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# CONTENTS

## PAPER -1

### **PHYSICAL & ARCHAEOLOGICAL ANTHROPOLOGY**

1. COVID-19 syndemic? Why anthropologists say calling it a pandemic isn't enough
2. When does metabolism start to drop? It's much later than you might think, study shows
3. Widespread cultural diffusion of knowledge started 400 thousand years ago
4. An Indigenous people in the Philippines have the most Denisovan DNA
5. Skull found in China represents a new human species, our closest ancestor: Scientists
6. Ancient DNA reveals origin of first Bronze Age civilizations in Europe
7. Africa's oldest human burial site discovered, child laid to rest with pillow 78,000 years ago
8. Modern Human brain originated 1.7 million years ago in Africa New study reveals

### **SOCIO – CULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY**

9. Live-in relationships vs morality: A case for strengthening Domestic Violence Act

## **PAPER - 2**

### **INDIAN & TRIBAL ANTHROPOLOGY**

- 1. Giant conglomerates 'favoured': Whither tribal rights for jal-jungle-jameen?**
- 2. Maharashtra government to train tribal youth as tourist guides'**
- 3. NSTFDC under M/o Tribal Affairs extends concessional loans to ST persons for income generation activities/ self-employment**
- 4. Guardian of Fire: A film on the story behind the Muthuvan tribe**
- 5. Marriage an alien notion for Indian tribe**
- 6. How One Woman Left Everything to Stop Tribal Girls From Being Trafficked in Jharkhand!**
- 7. Project Akansha: Motivating, helping out PVTG children to take up education**
- 8. Is uprooting millions of poor tribals from their ancestral homelands ethical?**
- 9. Axis Bank Foundation and Aga Khan Rural Support Programme Release Compendium of Best Practices for Water Management in Tribal Areas**
- 10. Help us assert grazing rights near LAC, it counts: ex-Ladakh BJP chief**
- 11. 5 Arenas Where Tribal India Shattered the Mainstream Ceiling**
- 12. Is a caste census desirable?**
- 13. Tribal welfare: GI tag can help ST entrepreneurs thrive**
- 14. How to Save Forest Culture? 'Silent' Battle by Odisha's Kondhs is The Right Lesson**
- 15. Why India's local health traditions need to be formalised**
- 16. Why the killing of a former militant triggered a crisis in Meghalaya**
- 17. Tamil Nadu's upcoming Tribal Park to Feature 12 Indigenous Communities of India**
- 18. India's first food park for tribals set to start in Bastar**

## PHYSICAL & ARCHAEOLOGICAL ANTHROPOLOGY

### 1. COVID-19 syndemic? Why anthropologists say calling it a pandemic isn't enough

A syndemic is, simply, a synergistic epidemic. Merrill Singer, an anthropologist, coined the term in the 1990s while researching HIV/ AIDS and working as the Director of the Center for Community Health Research at the Hispanic Health Council in Hartford, Connecticut.

"The basic idea is that -- it was true of HIV, and it's true of COVID -- often that people who are hit worst by these infectious diseases are already suffering from other problems that are rooted in fundamental social inequalities," Clarence Glavlee, an associate anthropology professor at the University of Florida, told KCBS Radio's Margie Shafer in an interview on Friday.



"That makes the diseases worse, and the disease, in turn, makes the social conditions worse," he said.

Glavlee and Emily Mendenhall, a professor of global health at Georgetown University's Walsh School of Foreign Service, authored a piece in *Scientific American* this week laying out how structural inequality in the U.S. left the country ripe for a syndemic.

Black, Indigenous and Latino Americans have been at higher risk of contracting COVID-19 because inequality in education, employment and housing increased their risk of exposure. Those same inequalities, the authors argued, have led to higher risks of comorbidities, like diabetes and hypertension, which in turn has led to higher risks of severe disease.

In California, Black, Indigenous and Latino residents comprise 45.4% of the state population. As of Thursday, they comprised 53.2% of official COVID-19 deaths in California.

"And then as you play it out over the last year, we see that the consequences of the pandemic have actually made many of those pre-existing social inequalities worse," Glavlee said. "You think about the Supreme Court's decision yesterday to end the (U.S. Center for Disease Control and Prevention's) moratorium on evictions. Well, here's an example where the response to the pandemic is now gonna increase the risk that people are going to be evicted from their homes, which is gonna magnify their risk of health problems in the first place."

Neither Glavlee nor Mendenhall believe the COVID-19 pandemic is a one-off. More pandemics are likely in the future, Glavlee said on Friday, requiring social and economic inequalities to be addressed in order to make American society "more resilient."

"We need to focus on improving the health and well-being of all in the first place," he told KCBS Radio. "We need to address the social conditions that make it possible for people to live full, healthy lives."

## 2. When does metabolism start to drop? It's much later than you might think, study shows

Your metabolism likely starts to tank much later than previously thought, a new study suggests.

A team of researchers — including Herman Pontzer, an associate professor of evolutionary anthropology at Duke University — found that the average person's metabolism appears to peak at age one and starts to decline once they turn 60.

The study looked at the average calories burned by over 6,600 people in 29 countries, from one week old up to age 95, and found that metabolism largely remained steady throughout mid-life.

“There are lots of physiological changes that come with growing up and getting older,” Pontzer told Duke Today. “Think puberty, menopause, other phases of life. What's weird is that the timing of our ‘metabolic life stages’ doesn't seem to match those typical milestones.”

Researchers adjusted their measurements for body size and compared participants' metabolism “pound-for-pound.”

The researchers' findings, published in journal *Science* on Aug. 13, were grouped into four metabolic stages:

1. From birth to age one, a baby's metabolism goes from being, on average, the same as the mother's to “burn(ing) calories 50% faster for their body size than an adult.”
2. From then on, a person's metabolism will slow down about 3% each year until their 20s when it “levels off into a new normal.”
3. No metabolism changes were recorded between 20 to 60 years old.
4. Metabolism will steadily decline after age 60 and by age 90 will be 26% lower than in mid-life.

The study's findings now pose new unanswered questions for researchers.

“Something is happening inside a baby’s cells to make them more active, and we don’t know what those processes are yet,” Pontzer told Duke Today.

And even though teens undergo a number of growth spurts, researchers didn’t find a spike in “daily calorie needs” during puberty.

“We really thought puberty would be different and it’s not,” Pontzer told Duke Today.

Researchers were also surprised at the lack of metabolism changes in mid-life. If anything, metabolism during a person’s 20s, 30s, 40s and 50s was the most stable, according to the study.

Metabolism starts declining after age 60 and then it’s a 0.7% decline per year, the study suggests.

Lost muscle mass as people age may be partially to blame because “muscle burns more calories than fat,” according to researchers, who emphasized the declining muscle mass “is not the whole picture

“All of this points to the conclusion that tissue metabolism, the work that the cells are doing, is changing over the course of the lifespan in ways we haven’t fully appreciated before,” Pontzer told Duke Today. “You really need a big data set like this to get at those questions.”

### **3. Widespread cultural diffusion of knowledge started 400 thousand years ago**

Different groups of hominins probably learned from one another much earlier than was previously thought, and that knowledge was also distributed much further. A study by archaeologists at Leiden University on the use of fire shows that 400,000 years ago knowledge and skills must

already have been exchanged via social networks. The discovery was published in *PNAS* on 19 July.

"To date it was always thought that cultural diffusion actually started only 70,000 years ago when modern humans, *Homo sapiens*, started to disperse. But the record for the use of fire now seems to show that this happened much earlier," archaeologist and researcher Katharine MacDonald explains.

Together with Wil Roebroeks, professor of the Evolution of the Human Niche, archaeologist Fulco Scherjon, research master's student Eva van Veen, and Krist Vaesen, associate professor in the Philosophy of Innovation at Eindhoven University of Technology, MacDonald conducted research on the traces of fire made by hominins at archaeological sites in various places throughout the world. "We started to look differently at the data from decades of archaeological research."

### **Cultural diffusion**

Cultural diffusion is the widespread distribution of objects, techniques or particular practices by people or hominins. Examples include children's songs or rhymes. Whether they are sung by a child in the United States in English or in Europe in a European language, they often sound the same. This is because people have passed knowledge of the melody and also, for example, the clapping rhythm via a learning process.

At many of those sites – in Israel and in Africa, Europe and possibly also China – the researchers found comparable traces, or combinations of traces, such as charcoal, carbonized bones and stones that had been subjected to heat. "We don't think that these similarities could be caused because early predecessors of humans themselves traveled great distances, or that they developed particular techniques separately from one another, for example because the human brain underwent sudden growth. There are no indications at all for that," MacDonald explains. The only other possibility is that different groups of hominins passed on these techniques and knowledge of raw materials to one another, and that primitive social networks must have existed.



The theory of the research team is supported by archaeological finds of a particular type of stone tool from a somewhat later period. These tools made using what is known as the Levallois technique pop up during a very short period in an increasing number of places in the Old World. There are also genetic traces that show that different hominin populations must have been in contact with one another.

### **Anthropology, primatology and social sciences**

The researchers looked not only at archaeological evidence for the spread of the use of fire, but also at what is needed to exchange such knowledge. They therefore needed to know in what ways particular types of hominins could have been in social contact with one another. MacDonald: "It became a strongly interdisciplinary study. Besides archaeological data, we also integrated knowledge from anthropology, primatology and the social sciences. That's something I'm very proud of."

"Exciting and at the same time terrifying," is how MacDonald describes the publication of the research findings in scientific journal *PNAS*. "We worked on the article for a year and a half; it was completely rewritten twice and we shared it with just a couple of colleagues. But now the whole world can read it and there will no doubt be people who don't agree with us."

Still, she hopes that the article will lead to new questions in archaeology and other scientific disciplines. For MacDonald, the most important question is: what was it that made widespread cultural diffusion possible 400,000 years ago? "I hope we can change the discussion surrounding fire use by hominins. That we look more at what the use of fire meant for human development and how that related to social change."

#### 4. An Indigenous people in the Philippines have the most Denisovan DNA

**Indigenous Ayta Magbukon people get 5 percent of their DNA from the mysterious ancient hominids**

Denisovans are an elusive bunch, known mainly from ancient DNA samples and traces of that DNA that the ancient hominids shared when they interbred with *Homo sapiens*. They left their biggest genetic imprint on people who now live in Southeast Asian islands, nearby Papua New Guinea and Australia. Genetic evidence now shows that a Philippine Negrito ethnic group has inherited the most Denisovan ancestry of all. Indigenous people known as the Ayta Magbukon get around 5 percent of their DNA from Denisovans, a new study finds.

This finding fits an evolutionary scenario in which two or more Stone Age Denisovan populations independently reached various Southeast Asian islands, including the Philippines and a landmass that consisted of what's now Papua New Guinea, Australia and Tasmania. Exact arrival dates are unknown, but nearly 200,000-year-old stone tools found on the Indonesian island of Sulawesi may have been made by Denisovans (SN: 1/13/16). *H. sapiens* groups that started arriving around 50,000 years ago or more then interbred with resident Denisovans.

Evolutionary geneticists Maximilian Larena and Mattias Jakobsson, both at Uppsala University in Sweden, and their team describe the new evidence August 12 in *Current Biology*.

Even as the complexities of ancient interbreeding in Southeast Asia become clearer, Denisovans remain a mysterious crowd. "It's unclear how the different Denisovan groups on the mainland and on Southeast Asian islands were related [to each other] and how genetically diverse they were," Jakobsson says.

Papua New Guinea highlanders — estimated to carry close to 4 percent Denisovan DNA in the new study — were previously thought to be the modern record holders for Denisovan ancestry. But the Ayta Magbukon

display roughly 30 percent to 40 percent more Denisovan ancestry than Papua New Guinea highlanders and Indigenous Australians, Jakobsson says. That calculation accounts for recent mating of East Asians with Philippine Negrito groups, including the Ayta Magbukon, that diluted Denisovan inheritance to varying degrees.

Genetic analyses suggest that Ayta Magbukon people retain slightly more Denisovan ancestry than other Philippine Negrito groups due to having mated less often with East Asian migrants to the island around 2,281 years ago, the scientists say. Their genetic analyses compared ancient DNA from Denisovans and Neandertals with that of 1,107 individuals from 118 ethnic groups in the Philippines, including 25 Negrito populations. Comparisons were then made to previously collected DNA from present-day Papua New Guinea highlanders and Indigenous Australians.

The new report underscores that “still today there are populations that have not been fully genetically described and that Denisovans were geographically widespread,” says paleogeneticist Cosimo Posth of the University of Tübingen in Germany, who was not part of the new research.

But it’s too early to say whether Stone Age *Homo* fossils found on Southeast Asian islands come from Denisovans, populations that interbred with Denisovans or other *Homo* lineages, Posth says. Only DNA extracted from those fossils can resolve that issue, he adds. Unfortunately, ancient DNA preserves poorly in fossils from tropical climates.

