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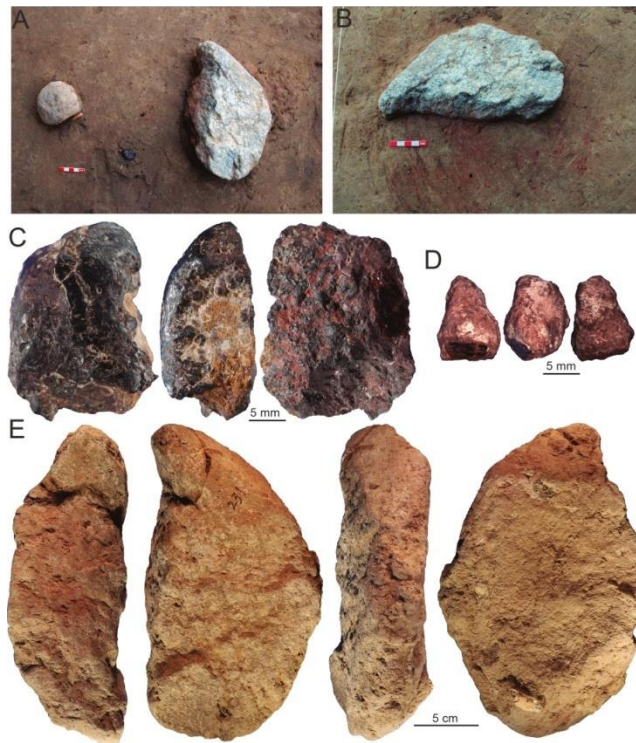
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PHYSICAL & ARCHAEOLOGICAL ANTHROPOLOGY

1. Archaeologists Discover Innovative Stone-Age Culture in China - Well-Preserved 40,000-Year-Old Paleolithic Site



A well-preserved Paleolithic site in northern China reveals a new and previously unidentified set of cultural innovations.

The discovery of a new culture suggests processes of innovation and cultural diversification occurring in Eastern Asia during a period of genetic and cultural hybridization. Although previous studies have established that *Homo sapiens* arrived in northern Asia by about 40,000 years ago, much about the lives and cultural adaptations of these early peoples, and their possible interactions with archaic groups, remains unknown. In the search for answers, the Nihewan Basin in northern China, with a wealth of archaeological sites ranging in age from 2 million to 10,000 years ago, provides one of the best opportunities for understanding the evolution of cultural behavior in northeastern Asia.

A new article published in the journal *Nature* describes a unique 40,000-year-old culture at the site of Xiamabei in the Nihewan Basin. With the earliest known evidence of ochre processing in Eastern Asia and a set of distinct blade-like stone tools, Xiamabei contains cultural expressions and features that are unique or exceedingly rare in northeastern Asia. Through the collaboration of an international team of scholars, analysis of the finds offers important new insights into cultural innovation during the expansion of *Homo sapiens* populations.

“Xiamabei stands apart from any other known archaeological site in China, as it possesses a novel set of cultural characteristics at an early date,” says Dr. Fa-Gang Wang of the Hebei Provincial Institute of Cultural Relics and Archaeology, whose team first excavated the site.

Cultural Adaptations at Xiamabei

“The ability of hominins to live in northern latitudes, with cold and highly seasonal environments, was likely facilitated by the evolution of culture in the form of economic, social and symbolic adaptations,” says Dr. Shixia Yang, researcher with the Chinese Academy of Sciences and the Max Planck Institute for the Science of Human History, in Jena, Germany. “The finds at Xiamabei are helping us to understand these adaptations and their potential role in human migration.”

One of the significant cultural features found at Xiamabei is the extensive use of ochre, as shown by artifacts used to process large quantities of pigment. The artifacts include two pieces of ochre with different mineral compositions and an elongated limestone slab with smoothed areas bearing ochre stains, all on a surface of red-stained sediment. Analysis by researchers from the University of Bordeaux, led by Prof. Francesco d’Errico, indicates that different types of ochre were brought to Xiamabei and processed through pounding and abrasion to produce powders of different color and consistency, the use of which impregnated the habitation floor. Ochre production at Xiamabei represents the earliest known example of this practice in Eastern Asia.

The stone tools at Xiamabei represent a novel cultural adaptation for northern China 40,000 years ago. Because little is known about stone tool industries in Eastern Asia until microblades became the dominant technology about 29,000 years ago, the Xiamabei finds provide important insights into toolmaking industries during a key transition period. The blade-like stone tools at Xiamabei were unique for the region, with the large majority of tools being miniaturized,

more than half measuring less than 20 millimeters. Seven of the stone tools showed clear evidence of hafting to a handle, and functional and residue analysis suggests tools were used for boring, hide scraping, whittling plant material, and cutting soft animal matter. The site inhabitants made hafted and multipurpose tools, demonstrative of a complex technical system for transforming raw materials not seen at older or slightly younger sites.

