of the forests.” On January 19, tribals from several villages protested outside the office of Sitanadi Udanti Tiger Reserve Deputy Director Ayush Jain.

The same day, he informed villagers through a letter that the reserve is to be brought under the category of Critical Wildlife Habitat. “The process of recognition of forest rights in such areas is being decided at a higher stage. So, only after the process is decided, the work on recognition of rights can be started,” the letter said.

15. Assam’s tribal communities lost land and forest to mining



For years, Assam's rainforests in and around the Dehing Patkai Wildlife Sanctuary have been bearing the brunt of coal mining, both illegal and legal.

Apart from the impact on the biodiversity of the ecologically sensitive area, it is the tribal communities of the region who have suffered due to repeated displacement and pollution.

The tribal community alleges that there have been many instances of illegal mining and they are yet to get respite from the ills of mining.

One of India's most important rainforests, the Dehing Patkai Wildlife Sanctuary in Assam has become a battleground for communities and cheap coal mined from the region.

The foothills of Dehing Patkai in the eastern end of Assam is home to the Khamti, Singpho, Sema Nagas, Tangsa, Tai-Phake, Syam, Aitom, Nocte and other communities who have been impacted by mining and deforestation that displaced them from lands that traditionally belonged to them.

Many of the people from this region in Assam have migrated to Tirap district in the bordering state of Arunachal Pradesh, said Raju Deori, a legal advisor to the Tirap Autonomous District Council. He estimates that at least 500 villages in the Dehing Patkai foothills are facing the threat of

mining and deforestation. "A lot of people depending on the forests of these areas have migrated to Tirap district of Arunachal Pradesh, leaving their homesteads after mines and illegal felling of trees destroyed entire forest areas," Deori, who has been campaigning for the rights of these communities, told Mongabay-India.

Some of these tribes have less than 5,000 people among them, said Deori as he stated that mining has widened the income gap in communities between those dependent on the forests and those lured by illegal mining and logging activities. He also highlighted that while the tribal population is going down the illegal mining and logging activities have gone up.

If the Dehing Patkai Elephant Reserve and more than a dozen patches of reserve forests and proposed reserve forests are added, the size of Dehing Patkai rainforest situated farther east of the Brahmaputra river would be more than 900 square kilometres. The wildlife sanctuary alone, however, is spread over 111.9 square kilometres only with two narrow elephant corridors and fragmented patches of forests surrounded by coal mines and tea gardens.

Before this globally-endangered lowland evergreen forest and its biodiversity was officially protected as a sanctuary in 2004, industrial activity had been going on for more than 100 years in these parts.

Deori informed that the coal mining started in the land held by indigenous tribes. "Forest department claims that they have leased their land to the mines. That is false. The foothills of Dehing Patkai were never surveyed. The land ownership always remained with the communities," Deori claimed.

Hekei Sema, a tribal elder from Tikok village said that the village had to shift three times as the mine expanded. "We were compensated a couple of times. But there are only six families left in our village. Most have migrated," Sema told Mongabay-India. He said that the Saleki Proposed Reserve Forest next to Tikok has been mined illegally for more than a decade.

His ancestral village was turned into mine in 1888 when the British were laying down railway tracks – it is now operated by North Eastern Coalfields Limited (NECL), a subsidiary of Indian government-owned Coal India Limited (CIL).

16. On Covid SOS call, Kerala health workers cross river, trek several kilometres to reach tribal village



Last week, three members from one family in the settlement had developed a high fever and were in need of immediate medical attention.

After receiving an SOS call, a medical team from Puthur Domiciliary Care Centre (DCC) reached a tribal village, which is 20 km from Attapadi in Palakkad and comprises around 100 people of Irula, Mudugar and Kurumba tribes. Last week, three members from one family in the settlement had developed high fever and were in need of immediate medical attention.

The journey to the Murugula village wasn't, however, easy. The team realised they can use their vehicles only up to the bank of the Bhavani Puzha river and that they had to cross the river on foot thereafter.

After crossing the river Saturday morning, the team then trekked another eight km inside the Attappadi forest before they reached the village. Once there, they conducted rapid antigen tests for Covid-19 of more than 30 people, of which seven tested covid positive. They were shifted to the Puthur DDC.

Significantly, Dr Sukanya, who was part of the team, besides health inspector Sunil Vasu, junior health inspector Shaij and driver Sajesh, received an appreciation call from Kerala Health Minister Veena George for their work.

To reduce Covid infection and mortality rate, the Kerala government has made many internal medical structure changes since the Covid-19 outbreak last year. DCC is one of the changes.

"Each gram panchayat has its own DCC and it is monitored by a gram. There are 67 villages that function under this Puthur gram panchayat. To reduce the burden on mainline hospitals and dependency on oxygen, the DCCs are utilised vastly in these areas. Now, we have around 120 beds in the Puthur DCC. We are saving more lives with this facility" said Rajan, former Palakkad district panchayat councilor.

Meanwhile, Attapadi-based tribal activist Odiyan Lakshmanan said: "Kerala government's Domiciliary Care Centers work efficiently. It encourages people to take tests and get vaccinations. We really appreciate the courage of Puthur Domiciliary Care Centre to cross the river by foot."

According to the Kerala government's official website, the active caseload as of Monday was 2,59,179. Nearly 18.68% of the population in the state was vaccinated until May 24.