Only a handful of confirmed Denisovan fossils exist. Those consist of a few fragmentary specimens from a Siberian cave where Denisovans lived from around 300,000 to 50,000 years ago and a roughly 160,000-year-old partial jaw found on the Tibetan Plateau

Fossils from the Philippines initially classed as *H. luzonensis*, dating to 50,000 years ago or more (SN: 4/10/19), might actually represent Denisovans. But a lack of consensus on what Denisovans looked like leaves the evolutionary identity of those fossils uncertain.

Larena and Jakobsson’s findings “further increase my suspicions that Denisovan fossils are hiding in plain sight” among previously excavated

discoveries on Southeast Asian islands, says population geneticist João Teixeira of the University of Adelaide in Australia, who did not participate in the new study.

Geographic ancestry patterns on Southeastern Asian islands and in Australia suggest that this region was settled by a genetically distinct Denisovan population from southern parts of mainland East Asia, Teixeira and his colleagues reported in the May *Nature Ecology & Evolution*.

### **5. Skull found in China represents a new human species, our closest ancestor: Scientists**

A handout screen grab obtained from EurekAlert! shows a virtual reconstruction of the Harbin cranium. Scientists announced on June 25, 2021 that a skull discovered in Northeast China represents a newly discovered human species they have named *Homo longi* or “Dragon Man”, and the lineage may replace Neanderthals as our closest relatives. Photo: EurekAlert! via AFP

***Homo longi*, or “Dragon Man”, scientists say, should replace Neanderthals as our closest relatives.**

Scientists announced on June 25 that a skull discovered in northeast China represents a newly discovered human species they have named *Homo longi*, or “Dragon Man” – and they say the lineage should replace Neanderthals as our closest relatives.

The Harbin cranium was discovered in the 1930s in the city of the same name in Heilongjiang Province, but was reportedly hidden in a well for 85 years to protect it from the Japanese Army.

It was later dug up and handed to Ji Qiang, a professor at Hebei GEO University, in 2018.

“On our analyses, the Harbin group is more closely linked to *H. sapiens* than the Neanderthals are — that is, Harbin shared a more recent common ancestor with us than the Neanderthals did,” co-author Chris Stringer of the Natural History Museum, London told AFP. “If these are regarded as distinct species, then this is our sister (most closely related) species.”

The findings were published in three papers in the journal *The Innovation*.

The skull dates back at least 146,000 years, placing it in the Middle Pleistocene.

It could hold a brain comparable in size to that of modern humans but with larger eye sockets, thick brow ridges, a wide mouth and oversized teeth.

“While it shows typical archaic human features, the Harbin cranium presents a mosaic combination of primitive and derived characters setting itself apart from all the other previously named *Homo* species,” said Ji, a co-author of the study.

The name is derived from Long Jiang, which literally means “Dragon River”.

The team believe the cranium belonged to a male, around 50 years old, living in a forested floodplain. “This population would have been hunter-gatherers, living off the land,” said Stringer. “From the winter temperatures in Harbin today, it looks like they were coping with even harsher cold than the Neanderthals.”

Given the location where the skull was found as well as the large-sized man it implies, the team believe *H. longi* may have been well adapted for harsh environments and would have been able to disperse throughout Asia.

### **Family tree**

Researchers first studied the external morphology of the cranium using over 600 traits, and then ran millions of simulations using a computer model to build trees of relatedness to other fossils.

“These suggest that Harbin and some other fossils from China form a third lineage of later humans alongside the Neanderthals and *H. sapiens*,” explained Prof. Stringer.

If *Homo sapiens* had reached East Asia at the time *Homo longi* was present, they might have interbred, though this is not clear.

There are also many unanswered questions about their culture and technology level, because of a lack of archaeological material.

But the finding could still reshape our understanding of human evolution.

“It establishes a third human lineage in East Asia with its own evolutionary history and shows how important the region was for human evolution,” said Prof. Stringer.

## **6. Ancient DNA reveals origin of first Bronze Age civilizations in Europe**

### **Finding shed light on role of migration in Neolithic to Bronze Age transition and emergence of Indo-European languages**

The first civilisations to build monumental palaces and urban centres in Europe are more genetically homogenous than expected, according to the first study to sequence whole genomes gathered from ancient archaeological sites around the Aegean Sea. The study has been published in the journal *Cell*.

Despite marked differences in burial customs, architecture, and art, the Minoan civilization in Crete, the Helladic civilization in mainland Greece and the Cycladic civilization in the Cycladic islands in the middle of the Aegean Sea, were genetically similar during the Early Bronze age (5000 years ago).

The findings are important because it suggests that critical innovations such as the development of urban centres, metal use and intensive trade made during the transition from the Neolithic to the Bronze Age were not

just due to mass immigration from east of the Aegean as previously thought, but also from the cultural continuity of local Neolithic groups.

The study also finds that by the Middle Bronze Age (4000-4,600 years ago), individuals from the northern Aegean were considerably different compared to those in the Early Bronze Age. These individuals shared half their ancestry with people from the Pontic-Caspian steppe, a large geographic region stretching between the Danube and the Ural rivers and north of the Black Sea, and were highly similar to present-day Greeks.

The findings suggest that migration waves from herders from the Pontic-Caspian steppe, or populations north of the Aegean that bear Pontic-Caspian Steppe like ancestry, shaped present-day Greece. These potential migration waves all predate the appearance of the earliest documented form of Greek, supporting theories explaining the emergence of Proto-Greek and the evolution of Indo-European languages in either Anatolia or the Pontic-Caspian Steppe region.

The team took samples from well-preserved skeletal remains at archaeological sites. They sequenced six whole genomes, four from all three cultures during the Early Bronze Age and two from a Helladic culture during the Middle Bronze Age.

The researchers also sequenced the mitochondrial genomes from eleven other individuals from the Early Bronze Age. Sequencing whole genomes provided the researchers with enough data to perform demographic and statistical analyses on population histories.

Sequencing ancient genomes is a huge challenge, particularly due to the degradation of the biological material and human contamination. A research team at the CNAG-CRG, played an important role in overcoming this challenge through using machine learning.

According to Oscar Lao, Head of the Population Genomics Group at the CNAG-CRG, "Taking an advantage that the number of samples and DNA quality we found is huge for this type of study, we have developed sophisticated machine learning tools to overcome challenges such as low depth of coverage, damage, and modern human contamination, opening

the door for the application of artificial intelligence to palaeogenomics data."

"Implementation of deep learning in demographic inference based on ancient samples allowed us to reconstruct ancestral relationships between ancient populations and reliably infer the amount and timing of massive migration events that marked the cultural transition from Neolithic to Bronze Age in Aegean," says Olga Dolgova, postdoctoral researcher in the Population Genomics Group at the CNAG-CRG.

The Bronze Age in Eurasia was marked by pivotal changes on the social, political, and economic levels, visible in the appearance of the first large urban centres and monumental palaces. The increasing economic and cultural exchange that developed during this time laid the groundwork for modern economic systems -- including capitalism, long-distance political treaties, and a world trade economy.

Despite their importance for understanding the rise of European civilisations and the spread of Indo-European languages, the genetic origins of the peoples behind the Neolithic to Bronze Age transition and their contribution to the present-day Greek population remain controversial.

Future studies could investigate whole genomes between the Mesolithic and Bronze Age in the Armenian and Caucasus to help further pinpoint the origins of migration into the Aegean, and to better integrate the genomic data with the existing archaeological and linguistic evidence.

## **7. Africa's oldest human burial site discovered, child laid to rest with pillow 78,000 years ago**

**Scientists have found the oldest-known human burial in Africa, dating to about 78,000 years ago at a cave site called Panga ya Saidi near the Kenyan coast. The remains of the child, who was between 2 ½ and 3 years old, laid to rest with a pillow were found in the cave.**



It is a scene that exudes sadness: a child perhaps 2-1/2 or 3 years old buried in a shallow grave under the sheltered overhang of a cave, head resting on a pillow and the upper part of the body carefully wrapped in a shroud.

Scientists said on Wednesday they have found the oldest-known human burial in Africa, the continent that gave rise to our species, dating to about 78,000 years ago at a cave site called Panga ya Saidi near the Kenyan coast. They nicknamed the youngster 'Mtoto,' meaning 'child' in Swahili.

The discovery, the researchers said, sheds light on the development of early complex social behaviours in Homo sapiens.

"This is at the root of the symbolic mind that characterizes Homo sapiens," said anthropologist María Martín-Torres, director of the National Research Center on Human Evolution (CENIEH) in Spain and lead author of the study published in the journal Nature

"The child was buried in a residential site, close to where this community lived, evincing how intimately life and death are related. Only humans treat the dead with the same respect, consideration and even tenderness they treat the living. Even when we die, we continue to be someone for our group," Martín-Torres added.

The highly decomposed bones, found in a circular pit, were encased in plaster and eventually taken to CENIEH for study.

The researchers determined that the child, whose gender remains unclear, was placed in the grave in a flexed position, the body lying on its right side, with knees drawn toward the chest.

The cranium and three neck bones collapsed into a void left by the decay of a pillow made of perishable material. The position of a shoulder bone and two ribs indicated the upper body was wrapped in a perishable material. The body was fresh at the time of burial, rapidly covered with earth scooped from the cave's floor.

"This would likely have been a group act, perhaps by members of the child's family. All of these behaviours are, of course, very similar to those observed in our own species today, so we can relate to this act even though the burial dates to 78,000 years ago," said study co-author Nicole Boivin, an archaeologist and director at the Max Planck Institute for the Science of Human History in Germany.

The researchers pondered the special significance of a child's burial.

"It is certainly very interesting and maybe evincing a particular grief or sorrow to such an early loss of someone they loved," Martín-Torres said.

It is unclear when funerary behaviour began, but ancient Homo sapiens and our Neanderthal cousins both practised it. Martín-Torres called it "a type of behaviour that allows us to maintain links with those who died and offer a farewell."

The oldest apparent Neanderthal burial site, in Israel, dates to about 120,000 years ago, similar in age to the oldest-known Homo sapiens burials, also in Israel, Boivin said.

The researchers said it is unclear whether funerary behaviour began outside Africa and was later adopted in Africa or began in Africa but archaeological evidence is lacking.

Mtoto was part of a hunter-gatherer culture, with remains of various antelope species and other prey found at the site, an upland setting in a tropical forest. Also found were stone tools for scraping and boring holes, and stone points that could be used as part of a spear

## **8. Modern Human brain originated 1.7 million years ago in Africa New study reveals**

**The first populations of the genus Homo, which emerged in Africa about 2.5 million years ago, walked straight up but they had brains similar to primitive ape, about half the size of ours.**

One of the most intriguing questions we face is: When and where did the modern human brain evolve? The first populations of the genus Homo, which emerged in Africa about 2.5 million years ago, walked straight up but they had brains similar to primitive ape, about half the size of ours. So an international team of researchers at the University of Zurich (UZH), Switzerland, spent a lot of time and energy to come to find the answers.

They concluded that the modern human brain evolved around 1.7 million years ago in Africa, the time when the extinct human Homoerectus first appeared and the culture of stone tools in Africa became increasingly complex. The homoerectus species was the first known hominin to migrate out of Africa were adept at cognitive tasks such as communicating and hunting or food gathering. The researchers, too, have concluded that the typical human brain spread rapidly from Africa to Asia.

According to the study published in Journal Science, the UZH team, led by Christoph Zollikofer and Marcia Ponce de León, examined the skulls of Homo fossils that lived in Africa and Asia 1 to 2 million years ago.

“Our analyses suggest that modern human brain structures emerged only 1.5 to 1.7 million years ago in African Homo populations,” Zollikofer said.

“The features typical to humans are primarily those regions in the frontal lobe that are responsible for planning and executing complex patterns of thought and action, and ultimately also for language,” said anthropologist Ponce de León.

The researchers believe that biological and cultural evolution are probably linked. Ponce de León said that it is likely the earliest forms of human language also developed during this period.

The UZH team used computed tomography to examine the skulls of Homo fossils that lived in Africa and Asia 1 to 2 million years ago, and compared the fossil data with reference data from great apes and humans.

## **SOCIO – CULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY**

### **9. Live-in relationships vs morality: A case for strengthening Domestic Violence Act**

The apex court held that two adults living together cannot be considered unlawful

The Supreme Court of India, for the first time in the case of *S. Khushboo v. Kanniammal* (2010) gave legal recognition to live-in relationships by categorizing them as “domestic relationships” protected under the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005 (“DV Act”). The Court held that a live-in relationship comes within the ambit of the right to life enshrined under Article 21 of the Constitution of India. The Court further held that live-in relationships are permissible and that the act of two adults living together, in any case, cannot be considered illegal or unlawful. However, they have become a developing area of controversy with respect to the types of live-in relationships that are recognized. The Supreme Court in *Indra Sarma v. V.K.V. Sarma* (2013) categorized live-in relationships into two – domestic cohabitation between two unmarried individuals and domestic cohabitation between a married and unmarried individual or two married individuals. The Supreme Court has only recognized the former and not the latter. This article explores the contours of the validity of the latter category of relationships.

#### **Conflicting views**

The High Courts of Bombay, Allahabad and Rajasthan have repeatedly refused to grant protection to such live-in couples, citing reasons that a live-in

relationship between a married and an unmarried person is illegal. The Punjab and Haryana High Court went a step further and referred to these relationships as unacceptable, claiming that they destroy the country's 'social fabric'. However, the Delhi High Court, taking a contrarian stand, adopted a wider approach, upholding the rights of a female live-in partner, irrespective of the marital status of both individuals.

### **Nature of relationship and bigamy**

Section 2(f) of the DV Act defines a domestic relationship as a relationship in the 'nature of marriage' between two people/adults living in a shared household. There are two main reasons for recognizing relationships in the aforementioned 'latter' category. Firstly, in our opinion, live-in relationships involving a married person fall within the four corners of 'domestic relationships' under the DV Act. This view found judicial endorsement by the Madras High Court in the case of *Malarkodi @ Malar v. The Chief Internal Audit Officer* (2021), wherein, adopting a wide interpretation of Section 2(f), the Court acknowledged it to be broad enough in its scope to encompass relationships of the aforementioned latter category. Furthermore, it is pertinent to note that the definition of live-in relationships as the law is understood currently was conceptualized during the erstwhile adultery regime, which has since been declared unconstitutional by the Supreme Court in *Joseph Shine v. Union of India* (2018), thus wiping off adultery from the criminal statute books. In view of this, it is imperative that the aforementioned latter category of live-in relationships must be recognized, particularly from the perspective of the DV Act.

Secondly, a strong case can be made that a live-in relationship between a married person and an unmarried person does not fall within the penal scope of bigamy (Section 494 Indian Penal Code). The provision is explicitly clear that it is only a second 'marriage' during the lifetime of the husband or wife that can attract criminality. Nowhere does the section say that a live-in relationship which is in the 'nature of marriage' will be considered to be an implicit marriage under personal law. The object of the DV Act was primarily to provide protection for the wife or female live-in partner from violence at the hands of the husband or the male live-in partner. When a woman, whether married or not, is in a domestic relationship with a man, the focus of the DV Act violation enquiry is centered on the tangible harm caused to the woman and the consequent protection of the woman. Any denial of protection would be a grave injustice to the women who are suffering. Unfortunately, the Bombay, Allahabad, Rajasthan, and Punjab High Courts have denied such victims protection on the moral

grounds that such relationships violate the sanctity of marriage and promote bigamy. However, we respectfully disagree; the courts could not be further away from the correct position. Acceptance of the aforementioned category of live-in relationships as akin to a domestic relationship for the purposes of Section 2(f) of the DV Act does not ipso facto promote bigamy nor is it an attack on the institution of marriage. By just considering the live-in couple to be in a domestic relationship, the married woman/ wife is not being deprived of her matrimonial rights of maintenance, legitimacy & custody of children etc. It merely acknowledges the existing factual reality of our society and astutely promotes the salient goals of protection of women enshrined under the DV Act.

### **The way forward**

People may view a live-in relationship between a married person and an unmarried person as unethical, but moral policing is not an option, especially when the arrangement is sanctioned by the touchstones of fundamental rights. In view of the contradictory findings of various courts on the matter concerned, it is laudable that the Punjab and Haryana High Court is the first court which has recently constituted a larger bench to consider the above stated vexed position of the law. However, the Punjab and Haryana High Court's findings will not be the final say on the matter. Ultimately, this controversy can be settled either by the Supreme Court of India ironing out the differences between the respective high courts or by way of a central legislation clarifying the position.

## INDIAN & TRIBAL ANTHROPOLOGY

### 1. Giant conglomerates 'favoured': Whither tribal rights for jal-jungle-jameen?



The struggle for “Jal, Jungle and Jameen” has been a long-drawn battle for the tribal communities of India. This tussle was once again in the limelight with the proposed diamond mining in the Buxwaha forest of Chhatarpur (Madhya Pradesh). The only difference in this movement was the massive social media support it gained, which actually seems to tilt the scale for the tribal people in a long time. A lot has changed over the past two decades when it comes to the people’s movement fighting for tribal rights. Prafulla Samantara, the 2017 Goldman Prize Recipient, when recounting his days of struggle

in the Niyamgiri Movement, talked about the three death attempts and how it did not deter his motivation.

Starting as a student activist, he has always been active in fighting for constitutional rights, be it against the unlawful Emergency during Indira Gandhi or his most celebrated success against the bauxite mining of Vedanta. Unlike the earlier times when it was very difficult to gather support for such causes, the internet has made it a lot easier to gather support for a movement.

But there are things which still have not changed. The greed of the corporates for natural resources is still the same, if not worse. Coupled with the support from the government and the police, the conglomerates have got free reign over the “Jal, Jungle and Jameen”. It again brings us to the basic question as to who owns them – is it the government, the tribal people, the general public, or the companies? While we debate over this, there is certainly a need for sustainable development.

Samantara, during our interaction, stressed for a strictly implemented national policy on the utilisation of natural resources. The national policy needs to address these key questions:

- How much “Jameen” (Land) will be destroyed?
- How many “Jungles” (Trees) will be cut down?
- How will “Jal” (Water Resources) be impacted?

At the same time, we have to ensure that all the stakeholders, particularly the tribal people, get an equal say during key decisions. According to few reports, the tribal people in the mined areas are hardly gaining anything while the conglomerates, at the same time, have multiplied their wealth. Hence, there is a need for equity when reaping the benefits from these natural resources.

Article 38 of our constitution already demands the same:

*“The State shall strive to promote the welfare of the people by securing and protecting as effectively as it may a social order in which justice, social, economic and political, shall inform all the institutions of the national life.”*



Yet, governments have failed miserably to uphold the same for the tribal people. Over 25 million people have already been displaced due to development projects during 1951-2000, out of which 70% are tribals. Only 25% of the displaced people have been rehabilitated. There also has been a blatant attempt to suppress all the voices of dissent. Those who have protested against this injustice are often labelled as Maoists. Therefore, it is the tribal people who have been on the receiving end due to mining.

On top of that, the judiciary has failed the tribal community as well. The lawsuits often go for a few decades when deciding on the tribal rights over “Jal, Jungle and Jameen” and most of them favour the giant conglomerates. It is only a few cases like the Niyamgiri Movement where the court ruled in favour of the tribes.

When asked about the reason as to why many movements failed, Samantara refused to accept those movements as failures. In his opinion, every movement has helped to save the environment and tribal rights – even those movements where the decision was not in their favour.

Many of the so-called failures have brought people together in raising voices against the wrongdoings. These movements have made the government, police and corporate more conscious of their responsibilities for the tribal communities of the mined areas. But the responsibility is not just restricted to the judiciary, government, or the corporate. The invisible hand of the free market has already inculcated a toxic culture of “every man for himself”. People nowadays believe that their sole objective is to earn for themselves, even if it comes at the cost of others.

We need to learn from our tribal friends to consume as much as required and live a simple lifestyle. If we use everything today, what would we leave for our children in the end? At the same time, the general public also needs to stand together with their fellow tribal

people in these tough times.

The road is not that easy, given that the voice of dissent is attacked from all sides. The constitutional rights of the public have been heavily suppressed. It is also not helped by the fact that the state has become a facilitator in the same.

In the absence of the people's voice, the state is no less than a tyrant. In that case, we can even say goodbye to the last ray of hope for the tribes – people's movements. At such a crucial junction, the youth can make or break the situation.

Hence, they need to be educated and made aware of the current shortcomings of the development. With the advent of the internet and social media, nothing is hidden from the sights of the public. And the fight is not just restricted to raising voices against the companies. The youth, therefore, must be encouraged to debate about these topics and arrive at a solution.

They must shift their focus towards sustainable practices and arriving at better feasible solutions for all the stakeholders, including the conglomerates. They can learn from the examples of countries like Brazil etc., where the youth have been proactive in fighting for the rights of the indigenous communities and saving Amazon forest. In the end, I would like to quote William Shakespeare from "Merchant of Venice" to summarise what "Jal, Jungle and Jameen" means for the tribal:

*"Nay, take my life and all. Pardon not that.  
You take my house when you do take the prop  
That doth sustain my house. You take my life  
When you do take the means whereby I live."*

## 2. Maharashtra government to train tribal youth as tourist guides'



The Directorate of Tourism (DoT), Maharashtra has announced plans to train tribal youth as tourist guides in the state as part of empowering tribal youngsters to take up jobs in the tourism sector. The government will also give free training to them. The programme is all set to launch in Raigad district of Maharashtra along with the Indian Institute of Tourism and Travel Management (IITTM). It is an autonomous body under the Ministry for Tourism, India.

As per program, 31 tribal youth from Karnala Sanctuary and Phansad Sanctuary will be selected for the training. It is a 'Special 5-day Guide Training Programme' where after five days, certificates will be awarded to the youth. This is for the first time that the DoT

Maharashtra is conducting such a guide training programme for youth belonging from tribal backgrounds.

The training will begin on August 2 and last on August 6 and youths will be given both theoretical and practical training. They will be taught about the roles and responsibilities of tour guides, best practices, concept of biodiversity, nature trail, how to conduct walking tours, handling difficult situations, among others.

The State Minister of Maharashtra for Tourism and Guardian Minister of Raigad, Aditi Tatkare, said, "This initiative by DoT for the unemployed youth of tribal areas will definitely prove to be helpful for them. This training programme will further be useful in spreading the glory of our state, as an excellent tourism guide, in different corners of the world. With the help of this programme, high quality tourist guides related to respective destinations in the State, will be ready."

He further said that there's a lot of scope for tourism in Maharashtra and that with this there is a demand for trained guides in places with diverse tourist destinations. She also said that every tourist needs a good guide to make their visit unforgettable.

### 3. NSTFDC under M/o Tribal Affairs extends concessional loans to ST persons for income generation activities/ self-employment



NSTFDC extends concessional loans to ST persons through Term Loan Scheme, AMSY, Micro Credit Scheme for Self-help Groups and under Stand-Up India scheme

Margin Money Support Scheme for ST Entrepreneurs formulated in December 2020 under Stand-Up India Scheme

Eligible ST Entrepreneurs are allowed to avail financial assistance of NSTFDC to the extent of 15% of the total project cost under Stand-Up India Scheme.

Tribal community owned Minor Forest Produce centric multi-purpose Kendras are set-up in localities with significant tribal population under VanDhan Vikas Karyakram

The Kendras provide sustainable livelihood opportunities at community level while creating enabling environment to prevent distressed migration.

The Ministry of Tribal Affairs (MoTA), through National Scheduled Tribes Finance and Development Corporation (NSTFDC), a central public sector

enterprise, extends concessional loans to the eligible Scheduled Tribe (ST) persons for undertaking any income generation activities/ self-employment through its implementing agencies. The prominent schemes of NSTFDC for undertaking Income Generation Activities are as under:

- Term Loan Scheme: NSTFDC provides Term Loan for viable projects costing upto ₹50.00 lakh per unit. Under the scheme, financial assistance is extended upto 90% of the cost of the project and the balance is met by way of subsidy / promoter contribution / margin money.
- Adivasi MahilaSashaktikaran Yojana (AMSY): This is an exclusive scheme for economic development of Scheduled Tribes Women. Under the scheme, NSTFDC, provides loan upto 90% for projects costing upto ₹2.00 lakh. Financial assistance under the scheme is extended at highly concessional rate of interest of 4% per annum.
- Micro Credit Scheme for Self Help Groups (MCF): This is an exclusive scheme for Self Help Groups for meeting small loan requirement of ST members. Under the scheme, the Corporation provides loans upto ₹50,000 per member and maximum ₹5 Lakh per Self Help Group (SHG).
- Margin Money Support Scheme for ST Entrepreneurs: In order to finance projects under the Stand-Up India Scheme of Government of India, a separate scheme titled “Margin Money Support Scheme for ST Entrepreneurs” has been formulated in December 2020. Under this scheme, the eligible ST Entrepreneurs are allowed to avail financial assistance of NSTFDC to the extent of 15% of the total project cost under Stand-Up India Scheme.

Van Dhan Vikas Karyakram, an initiative under the Scheme ‘Mechanism for Marketing of Minor Forest Produce (MFP) through Minimum Support Price (MSP) and Development of Value Chain for MFP’, targets livelihood generation for tribals by harnessing the wealth of forest i.e. Van Dhan. Under this programme, tribal community owned Minor Forest Produce centric multi-purpose Kendras are set-up in localities with significant tribal population. The Kendras act as common facility centres for procurement cum value addition to locally available Minor Forest Produce, training of tribal MFP gatherers etc. to provide sustainable livelihood opportunities at

community level while creating enabling environment to prevent distressed migration.

This information was given by Minister of Tribal Affairs Smt. Renuka Singh Saruta in a written reply in Rajya Sabha today.

#### **4. Guardian of Fire: A film on the story behind the Muthuvan tribe**



**‘Theyude Kavalkaran’, a docu-fiction film by the Kerala Forests and Wildlife Department, offers a glimpse into the lives of the ancient Muthuvan tribe of the Western Ghats**

Every forest is a repository of stories that are handed down generations. The tribal communities still hold on to these stories and beliefs, which form the very foundation of their lives.

‘Theyude Kavalkaran’ (The Guardian of Fire), a docu-fiction film presented by the Kerala Forests and Wildlife Department, released on YouTube recently, explores one such story. It follows an elderly

Muthuvan, who is believed to be the keeper of a fire, which sustains the tribe. Muthuvans are considered to be one of the earliest inhabitants of the Western Ghats.

Believed to have migrated from Tamil Nadu and settled in the evergreen forests of the Western Ghats a thousand years ago, the Muthuvans are known to be reclusive. Modern history describe them as descendants of a group of people who migrated from the African continent 55,000 years ago.

Featuring Malayalam film screenwriter and director Lal Jose, the film offers a peek into the lives of the tribe. Lal Jose goes in search of Krishnan Muthuvan, who tells him about his tribe's inseparable link to the forest. "There are many stories about us – how we came from the Kannaki temple in Tamil Nadu, how we came from the earth's belly – but the fire continues to blaze in each Muthuvan's heart," Krishnan tells Lal Jose in the film.

This first-of-its-kind initiative by the Forest Department is aimed at creating awareness about Kerala's diverse landscape, its people and its colourful cultural tapestry, says Suhyb PJ, District Forest Officer, Mankulam, who was part of the project. "The forest is not just about its trees and its wildlife. It speaks to us through its people too," he says, "While on treks through the forest, we often rely on guides, who are part of tribal communities. While we break for the night, sitting around bonfires, they tell us intriguing stories, myths and folklore. We wanted this to reach the common man so they learn about the forest and its people and appreciate it more.

Funded by the Forest Development Agency (FDA) and the State Forest Development Agency (SFDA), along with the UN's India Highrange Mountain Landcape Project, the film has been directed by Raju K Francis and scripted by Pramod G Krishnan. The team hopes to make more such films to take stories from the heart of the forest to general audiences.



The film can be watched on YouTube.

## 5. Marriage an alien notion for Indian tribe

Live-in relationships are the norm in Garasia community where women retain a high status in western state of Rajasthan.

**Udaipur, India** – Live-in relationships between couples who see little reason to marry may be a modern fashion in India’s Bollywood film industry, but for one community in India they reflect thousands of years of tradition.

Members of the indigenous Garasia tribe in the northwestern state of Rajasthan have been cohabiting in live-in relationships outside wedlock since time immemorial.

Social scientists studying the arrangement – called *dapa* and recognised through formal rituals – point to a low incidence of rape and dowry deaths in these communities where women retain a high status.

“These tribals, whose livelihood depends on farming and working as labour, marry their live-in partners only when they have sufficient money,” said Shahid Pathan, a journalist who has gained an understanding of indigenous customs in the Kotra area.

“Needless to say, that happens much later in their lives, and in absence of money they continue living together for several years and even become parents without the fear of bearing a child out of wedlock.”

### Joint wedding

It was surprising for many visitors to the wedding of 70-year-old tribal Naniya Garasia to his 60-year-old live-in partner Kaali to discover that not only were his grandchildren present but also his three sons – Mugla, 50, Gana, 40, and Shankar, 35.

Surprise turned to astonishment when they learned that the sons were also marrying their live-in partners – Lakhmi, Masri and Hazari respectively – on the same day.

All four men had been living with their partners for years and their children had all been born out of wedlock, something much of Indian society is yet to accept.



Naniya Garasia with his three sons, daughters-in-law and grandchildren.  
[Shahnawaz Akhtar/ Al Jazeera]

Naniya's second son, Gana, and his partner did not think twice before having four children, nor did Gana's younger brother Shankar, who has three kids.

Live-in relationships of this kind are at the heart of the culture of this tribal group concentrated in the region around Udaipur and Kotra.

The Garasia tribe in Rajasthan and parts of Gujarat holds a fair for their teenage children to befriend partners of their choice – and they then elope with them before returning and living together without having to marry.

**When the eloped couple return, the boy's family has to pay a sum to the bride's family before the couple starts to live together outside wedlock.**

But therein lies a catch: if they wish, women can seek a new live-in partner at another fair, who is then expected to pay a higher price to the woman's former partner. A similar practice can be found among the Gamars, another Rajasthani tribe.

Unlike the rest of India, women in the Garasia community hold a superior position to men – placing the onus on the man to bear all the expenses for the wedding.

In the marriage of Naniya and his sons, for example, the rituals were performed at the house of the groom whose family had to shoulder all the expenses.

### **Lesson in democracy**

Nonetheless, this ancient custom may be slowly changing.

“The only change that has been made to the age old practice of dapa is that now the verbal agreements between the boy and the girl are being recorded on paper,” said the head of Kotra, Gowri Devi.

Despite this concession to modern life, tribal people have little idea about similar live-in relationships among the middle classes of India’s large cities and other countries.

“We had no idea that other people also live in this way but it is in our culture and we have been doing it for thousands of years,” said Nirmal Singh Garasia, the head of Jodiwad village.

Social scientists who have studied the custom such as Rajiv Gupta believe that the tribal culture of cohabitation is based on a system known as “the right to choose and right to reject”.

“They do not find the modern society’s marriage system worthy, as it brings with it several impositions, especially on women,” said Gupta.

“In tribal society, democracy is deep rooted, whereas the institution of marriage gives superiority to manhood.

“Tribal people are more into practices that give equality to both sides – what democracy actually preaches to us.”

The social scientist also revealed that some tribal people practise a custom called *chaadar dalna*, marrying their brother’s widow.

Indeed a community considered by so many Indians as backward may even be able to teach mainstream society a few lessons about gender relations – cases of violence against women such as rape and dowry deaths are rare among the Garasia.

## 6. How One Woman Left Everything to Stop Tribal Girls From Being Trafficked in Jharkhand!



Returning to Delhi, she decided to quit her corporate job and luxurious life to visit tribal areas of India in an attempt to understand the extent of trafficking and empower tribal girls and women.

Five years ago, Rashmi Tiwari recalls entering a small tribal home in Orissa, as part of a social welfare funding project for CEO Clubs, India. The ground reality of the red corridor in the country shook her to the core.

**She stared in absolute horror, as parents of minor girls as young as 5-6 years old, offered them to her in exchange of money.**

While one home had three grown up girls sharing one set of clean clothes, most daily wage laborers struggled to have two meals a day. This marked the watershed moment of her life.

“Minor girls were being pushed into the web of trafficking and nobody was bothered. I was witnessing the worst kind of human rights violation on the ground of my own country.”



Returning to Delhi, she decided to quit her corporate job and luxurious life to visit tribal areas of India in an attempt to understand the extent of trafficking and empower tribal girls and women.

Rashmi was only nine when she was pushed out of the comfort of her Mumbai home with her single mother. There was no roof over her head and certainly no source of income for her uneducated mother. Enrolled at Saraswati Uchchar Kanya Vidyalaya in Varanasi at 10

years old, there was never enough money to buy school uniform or books or lunch.

It was a common to see a young Rashmi break into Amitabh Bachchan's Aaj Rapat Jaayein or mimic him to entertain the senior girls, who lent their old belongings to her. She'd work at the soap factory as a child labourer after school. Living out of a 3.5 x 5.5 m box room in Varanasi, she completed her Masters and earned her PhD degree in Economics from Banaras Hindu University in 1998-99. She then established herself in the corporate world.

How many times have you witnessed a neighbor or a friend calling out to a choti in their homes to get you a glass of water or feed the toddler, and you did not bat an eyelid?

While 'sex trafficking' draws a sharp response from most people, human trafficking as modern day slavery - by hiring underage girls as child laborers or domestic helps - easily disguises itself as a socially accepted norm, says Rashmi.

"The demand and supply for these underage girls are not only in tribal areas but also the leading metros. In fact, city dwellers create the demand. Unknowingly and unintentionally, we are all contributing to it. Every time you hire a tribal underage girl from an agency as a house-help, even if you don't abuse her. Or buy products and services that involve child labor and bonded labor, you are partaking in this grave human rights violation."

She lays down hard-hitting facts that state India is one of the top five countries in the Global Slavery Index. Large tribal populations, on the brink of extinction in the red corridors of India, become breeding grounds for trafficking.

Similar problems exist in the state of Jharkhand, notorious for Naxal activities, where Rashmi's Aahan Tribal Development Foundation works for the upliftment of tribal women and girls.

Stating the sociocultural context in these areas Rashmi expresses how generations of debt and bonded labor in tribal families make vulnerable girl children easy victims. Very often, these innocent girls are offered to the traffickers by the parents themselves. Or sometimes traffickers lure the parents and the girls with the dreams of a better life and job opportunities.

Over 40% of these girls disappear without any trace. Even if they escape, going back to the villages without making money for the agent is never an option. Threats, physical abuse, starvation and multiple sexual assaults by several men several times a day are common practices to make them comply, surrender and suppress their voice.

Speaking about the vision and mission of Aahan Foundation, Rashmi says, "I wanted a sunrise for these girls as a result of their own collective efforts, not a result of anybody's charity.

'*Aahan*' refers to a new dawn.

Shedding light on the many challenges that she had to face while starting her work Rashmi shares, "I had never been to Jharkhand before. I had no funds, no resources and zero experience of working at the grassroots level in the social sector."

On her first visit to a tribal village in Jharkhand, she thought of the most unconventional way of getting women and young girls to open up to her. She lured them by *samosas* and *gulab jamuns* and showed them anti-trafficking films on her laptop. Initially reluctant, the turnout started improving.

Most fathers, uncles, brothers and even traffickers started attending these chats who mistook Rashmi for an organised trafficker, who would lure the mothers along with the girls this time without paying them a penny.

Little did they know, she was here to disturb their entire system and train these girls to fight for their own rights. Slowly, she started gaining the trust by interacting with the women Sarpanch and members of the self-help groups, who enjoyed great respect among tribals. It helped her in breaking the ice and take tribals into her confidence.

But it was a huge challenge to convince women and young girls to live their lives on their own terms.

“The constant fear of getting trafficked locked them in a cage that dictated that they had to earn enough money to feed their families. What was needed was a behavioral shift,” says Rashmi.

But now Rashmi had already come under the radar of the traffickers, local leaders and politicians who threatened to hurt her if she did not back down. She recalls an incident when she was on the brink of being kidnapped by Naxalites and was allowed to escape because locals intervened. That did not stop them from hitting her and threatening her to return to the city.

It's been over 3 years, her projects are still working successfully in over 50 villages reaching out to over 5000 women and girls.

### **Impact**

Aahan Foundation started in 2013, provides vocational training to girls and women in sales, marketing, sports, performing arts and arts. To prevent trafficking and promote holistic growth, they run Aahan Fellowship for Tribal Girls and Women, a year long leadership program, Udaan a week long program to get selected tribal girls and women to New Delhi to meet with leaders political, social and business areas, Village Level Mentoring Programs and Global Tribal Mentoring Walks.



Today members of the Aahan family are successfully working as corporates, nurses, teachers, panchayat leaders, mason and builders, professional football players, and constructing toilets as social workers.

As a Rupanti Munda dons an Indian Jersey at the Homeless Cup, a 14-year-old Rupni Barla speaks at TEDx about bouncing back strongly and representing India in Marathon runs across the globe. Aarti Munda saves the dying Madhubani and Surahi art on women's issues and now wants to start an art and culture school in her village.

**Biresh Devi who struggled as a child bride, now works as a pink auto driver in Jharkhand.**

Rashmi talks about her biggest experiential learning saying, "You don't need a lot of money or too many people to drive change. We had no resources, no experience, and no business model. It's been over three years and we have sustained our activities without any major funding. We focus on impact sheets than excel sheets. One needs to measure how much change is one bringing in the lives and mindsets of tribal girls and women. I am not discounting the need of money, but revolutionary ideas do not ride waves of change based on the rationale of money."

**7. Project Akansha: Motivating, helping out PVTG children to take up education**



Under Project Akasha, over 220 students are enrolled in seven residential schools across Jharkhand.

RANCHI: Children of Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTG) in Jharkhand, which are considered extremely backward but are on the verge of extinction, have started going to schools and doing well in exams

All thanks to Project Akasha, an initiative by Tata Steel Foundation which has been motivating and helping out PVTG children to take up education so that they can motivate others in the tribe and develop interest towards education.

Scattered throughout Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, West Bengal, Maharashtra, Odisha, Madhya Pradesh, and West Bengal, the Birhors are traditionally nomadic by nature, which spend their entire lives in the jungles sustaining on natural resources collected from forests. With less than 10,000 members left in the tribe, their vulnerability as an age-old ethnic group of India comes across in dwindling numbers.

The project has not only enabled quality education by enrolling Birhor and Sabar children into residential schools and supporting them with tuition fees, but has gone ahead and produced many first-generation learners in their families. It has not only given the children a chance at sound education, but also enabled them to imagine living in the reverie of becoming a doctor, or an engineer someday.

Therefore, with over 220 students enrolled in seven residential schools across Jharkhand, Project Aakash is a strong foray into the dark shroud of illiteracy

that surrounds the Birhors and Sabars, yet another nomadic tribe that is dependent on the forests for sustenance.

This year, as many as nine students enrolled in the project completed their matriculation with flying colours.

Stifan Birhor is one among them, who, for the first time felt the taste of success. Belonging to the Birhor tribe, Stifan is one of those many children from Jharkhand who have found their roots in a sound educational environment.

“It was my first exam in a new school and after scoring decent marks in almost all the subjects, the teacher called me to the front of the class and cheered me on!”, says Stifan Birhor, a student of M S Mahato High School, who recently passed matriculation with a whopping 84.6 per cent. Possibly, this was the first time he was cheered for doing well in exams which will motivate him to study harder for the next exam, he added.

Notably, with a smile beaming across the entire length of his face, there was a prominent presence of pride and excitement in Stifan’s words.

Another child, Charan Birhor, who also studies in the same school under Project Akasha and scored 72 per cent in class 10 Board Examination, admitted that he would never like to go back to his old lifestyle.

“Initially, I used to spend the entire day roaming around the village with my friends, wasting all my time, but after getting enrolled in the school, I found myself being busy with studies and once I scored well in my exams, there was no looking back at the old lifestyle”, says Charan Birhor.

Project Aakansha, therefore, aims at bringing a paradigm shift in the lives of Birhors and Sabars one child at a time.

“Education being the driving force towards creating a world that needs holistic development of children, Project Akansha aims at motivating students from communities to take up complete basic and gradually enable them chose their career paths,” said Tata Steel Corporate Social Responsibility Chief, Sourav Roy.

Many of the students who are a part of the project Aakansha, the first generation learners, have become inspiration for many around them, he added.

Roy further added that it enables them to study sincerely and break out from the shackles of abject poverty and rural hardships that today envelops the members of the Birhor tribe.

### 8. Is uprooting millions of poor tribals from their ancestral homelands ethical?



**One should not have been surprised when the Centre failed to send its lawyers to the hearing on Forest Rights Act**

One should not have been surprised when the Centre failed to send its lawyers to the hearing on Forest Rights Act. One has seen forest lands usurped by private corporations and ecological considerations thrown to the wind under the current government.

While the government might have a clear motive of displacing sons and daughters of the forests to enable a corporate takeover of the resources, the Supreme Court also has to bear the moral cross for displacing millions of Indian citizens, most of whom are haplessly poor and marginalised.

The Supreme Court on February 20 ordered the forced eviction of more than a million tribal and other families from forestlands across 16 states of the country after the Centre failed to defend Forest Rights Act that was ironically passed to

defend their rights. The Union government failed to present its lawyers in defence of the law on February 13.

The SC order asked the state governments to “ensure that where the rejection orders have been passed, eviction will be carried out on or before the next date of hearing. In case the eviction is not carried out, as aforesaid, the matter would be viewed seriously by this court.” The next date of hearing is on July 27. So, by that day these families are going to be homeless.

The Forest Rights Act was passed by the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance government in 2006. It required state governments to transfer back traditional forest lands to tribals. The 16 state governments have said over 1.1 million cases were disqualified. However, there is widespread scepticism about the veracity of this figure as implementation was shoddy and lackadaisical. Critics have said that many state governments, specifically the forest departments and local administrations, did not even care to carry out the process.

What is unnerving is that the Supreme Court has put the onus of the Centre’s non-appearance in the court and non-implementation of the Forest Rights Act by the states on dwellers of the forest. As a result, going by an average family size of five, almost 6 million people are going to be uprooted from their roots and their homeland without any provision of rehabilitation. From a purely moral and ethical point of view, this can’t be construed as justice.

## **9. Axis Bank Foundation and Aga Khan Rural Support Programme Release Compendium of Best Practices for Water Management in Tribal Areas**



Axis Bank Foundation (ABF) and Aga Khan Rural Support Programme India (AKRSPI) has released a report 'Compendium of Best Practices Water management in Tribal Areas' highlighting the increased need for governance and resource allocation towards agricultural water for tribal communities across the country.

This extensive compendium suggests practices that can be shared with government departments that look into irrigation and tribal affairs, for effective implementation of farm water infrastructure across all and districts and states, leading to improved water access and control by the tribal communities.

The Report was launched by M K Jadhav, Secretary, Water Resources, Government of Gujarat in the presence of Dhruvi Shah, CEO, Axis Bank Foundation and Apoorva Oza, Chief Executive Officer, Aga Khan Rural Support Programme India.

Why was the compendium created?

The Central Indian region is home to 70% of the tribal population of the country, covering over 100 districts in eight states; extending from Banswara in Rajasthan

to Purulia in West Bengal, but the percentage of area under irrigation in these tribal areas is half that of non-tribal areas. Moreover, the tribal communities residing in these geographies face multiple challenges such as undulating hilly mountainous terrain and sloping agricultural land, which makes it non-conducive to groundwater storage and difficult to access them during dry seasons.

Based on these observations, ABF and AKRSP has done an extensive study on the Central Indian region to showcase the irrigation investments made by the governments and how large dams, lift irrigation schemes, well-digging schemes and other water-focused schemes are the requirements of the tribal geographies.

Speaking on the launch, Dhruvi Shah, Chief Executive Officer, Axis Bank Foundation said: "Water security is one of the primary challenges that rural communities experience. While it is important to allocate more resources for water control in tribal areas, it is also critical that the resources be used for greater effectiveness. The compendium will offer an insight to the policy-makers, practitioners and NGOs, as they try and enhance water security in some of the poorest regions of the Central-Indian tribal belt."

Apoorva Oza, CEO-AKRSP(I) said, "We have a curious problem of tribal poverty caused by poor water control despite good rainfall. This can be addressed by scaling up context specific solutions which have stood the test of time. This compendium will help all of use our resources more wisely. Hence it's essential that donors and NGOs come together not only for field implementation but also for thoughtfull research into what works best to solve the complex problems of rural poverty."

The compendium showcases a few successful interventions undertaken by CSOs and NGOs to ensure drinking water security, as well as availability of water to support livelihood for inhabitants of the Central tribal belt. It further showcases some of the best traditional practices in water management and conservation effective in the tribal context. For instance, one such traditional method to irrigate crops has been the diversion of water in perennial or seasonal streams through an intricate network of channels, thus allowing water to flow to fields using gravity. This system, known as Diversion-based Irrigation in modern times, has been practiced in various parts of the country since times immemorial under different local names.

## 10. Help us assert grazing rights near LAC, it counts: ex-Ladakh BJP chief

**Demchok in south eastern Ladakh, in military parlance an area called sub-sector south, and Chushul, which is closer to Pangong Tso, are the two places where the graziers experience the most pushback by Indian security forces, mainly the ITBP which means the border posts.**

A former J&K minister from Ladakh in the PDP-BJP government has said Indian security forces must help the semi-nomadic people of the area assert traditional rights over the land near the Line of Actual Control instead of preventing them from taking their livestock to graze on these pasture lands as they do now.

Chering Dorjay, who was Minister for Co-operatives and Ladakh Affairs until 2018, and until recently president of the BJP in Ladakh, told *The Indian Express* there was concern among the people of that area that if India does not succeed in getting the PLA soldiers to go back to status quo ante positions, “there will be no end” to how much land Ladakhis may lose.

“As far as we are concerned, there has been no question of our people going to the lands on the Chinese side, but our security forces create problems for us even when we take our animals to graze in pasture lands on our side. This has been a problem from the beginning,” said Dorjay.

Demchok in south eastern Ladakh, in military parlance an area called sub-sector south, and Chushul, which is closer to Pangong Tso, are the two places where the graziers experience the most pushback by Indian security forces, mainly the ITBP which means the border posts.

“From the other side we have seen that their army or border police follow a modus operandi by which they push nomads from their side to our side. They send them first to encroach, and come behind them later,” said Dorjay, who has raised this issue many times with the security forces as well as with the administration of J&K (at the time when Ladakh was part of the former state).

Senior security officials acknowledged that there were problems between the local people and the security forces over permission for grazing, and said the ITBP prevents tribesmen from going into certain areas even on the Indian side because it obstructs their patrolling, with animals and people coming in the way.



There is also the “unspoken” suspicion, one official said, that some may be informers for the other side.

However, Dorjay says the main reason that the ITBP stops the graziers is because “they want a peaceful tenure” and fear that permitting people to set up grazing camps may lead to confrontations with the Chinese.

Between December and March, the Changpas, semi-nomadic shepherds of the south eastern Ladakh area, cross over the frozen Indus with their Pashmina goats and yak to a plain called Skakjung, where grazing does not take place in the summer so as to preserve the grass there for the winter. Here, Dorjay said, the Chinese had encroached steadily into traditional Ladakhi pastureland. He recalled an incident from 2008-9, when he was chief executive councillor of the Ladakh Autonomous Hill Development Council (Leh), to show that being assertive is the only way for India to safeguard its territory.

That winter, the Chinese had uprooted some Changpa reboos (woollen tents) in Skakjung and pushed them back, even burning one tent.

“Some people called me, and said I should go to Skakjung to express solidarity with people, which would help their morale. I took the Nyoma SHO and we went in 10 vehicles to meet the affected people. They told me what had happened, and as the migration season was coming to an end, and the grass on that side was also finished, they were planning to return. But I told them to remain there for the next week or 10 days, otherwise the Chinese would get the impression they had succeeded in their plan. I replaced the burnt tent, sent 10 truckloads of fodder for their livestock, and also installed three handpumps. From that year until now, we have had no problem in that area from the Chinese,” he said.

“Our Army and ITBP never do this, they never go and confront the Chinese like this,” Dorjay said, observing that it was because of “constantly downplaying incidents” that people in the area had lost winter pasture lands on the north bank of Pangong, where dry grass was plentiful on the south facing ridges, and people would take their livestock until some 15 years ago.

Dorjay, who belongs to the Lakruk area of Ladakh, said people living on the south bank of Pangong could see that Chinese soldiers had not fully withdrawn from Finger 4 to Finger 8, and they could also see building activity on the other side.

“Our people can see dozers, road-building activity is going on. Earlier, we never used to see any Chinese, now they are fully visible to people living in the villages on the opposite side,” he said. At night, as the lights come on, their presence becomes particularly visible.

“People have noted this, and they fear the Chinese are not going to go back. They are making permanent structures, they have taken control of that land without firing a shot,” he said.

“If they don’t go back, our people say there will be no end to it. They are very much agitated, they think now they have come 8 km, next time they will come in more, and one day, they will take the whole of Pangong,” he said.

## 11.5 Arenas Where Tribal India Shattered the Mainstream Ceiling

Whether it is the tribes’ ability to innovate, adapt, and create, they continue to use their skills to thrive in an ever-evolving world

The culture and practices of the tribes of India form a rich part of our history. Whether it is in the realm of arts, music, dance, handicrafts, or innovation, their way of life is one which is unique. However, it is true that they remain off the radar of mainstream India on most days.

But that has not stopped them from making a mark in mainstream India with their contributions to the economy, sports and much more! So, here are five areas where tribal India broke through that barrier!

### 1. The cultivation and export of natural products.

Many tribes were originally hunter-gatherer societies. As such, their knowledge of ancient herbs, plants and other natural products is tantamount to that of an expert.

**These skills that were once a part of their tradition have now become a means for not only their livelihood but an active contribution to furthering India’s economic growth.**



Members of Kattunayakan, an ancient tribe in Kerala, have been collecting and selling wild honey for years. Tribals in the Koraput region of Orissa have also adopted beekeeping to earn a livelihood. They cultivate natural honey, and this is widely sought after in both the domestic and global market. According to a report by Agriculture Processed Food Products Export Development Authority (APEDA) 38, 177.08 metric tonnes of honey, worth 705.87 crores was exported in 2015-2016.

Tribes that live near forest-fringed villages usually tend to cultivate organic food grains, and gather bamboo, ivory, timber, and fruits, which they sometimes make into natural products, for example, soaps!

## **2. The sports stars who made India proud**



Sports stars Baichung Bhutia and Mary Kom.

The tribes of India are known for their natural stamina and strength, which is a product of their lifestyle. As a result, many prominent sports figures hail from tribes across India. Mary Kom, a five-time world amateur boxing champion, and Olympic Medal winner hails from the Kom tribe in Manipur, and Baichung Bhutia, the first Indian to play professional football in England, comes from a tribe from Tinkitam in Sikkim.

At one point in time, Dilip Tirkey, who belonged to the Oraon tribe of Odisha, was a force to be reckoned with on the hockey field and was referred to as one of the toughest defenders to beat in the entire world. These are just a few of the many people of tribal origin who have excelled in the field of sports, and have made India proud with their achievements in the domain!

### **3. Their centuries-old music and dance**

Dance and music are a way of expression, and for India's tribal communities, it has become an aspect which defines their culture. The Bagurumba is a dance which is said to represent the Bodo tribe's strong connection to nature, while the women of the Kamar tribe perform a dance known as Tertali. This is an intricate dance where the performers sit on the

floor and have several cymbals attached to their body, and a pot balanced on their head, and a sword between their teeth.

There are hundreds of folk dances that originated in the tribes of India, and the list is exhaustive!



Bagurumba, the dance of the Bodo tribe.

Many of them are still performed for festivals and celebrations today.

Tribal India has also stepped out of its indigenous tradition to make waves in other folk forms as well, as in the case of Padma-winner Teejan Bai. A member of the Pardhi tribe, in Chhattisgarh, Teejan is a world-renowned Pandavani exponent. This art form involves singing, playing various traditional instruments, and enacting scenes from the Mahabharata, and Teejan has been invited to other countries to perform, which has put her tribe on the global map!

Whether it is to express joy, entertain, or celebrate, the hundreds of folk dances that India's tribes have given to the country has definitely added to India's cultural repertoire.

#### 4. The coveted handicrafts – a significant source of income

Tribal handicrafts are coveted around the world, for the precision, and effort with which each piece is created.

**Their age-old traditions have cultivated a generation of artisans who have honed their craft to contribute not only to the domestic market but India's exports as well.**



An array of the Dhokra technique. Source:

The Bhil and Bhilala tribes are known for their ragged dolls. While in the domestic market, a doll may fetch up to Rs 10,000, in foreign craft bazaars, their prices have been known to fetch a prize of Rs 50,000, depending on

the size! The tribals of the Kalahandi district in Orissa craft good quality products out of wood, which have been exported to other countries, while the Dhokra Damar tribes of West Bengal and Odisha are the creators of Dhokra technique, which has been used to create metal artefacts. These artefacts are known for their simplicity, folk touch, and form.

If one travels to the Mayurbhanj region of Odisha, the tribes there create ropes made out of Sabai grass, which have been noted for their durability. The Adivasis of India have created all kinds of art, including paintings, metalwork, jewellery, bamboo craft, and woodwork!

In 2013-2014 exported handicrafts in India earned a total of \$3304.9 million! Each year, handicrafts are exported to at least 100 countries around the world.

## **5. Their knowledge of medicinal plants**

Before chemical medicines reached India's shores, there was the natural medicine that came from the land. Over 7500 species of plants can be used for medical purposes in India.

**Today, several tribes across India, who live close to forests retain extensive knowledge of their use.**



Tender bamboo shoots have been known to cure muscle pain. A plant known as "narinaranga" is used by the Kurichiar in a paste made to

provide relief for sprains; and for the Sugali tribe of Andhra Pradesh, the garlic bulb is a remedy for fever. There are thousands of such natural remedies within

Many of us living in the modern world have begun to admire traditional remedies, and it is a known fact that tribal people have been practising these remedies since the time of their ancestors. This has now become a part of their livelihood, with many tribes cultivating plants as part of subsistence agriculture.

The people have lived off the land, and have given back just as much as they have taken. Their contributions to India's culture have been unforgettable. Whether it is their ability to innovate, adapt, and create, they continue to use their skills to thrive in an ever-evolving world, staying true to themselves, while also reaching new heights in novel fields!

## 12. Is a caste census desirable?



With the 2021 Census coming up, several political parties have demanded a nationwide caste census.



## What is Caste Census?

- Every Census in independent India from 1951 to 2011 has published data on Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, but not on other castes.
- Before that, every Census until 1931 had data on caste.
- However, in 1941, caste-based data was collected but not published.
- In the absence of such a census, there is no proper estimate for the population of OBCs, various groups within the OBCs, and others.
- The Mandal Commission estimated the OBC population at 52%, some other estimates have been based on National Sample Survey data.
- Some political parties make their own estimates in states and Lok Sabha and Assembly seats during elections.

## Arguments for caste census

A caste census is not merely geared to the reservation issue.

- **Enumerating the marginalized:** A caste census would actually bring to the particular the number of people who are at the margins, or who are deprived, or the kind of occupations they pursue, or the kind of hold that institutions like caste have on them.
- **Data for Policymaking:** This information is absolutely necessary for any democratic policymaking.
- **Judicial backing:** The courts in India have often emphatically said that it is important to have adequate data with regard to the reservation.
- **Caste offers privilege:** Caste is not only a source of disadvantage; it is also a very important source of privilege and advantage in our society.
- **Caste doesn't marginalize:** We need to do away with the idea of caste being applicable to only disadvantaged people, poor people, people who are somehow lacking.
- **Rids away caste rigidities:** Counting of caste doesn't necessarily perpetuate caste or the caste system. Myths of caste elitisms can be debunked through a caste census.

## Arguments against caste census

- **50% breach:** It is argued that a Socio-Economic Caste Census is the only way to make a case to breach the 50% cap on reservation and rationalize the reservation matrix in the country.

- **Rising assertiveness:** More the State ignores out caste, the more is the tendency to preserve caste, protect it. This has been observed in many states.
- **Chaos:** Data gathering itself is a big problem because it can become very, very invasive. But we need to actually balance it with enabling people and asserting citizen equality.
- **Social friction:** Caste identification can lead to friction amongst various classes.

### Breaching the 50% cap

- **Judicial Substantiation:** The 50% cap, as introduced by the court, has not really been argued through.
- **Questioning the sacrosanctity:** Some feel that nothing sacrosanct about the 50% limit – it can be exceeded, if necessary, but a clear argument should be given for why this is being done.

### Inefficacy of reservations

- **Fractional benefits:** The way reservation is practiced has invariably led to elites among castes and communities.
- **Domination:** These elites within the castes have tended to exercise their dominance over their very communities and not let them exercise the kind of freedoms, or search for equality, which any democratic polity deserves.
- **Welfare isn't reservation:** The state has helped privileged communities far more, even though this help has not taken the explicit form of programs like reservation.

### Why is a caste census always controversial?

- **Data manipulation:** This is a manifestation of the principle that those in power control data and information.
- **Censoring of data:** We have had instances where this data has been collected but has not been made public.
- **Relative deprivation:** Since a caste census is a necessity, it is not a happy thing, it is not a great achievement, it is just something that the State has to do circumstantially.
- **Vote bank politics:** Vested interests of particular state governments in hunt for vote banks are also visible these days.

### **SECC has the solution**

- We have got locked into a mindset where we think only those communities which want welfare benefits from the state must be enumerated.
- Many have argued that a Socio-Economic Caste Census would be the best way to rationalize reservation based on data and make a strong case for breaching this gap.
- Earlier governments argued that counting caste will perpetuate it.

### **Conclusion**

- Favoring one caste becomes a disfavor for others. This is an undeniable fact of Indian society.
- It seems that the caste census will happen unless something extraordinary happens in our polity.
- There are also important questions of demands coming up because of mismatches between the numbers that we come out with and the share in resources that different communities have.
- This is a kind of nightmare that all governments fear. So, they would much rather leave things vague.
- The Backward Classes are more than 50% of the population. And this dispensation knows that it cannot afford to lose the support of the Backward Classes.

### **13. Tribal welfare: GI tag can help ST entrepreneurs thrive**



At this critical juncture of India's development journey, where inclusive economic growth has emerged as a new exemplar of development, the empowerment of scheduled tribes (ST), which are largely economically and socially backward, has assumed special significance. And what better way than to help them become self-employed entrepreneurs.

Major chunk of the scheduled tribe population – tribal cultivators and artisans – already belong to the self-employed category. In fact, according to the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) 2018-19 report, a large proportion of scheduled tribe workers (57%) are self-employed, basically in the agriculture & allied activities and handicrafts.

Around 30% are casual and agricultural labour, and only around 13% are engaged in salaried employment. Hence, it is essential to explore skilling avenues which would help them earn more in the same occupation.

Under the circumstances, would the provision of geographical indicators (GIs), which certify products as belonging to a geographical location and protects identity, help promote and revitalise traditional production

practices and increase the employability of the scheduled tribes? In other words, would the GI tag help the tribes to become entrepreneurs?

There is no doubt that GI holds the potential for increasing the value and market price of a wide variety of potential GI forest products for local ST communities. Many communities have benefited enormously economically from the GI recognition granted to their traditional products. For instance, post the GI tag, the price of Kadaknath Chicken, a native breed of the Dhar and Jhabua districts in Madhya Pradesh and primarily nurtured by the Bhil tribals, has gone up significantly. Greater awareness about the exotic nature of Kadaknath has resulted in a huge spike in its demand and breeders are making respectable profits.

Similarly, the GI tagged aromatic Araku Valley Coffee, originally produced by the tribal population of Andhra Pradesh, is now being exported as a premium lifestyle and health product. It has also received global acclaim by winning the Gold Medal for the best coffee pod in the Prix Epicures OR 2018 Award in Paris, France. There are many such success stories.

Considering the advantages, it is important that states where the tribal population is domiciled, do their utmost to identify and explore how traditional products, which incorporate the knowledge and skills of the scheduled tribes, could qualify for GIs. However, presently states with high tribal population may not rank high in terms of the number of geographical indications.

Having said so, getting the GI tag alone may not be enough to economically upstage the tribal population. The benefit of the GI registered tribal product, in many cases, accrues not to the artist but to traders or middlemen. Second, traditional hand-woven designs are often duplicated and sold at a lower price through mass production, which deprives the tribes of their legitimate income.

A case in point is the GI registered unique hand-woven embroidery and textile designs made by the Toda tribe of the Nilgiris. Third, marketing and brand promotion is an issue. The GI tag enhances the value – in terms of sales and profits – of only those products which are known, are already

profitable, and the enhanced revenue reaches the actual producer of the traditional product.

Hence, it should be ensured that the provisions of GI are strictly implemented and any infringements, such as cases of proliferation of duplicate and fake products, are dealt with severely. Moreover, there is a need to upgrade the GI Act, 1999, and make it more inclusive and responsive to ground realities so that more products are GI registered.

It is also critical that NGOs and corporates support the branding and marketing of GI products. In fact, the credit for establishing Araku Valley coffee as an international brand owes essentially to the marketing efforts of an NGO and select corporates. This transformed the lives of adivasis in the area. Government support also helps. For instance, Kadaknath chicken was promoted by the government of Madhya Pradesh and has contributed towards tribal uplift. Many such cases can be cited.

Further, an enterprise-facilitating platform such as a chamber of commerce, governmental help desk or a voluntary organisation dedicated to GI must be constituted. This would help connect the buyer with the original seller/tribal, thereby helping in reducing the exploitative gap between owner and seller within the GI ecosystem. The inclusion of legal support services within the chamber and voluntary organisations also helps protect the rights of tribes.

At a time when the government is working on the 'One District, One Product' plan and considers the use of GI tag for better results, the experience of scheduled tribes could help.

#### **14. How to Save Forest Culture? 'Silent' Battle by Odisha's Kondhs is The Right Lesson**



Accustomed to consuming nearly 275 varieties of wild fruits, vegetables and herbs from the jungles, the Kondhs were suddenly instructed to practice monoculture and forget their culture. Here is how they stood firm.

“One of the main problems with the common development paradigm is that Adivasis are considered underdeveloped. People do not recognise that their prosperity lies in their unique lifestyle and world views. That is why the government and the NGOs tried to intervene and impose modern-day practices on them. The result was appalling,” reveals Debjcet Sarangi from Living Farms, a non-profit organisation helping Kondhs in Rayagada to uphold their unique culture since 2008.

Much like the iconic Chipko movement, despite threats of imprisonment, repeated interventions from the forest department, and the ever-present pressure to give into the so-called ‘modern’ methods of cultivation, the Kondhs stayed unflinching on their resolution – to bring back their forests and way of life.

Living Farms has helped the Kondhs in over 800 villages of Rayagada in their struggle against the invasion of modernity. Gradually, the expanse of the movement spread like wildfire all over Rayagada, bringing 1,06,000 Adivasi and Dalit households in 2000 villages under its ambit.

### **The Kondhs and Their Way of Life**

Just like the majority of Kondhs, Landi Sikoka and Tulasa Kurangalika from Khalpadar village have little idea what 'global warming' means. There is perhaps no translation for the term in 'Kui' – their native tongue. But, their plates are vibrant with rich and healthy forest harvest, their homes are abodes of peace, their air fresh with the musty petrichor after rains.

The Kondhs lead a sustainable lifestyle – in perfect harmony with nature – teaches a lot to the modern generation, bearing the brunts of its mindless consumption.

The southern hinterlands of the coastal state is lined by a thick foliage of tropical forests, inhabited by wild beasts, birds and the Kondh community. Their quaint huts of mud and thatch are never huddled together to delineate a settlement, rather they build their homes in groups of few at naturally-secured locations, like atop a hillock or beside one.

Accustomed to the traditional livelihood of hunting-gathering, the Kondhs were never rigid cultivators, but the passing years saw them practising *dongar* cultivation (shifting agriculture) of vegetables, fruits, grains and leaves that constitute their traditional diet.

They periodically clear patches of forests to make way for seasonal farming.

“On these plots of lands, manually-run implements are used, for multiple millets-based crops that cover millets, oilseeds and pulses needed for subsistence of the household,” social activist Kavitha Kuruganti describes about the Kondh style of agriculture.

### **Keeping the Traditions Alive**

Among the community, the traditional practice of game hunting had faded through the ages, but forest gathering of fruits, berries, mushrooms, tubers, leafy greens, bamboo shoots etc. still continued, which actually defined their characteristic cuisine.

Living on the ideals of *sundi* (trust) and *mitho* (friendship), the minimalistic lifestyle of the Kondhs is characterised by beautiful customs that brings the Kutumb (community) together.



“When a newly married couple wants to set up a house of their own, the entire village would help them in building their house, without expecting any wages,” informs Kuruganti, for instance.

She also states how women enjoy greater autonomy among the Kondhs than any other aboriginal communities, as they remain at the forefront of their contact with the outer world. Be it trading at local *haat* (market) or choosing their life partners independently, Kondh women exercise ample independence.

From granary banks to village funds in kind (seeds, grains, even domestic animals) – the Kondh economy was least dependent on paper currencies. In fact, the older generation might even have never held money in their hands. They had always been content with their traditional economic structure, without any influence of the rapidly changing outer world.

### **When Modern Ways Intervene**

However, things slowly started to change. The government intervened in their lives, so did several non-profit organisations. The flawed notion was that these Adivasis were ‘backward’, ‘poor’ and ‘illiterate’.

The community faced the infiltration of modernity in several aspects, especially agriculture. Accustomed to sourcing nearly 275 varieties of wild fruits, vegetables and herbs from the jungles, the Kondhs were suddenly instructed to practise monoculture of crops like paddy, a practice alien to them.

“A government agricultural scheme designed keeping a Punjab farmer in mind will never work for the Adivasis. The imposition of monoculture cropping by forest officials reflected badly in the health of the tribals as their dietary diversity disappeared,” shares Sarangi.

The intention was good, the execution was bad. Both the government and the non-government entities failed to understand and relate with the Kondh culture and compelled them to resort to mainstream habits. “If one crop failed, the people now had no alternatives on their plates,” says Sarangi, explaining the drawbacks of monoculture.

“The diversified food basket thereby provides a vital safety net against hunger, increasing crop failures caused by climate change, erratic rainfall, mounting ecological degradation including water scarcity, and depleted soils,” describes a Living Farms representative.

There were additional issues as well. For instance, the Kondhs had inherently been patrons of 100 per cent organic farming. But now, chemical fertilisers and pesticides were handed over to them to support the singular crops. This inevitably ruined the soil richness of the forested zones, which once used to be hotspots of flora biodiversity.

Also, they were now forced to diverge from their internally sustainable economy, as they ventured into the towns and cities to source the chemicals. The hefty investment cost was an additional woe.

The natural forests comprised a rich trove of mangoes, Jamun, jackfruit, tamarind, berries etc. But officials coerced them into replacing their orchards with cash-yielding trees like teak and eucalyptus. The forest department even cleared out parts of the natural forests to make way for these 'profitable' plantations.

Kondh youngsters, who ventured outside for education or employment brought back instant noodles or soya nuggets with them – foods which were gravely detested by the community leaders. They yearned for the forest to be back on their plates. And when the authorities threatened or warned them with consequences, they countered back with their silent protests.

### **Taking Back the Forests**

Women, once again, pioneered the Kondh war against modernity by leading resistance movements in many villages. Farmers decided to refrain from chemical agriculture and monocropping. They stopped sowing hybrid 'corporate' seeds and reseeded their mandua (finger millets).

The farmers refused to cower down to the forest officials and stopped their natural forests from being destroyed further. They had seen in their neighbouring villages how these economic plantations destroy the forest's sanctity and degrade soil quality. They would not let the same happen to their own zones.

The men, women and children from every family worked on a war footing to replant, restore and replenish the beauty of their aboriginal mother – the jungle.

The results have been exceedingly prominent in the past five years, with the forests once again glistening with vibrant colours and a captivating aura. Their plates are once again 'full' with bounty from the forest.

Living Farms continue to conduct local food festivals and workshop to showcase the beauty of the Kondh culture. They predominantly focus on a deep sense of respect for the community and keeping their dying traditions alive. Their support programmes are designed with the basic aim of retaining the communitarian fabric of Kondh society, while also introducing them with the indispensable aspect of modernity.

Even after sustained and cumulative resistance from the locals, self-appointed “saviours” still continue trying to ‘reform’ them. And thus the Kondh’s struggle to combat such imposition persists parallelly. Amid the disappearing diversity and rampant cultural appropriation in India, the unknown story of the Kondhs will remain a glorious chapter.

### 15. Why India's local health traditions need to be formalised



Traditional healers need to be brought into the public health systems as they

function in a resource-strained ecology A few months ago, Tony, a colleague of mine in Gudalur – a small tribal town in Tamil Nadu’s Nilgiris district complained of mouth ulcers. He whined about black circles, lack of sleep and loss of appetite. Maadhan, another colleague from the local Adivasi community, advised him to eat the tender fruits of manathakkali (*Solanum nigrum*), a wild herb. Tony ate the ripe fruits diligently for two to three days and the ulcers eventually disappeared. Normally, as a biomedically trained dentist, I would have prescribed an anaesthetic ointment and vitamin supplements.

I did not realise the cure for the ulcers was right in the garden attached to my workplace. Tony’s ulcers happened at a time when I was enquiring, as a part of a research project, about the legitimacy of the Local Health Tradition (LHT) practices among Siddha vaidyars (healers) and Adivasi healers in Tamil Nadu. The study aimed to understand “LHT’s revitalisation”.

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In Tony’s case, the herbal treatment received was primary and affordable healthcare. There is community support for LHT in Gudalur, which perhaps, has kept this tradition alive, as must be the case in many other parts of India. In Tamil Nadu, LHT is practised by pacchamarundhu vaidyars (“green” or herbal medicine healer) among the Adivasis, and by paramparika Siddha vaidyars (traditional Siddha practitioners) elsewhere. For both types of healers, knowledge has been passed from one generation to another: healer families protect it as their intellectual property. In many places, I found that paramparika vaidyars enjoy a special social status entirely attributed to their <sup>a</sup>power of healing<sup>o</sup> which gives them traditional legitimacy.

Analysing Tony's experience, besides other related research and interviews with healers, intricate nuances of the LHT practice came to the fore. Earlier last year, an Adivasi community worker accompanied me to the residence of an elderly healer in a remote tribal hamlet near Gudalur. He noted that <sup>a</sup>many people here, mostly tribals, still go to healers<sup>o</sup>. He also observed that the older the healer, the larger his/her patient following.

The healers represent a parampara or tradition. According to a healer from Vellore, several Siddha traditions trace their origins to the wandering mendicants who passed it to the family of the Siddha vaidyars centuries ago. The traditional legitimacy which the lineage offers reinforces the thought that the older the practitioner, the richer the knowledge, and thus, the stronger the following. Parampara denotes a succession of teachers and disciples in traditional Indian culture.

It is the tradition of relationship and mentoring where teachings are passed on from a teacher to the student. The knowledge transfer and training is rigorous and starts as early as four years in the case of Siddha vaidya. The knowledge is transferred orally with emphasis on observation. Siddha vaidyars spend the early years as apprentices until they are ready, as opposed to a Siddha doctor who earns a Bachelor of Siddha Medicine and Surgery after five years of college education.

The parampara is held in high regard and enjoys immense community support. Healers typically do not demand monetary compensation for consultation – they accept whatever is given to them. Sometimes, clothes and fruits are given by a recuperated patient, or payment is made for the preparation of medicines.

Healers don't get monetary gains from healing – an important distinction from quacks. For tribals, an Adivasi healer who is a member of their community will often enjoy greater acceptance than a western biomedicine-trained doctor. They are socially relevant in rural society and are the immediate point of contact, forming the fundamental part of primary healthcare. A successfully-treated patient refers the healer to more of his/her peers, as I learned from an elderly non-tribal healer in Gudalur who treated patients in far-off towns and cities. Healers are sympathetic to patients' emotions. There is an unexplained vishwasam (faith) in the healers among patients. The healers are service oriented and see the healing as a punyam (virtuous deed).

But there are contrasts between the practices of Adivasi healers and Siddha vaidyars – training, nature of practice and even clientele vary substantially. Adivasi healers do not see registration as a great deal, but it concerns the Siddha vaidyars. Siddha vaidyars' main occupation is healing, whereas Adivasi healers do it in an ad hoc manner.

Further, Adivasi healers are rarely antagonistic towards hospital care. As one elderly Adivasi healer mentioned, "No one went to the hospital. It was all in the house, whatever happened. If nothing could be done, then we used to go to the hospital." Integration is practised at the community level and encouraged by these healers, even though it may be neglected or dissuaded in official policy. In contrast, Siddha vaidyars often emphasise the inadequacies of western medicine and even codified systems like the Siddha degree.

Notwithstanding these differences, all healers acknowledge the distinct nature of their practice. As anthropologist Helen Lambert says, based on her work on haad vaidis (traditional bone doctors), many LHT are experience based, where training is based on practice and observation rather than textbook or school learning. Haad vaidis like pacchamarundhu and parramparika Siddha vaidyars are primary healthcare providers. They have been part of the public health system across the country, yet they operate on the margins as a subaltern practice because of regulations by the Indian medical boards. This is primarily due to state neglect of LHT and increased investments in western biomedicine.

**What does this mean for legitimacy?** For the state, legitimacy is derived from certification from institutionalised training and standardised practices. So LHT is outside the strict legitimacy boundary for the state. But healers respond to the demands of legal-rational authority legitimacy from various angles. Our research suggests that the stronger a health tradition's legitimacy, the greater the confidence in practice. In this scenario, some healers don't seem to see the necessity for legal-rational authority.

Others see its potential role in complementing the existing practice which has traditional legitimacy. As a Chennai healer put it: "If registration was there I could have practised it on a bigger scale. You can't drive a vehicle without a licence," he says. Yet another healer didn't seem to care about registration; he attributed his legitimacy to the success of his treatment evidenced by patients' referral.

For the traditional healers in Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Karnataka, legitimacy has

come from myriad sources: the authenticity of the knowledge system they possess, allegiance to a larger organisation (like Tamil Nadu Paramparika Siddha Vaidya Sangam), and favourable results of treatment, which got them a loyal following. So most of the traditional healers have traditional legitimacy where the authority is legitimated by the sanctity of the tradition. However, the compulsory state professionalisation of medicine has pushed LHTs on the margins. Those belonging to this marginal space practise esoterically.

There is an urgent need to formalise LHTS within the health system. LHTS are locally relevant and appropriate in a resource-strained system providing remedies within the vicinity just as seen in Tony's case. The conversion of these details into a policy prescription is challenging because of the fluid nature of the traditions. The current slogan of policy documents on revitalisation of LHTS need to take these traditions' vibrant nature into account and not literal impositions of standards and practices alien to such traditions.

## 16. Why the killing of a former militant triggered a crisis in Meghalaya



**The death of Cherishterfield Thangkhiew, a former militant of the outlawed Hynniewtrep National Liberation Council (HNLC), in a police operation has led to a crisis in Meghalaya. Who was he, and what are the political ramifications?**

The death of **Cherishterfield Thangkhiew**, a former militant of the outlawed Hynniewtrep National Liberation Council (HNLC), in a police operation has led

to a crisis in Meghalaya. Stone pelting, vandalism and arson rocked Shillong on Sunday, and it has been placed under curfew until August 18. Home Minister Lakhmen Rymbui **has resigned calling for a judicial probe** “to bring out the truth”. The Internet has been blocked for 72 hours in four districts and central forces have been deployed.

### **Who was Cherishterfield Thangkhiew?**

Thangkhiew, 57, was the founding general secretary of the separatist HNLC. In October 2018, he came overground in Shillong – while the government claimed he had “surrendered”, he maintained he had “retired”, mostly because of ill health.

**However, the Meghalaya Police say Thangkhiew had become “active” in the last six months and they had “clear indications” of his involvement in two low-intensity blasts – in Khliehriat, East Jaintia Hills in July, and in Shillong’s Laitumkhrah market last week, in which two people were injured. Meghalaya DGP R Chandranathan told The Indian Express that they had “clinching evidence” of his involvement, and a tip-off that another blast was being planned. “We went to pick him but this unfortunate thing happened.”**

As per a police statement, Thangkhiew attacked the team with a knife in an attempt to escape and the police exerted their right to “private defence” by firing a single round, which hit him. He died on the way to hospital.

Thangkhiew’s family describes the killing as a “cold-blooded murder”, and local residents accuse the police of a “fake encounter”.

### **What is the history of separatist militancy in Meghalaya?**

According to the Centre for Development and Peace Studies (CDPS) an independent research centre in Assam, insurgency in Meghalaya “started as a movement against the domination of the ‘dkhars’ (outsiders)”.

The first prominent separatist militant tribal organisation of the state, Hynniewtrep Achik Liberation Council (HALC), was formed in the mid-1980s, with Thangkhiew as co-founder. ‘Hynniewtrep’ refers to the Khasi and Jaintia communities, and ‘Achik’ to the Garo community. The HALC later split into HNLC, which represented the Khasis and the Jaintias, and the Achik Matgrik



Liberation Army, which represented the Garos and was subsequently replaced by the Achik National Volunteers Council (ANVC).

“The HNLC, of which Thangkhiew was one of the co-founders, wanted independence from India, while ANVC wanted a Garo homeland, but within the Constitution of India,” said an observer from Meghalaya, who did not want to be named. The former’s demands stemmed from a strain in Khasi political thought that Khasi territory was never a part of India, even in colonial times.

“The HNLC were seen as representative of Khasi identity and pride... most of the top leadership, including Thangkhiew, were based out of Bangladesh,” said the observer.

### **How active are militants today?**

In the early 2000s, the HNLC would frequently call for bandhs, boycott Independence Day, carry out extortions etc. According to the CDPS website, “sustained counter-insurgency operations, over the years, weakened both the outfits”. “Since July 23, 2004, the ANVC is under an extended ceasefire agreement with the government... while HNLC’s top leadership, based in Bangladesh, continue to resist any type of peace deals,” it said.

Patricia Mukhim, Editor of Shillong Times, said that in 2000, Home Minister R G Lyngdoh “dealt firmly with the HNLC” and funding to the outfit “dried up”, with many of the cadres coming overground.

Over the last several years, militancy in Meghalaya was seen as declining. Police sources said the HNLC was trying to initiate talks with the government, but on its terms. Mukhim added: “The government on its part wanted them to first surrender with arms and ammunition and only then would they talk to the outfit. It is this battle of nerves that the HNLC is engaged in, and the IED blasts are meant to send a message that they still have firepower.”

### **What explains the public reaction to the militant leader’s death?**

On Sunday, hundreds joined a funeral procession for Thangkhiew, and a conglomerate of pressure groups called for a “black flag day” and put up banners in Shillong demanding justice for him.

“The former militant became an urban legend, a martyr of sorts,” Mukhim said.

Amid violence across the city, two petrol bombs were hurled at CM Conrad Sangma's home in Upper Shillong.

Observers feel the display of anger does not necessarily mean that the public is sympathetic to the cause of the HNCL, but it was also a reaction to the way the state government has been functioning of late.

"Their lackadaisical attitude through the lockdown, the corruption has made people weary – the encounter killing was the last straw," said the observer.

Mukhim added: "Illegal coal mining has continued unabated, there are alleged scams... all these add up to bad governance and loss of public trust," she said.

### **What are the political ramifications?**

The resignation of Home Minister Rymbui, who belongs to the United Democratic Party, an ally of CM Sangma's National People's Party, has put the government in a spot. In a video statement, he said he had taken the step after consultation with his party's leadership.

At a press conference on Monday, Sangma said he had received Rymbui's letter but "not made a decision yet". "As a chief minister, I have to look at all aspects of the state's security and overall situation... Keeping all these aspects in mind, I will examine and take a decision at the appropriate time," he said.

Observers say all this highlights divisions in the alliance.

On Monday, the Cabinet announced it would constitute a judicial enquiry into the death. It also announced a "Peace Committee" to be chaired by ministers, with members from civil society, religious organisations, community heads, etc. A separate Security & Law & Order subcommittee headed by Sangma has also been formed "to look into aspects of law & order".

## 17. Tamil Nadu's upcoming Tribal Park to Feature 12 Indigenous Communities of India



The upcoming tribal park in Tamil Nadu's Thoothukudi will feature as many as 12 communities across the country and their ways of life.

In an effort to preserve and to showcase the nature and lifestyle of tribal people in and around its forests, Tamil Nadu has given the nod to put up a tribal park in Thoothukudi (formerly Tuicorin) at a cost of Rs 73 lakh as part of the Smart Cities Mission programme. The said attraction will be a part of the upcoming Science Park near the VOC College on the Thoothukudi - Palayamkottai highway and is expected to cost Rs 6.28 crore.

Along with the attraction featuring the tribal people, the park is also expected to have a traffic Park, planetarium and 'Lands of Tamil Nadu', which are known as 'kurinji,' 'mullai,' 'marudham,' 'neithal' and 'paalai' in Tamil literature, The Hindu reported.

Officials said that the tribal park will help children understand and identify the unique lifestyle and mannerisms of the tribals who reside in the state and in other parts of the country. The Poompuhar Corporation will house the park as they have better expertise when it comes to showcasing the ways of tribal folks. The report said the park will feature as many as 12 communities across the country and their ways of life.

Recently to mark 75 years of Indian Independence and to boost tribal-made products, 75 new tribal products were launched by Tribal Co-operative Marketing Federation of India (TRIFED). The products have been sourced from all over the country and the TRIFED launched attractive items like metal figurines, handmade jewellery, decorative hangings, handcrafted shirts, kurtas, masks and also organic products such as spices, processed juices and other herbal powders.

The International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples is celebrated every year on August 9 to mark and preserve the ingenuity of the tribes all around the world. Estimated studies suggest that the indigenous people make up more than 300 million of the global population, out of which more than 150 million belong in Asia itself. India is estimated to have a population of over 68 million tribals.

Recently, colourful handmade fans sourced from tribal artisans across the country provided relief to dignitaries and guests at the Independence Day function from the scorching sun beating down on the Red Fort on Sunday.

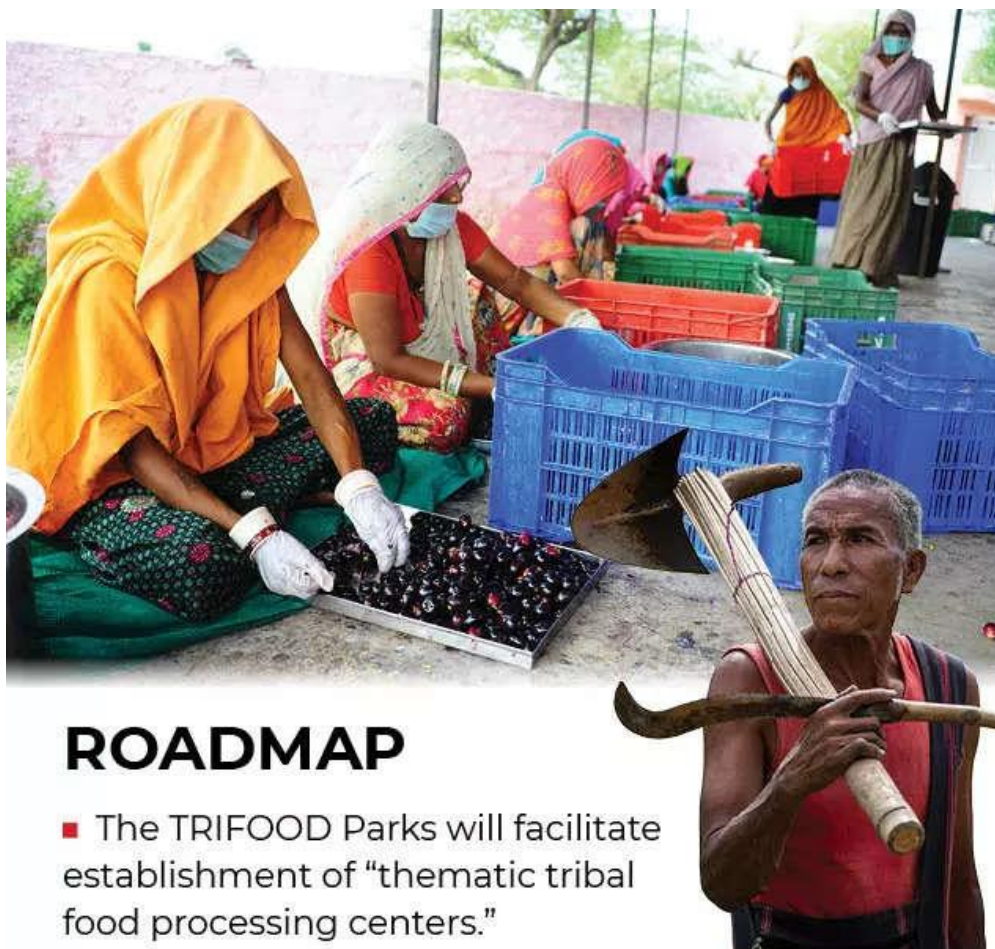
## 18. India's first food park for tribals set to start in Bastar



JAGDALPUR: Amid concerns over unemployment in the ongoing pandemic, a first of its kind food park for tribals in Jagdalpur block of Bastar district in Chhatisgarh is all set to begin operations in the coming months. It is being cited as a move that will steer sustainable livelihood opportunities and check migration. Of the total population in Bastar, more than 40% belong to Gond, Maria, Muria, Dhruva, Bhatra and Halba Tribes.

The idea of a processing and value addition facility for forest produce was first conceived by the Bastar district administration in the late 1990s and land was allotted for the same in 1999. However, the project never took off. Around two years ago Tribal Co-operative Marketing Development Federation (TRIFED) stepped in to revive the vision and the Food Park project was approved for the same 26 acres of land that was allotted almost 22 years ago.

The project initiated by TRIFED is the first of eight that will be set up across states. The construction of the Food Park in Raigad in Maharashtra is also in progress. The other six states include Assam, Manipur, Nagaland, Odisha, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Andhra Pradesh.



## ROADMAP

- The TRIFOOD Parks will facilitate establishment of “thematic tribal food processing centers.”
- About 75% of raw materials are expected to be sourced locally from the identified Vandhan Self Help Groups and value addition centres for Minor Forest Produce for a minimum period of 10 years.
- Each proposed TRIFOOD project is estimated to provide employment opportunities for around 200 tribal people directly and 3000 tribal families indirectly.



Bastar district, which for decades has existed under the shadows of Naxalite unrest, will be the launchpad for putting to test a convergence model.

Once the Food Park turns functional, it will enable thousands of forest produce gatherers to have direct access to tertiary level processing facilities for converting their produce, as wide-ranging as the traditionally dominant Imli (tamarind) to

the new age Bastar coffee and VNR Ameena - a new hybrid papaya variety, into products that can get them the due market price.

The project is being implemented by TRIFED in convergence with the ministry of food processing Industries under Backward and Forward Linkage of Pradhan Mantri Kisan Sampada Yojna and financial assistance from National Scheduled Tribes Finance Development Corporation and district administration, Bastar.

TRIFED aims to set up 100 such Food Parks across the country. Union minister Arjun Munda said that the convergence model that puts tribals at the center of all planning will help them get the correct market price for their products. During a review of the project in Jagdalpur, Munda met the Self Help Group members, largely women steering the collection and processing of the forest produce in the district's value addition centers called the Van Dhan Vikas Kendras.

Braving the rain, tribals from villages in and around Jagdalpur gathered at the Food Park complex setting up stalls of products as diverse as the mul silk, metal craft to millets, black and red rice. Finely packed cashew and Imli bricks and candy displayed on counters reflected the journey of women steering SHGs from a time when they just collected the product and sold it to middlemen to a time when they are a trained workforce involved in the processing and marketing their produce at the Minimum Support Price.

Basanti Kashyap from Dhura village told TOI that they were 10 women steering a self-help group that collects imli and is now trained to process it as candy and sauces. She joined the SHG about a month back as getting daily wage work was becoming difficult and she was struggling to make both ends meet. She now hopes to make a living with dignity. The story of the Food Park project also brings into focus the two-decade-long journey and struggle of tribals to overcome barter, exploitative middlemen, and the lack of resources and training to value add and market their produce.

TRIFED Managing Director Pravir Krishna shared that as district collector of Bastar in the late 1990s, when it was a much larger district located in Madhya Pradesh, he saw that tribals were dependent on middlemen who bartered their forest produce like high-quality imli (tamarind) for cheap items of daily use that they needed.

"Immediate steps were taken to ban barter and funds were assigned to enable the forest gathered to experiment with value addition to imli and create procurement

channels for the produce. The small experiment was referred to by villagers as "imli andolan," Krishna said. He added that land for a food processing and value addition facility was allotted in the Jagdalpur in 1999. However, the project never took off due to the change in administration boundaries after the formation of the new state of Chhatisgarh. Bastar became part of the new state.

It was around two years back, that TRIFED stepped in to revive the vision and the Food Park project was approved for the same piece of land that was allotted 22 years ago.