A Complex History of Innovation

The record emerging from Eastern Asia shows that a variety of adaptations were taking place as modern humans entered the region roughly 40,000 years ago. Although no hominin remains were found at Xiamabei, the presence of modern human fossils at the contemporary site of Tianyuandong and the slightly younger sites of Salkhit and Zhoukoudian Upper Cave, suggests that the visitors to Xiamabei were *Homo sapiens*. A varied lithic technology and the presence of some innovations, such as hafted tools and ochre processing, but not other innovations, such as formal bone tools or ornaments, may reflect an early colonization attempt by modern humans. This colonization period may have included genetic and cultural exchanges with archaic groups, such as the Denisovans, before ultimately being replaced by later waves of *Homo sapiens* using microblade technologies.

Given the unique nature of Xiamabei, the authors of the new paper argue that the archaeological record does not fit with the idea of continuous cultural innovation, or of a fully formed set of adaptations that enabled early humans to expand out of Africa and around the world. Instead, the authors argue that we should expect to find a mosaic of innovation patterns, with the spread of earlier innovations, the persistence of local traditions, and the local invention of new practices all taking place in a transitional phase.

“Our findings show that current evolutionary scenarios are too simple,” says Professor Michael Petraglia of the Max Planck Institute in Jena, “and that modern humans, and our culture, emerged through repeated but differing episodes of genetic and social exchanges over large geographic areas, rather than as a single, rapid dispersal wave across Asia.”

2. Ten Things Archaeology Tells Us about Neanderthals



When they were first discovered in 1856, Neanderthals were a scientific sensation, and in many ways they're still leaving us surprised and fascinated over 160 years later. Today, the field of ancient genetics has transformed our understanding of early human history and the Neanderthals, but archaeology has been undergoing its own quiet revolution. In the past three decades, advances in methods from excavation to analysis have painted a captivating fresh portrait of these, our closest relatives. Here are 10 things we've learned.

1. Neanderthals were survivors. Back in the 1850s, nobody was sure how long ago Neanderthals had lived, other than the fact they had existed alongside species now vanished from Europe, such as reindeer, and long-extinct beasts like woolly rhinoceros. Once means for directly dating archaeological sites were developed, the true chronology of Neanderthals became clear. They emerged as an anatomically distinctive population around 350,000 years ago, and what's more, between that point and their vanishing from the record around 40,000 years ago, they survived *six* global climate cycles. Far from arctic environment specialists, they preferred to avoid extreme cold, and should equally be thought of as adapted to steppe-tundra, forest, and coasts, spreading all the way from Wales to Palestine, through into Central Asia and Siberia.

2. They weren't stuck in a big game rut. Theories that perhaps Neanderthals vanished because they were poor hunters have abounded. Yet evidence from close study of animal bones, chemical analysis, and microremains in sediment or even their own dental calculus shows they were highly flexible in dietary terms. They took the best of whatever was in the environments around them. That included tackling megafauna like mammoth, medium-sized prey, such as deer, and even small game and shoreline resources. Mediterranean Neanderthals even had a particular way of roasting tortoise. But plants were also on the menu, whether tubers like waterlily roots or seeds and fruits, some of which needed cooking.

3. Neanderthals were artisans and innovators. Notions that Neanderthals were inherently unsophisticated and lived in a state of technological stasis persist. But careful study and new finds confirm they mastered many methods for taking apart stone, had varied cultures across time and space, and skillfully worked wood, shell, and even bone. Remarkably, they also produced the first synthetic material: birch tar. Neanderthals in what is today Italy, even invented another adhesive for multipart tools by mixing pine resin and beeswax.

4. Home was where the hearth is. Remarkable twenty-first century excavation methods allow us to pick apart Neanderthal living sites in mind-boggling detail. Archaeologists might only trowel away a few centimeters in a field season, but these can contain *centuries* of occupation. By recording the spatial positions in 3D, then digitally or manually refitting fragments of stone and bone back together, different sub-layers and activity areas can be identified. Sediment analysis reveals midden zones, multiphase hearth fires, and even the potential use of animal hide mats. It's in Neanderthal sites that we see the emergence of human hearth-centered living.

5. Neanderthals talked to each other. Recent research shows that Neanderthal voice boxes could make similar sounds to ours, and their inner ears were tuned into the same frequencies: speech. But genetic studies suggest subtle differences, meaning that the cognitive foundation and expression underlying their language was not the same. What might they have talked about? Perhaps stone and seasons, animal and plant lore. Shared memories woven together may have become the first hearthside tales. Sediment analysis reveals midden zones, multiphase hearth _res, and even the potential use of animal hide mats. It's in Neanderthal sites that we see the emergence of human hearth-centered living.

6. They lived in small populations (mostly). Modern archaeological research has picked away at one of the trickier problems in understanding Neanderthals: How many of them lived together? High resolution sites (where sediments accumulated slowly and short occupations can be discerned) confirm that groups likely contained no more than 20 individuals, and sometimes split up to go off into the landscape. But DNA shows that they weren't all genetically inbred, and persistent long-distance stone movements point to territories covering hundreds of kilometers.

7. There was such a thing as Neanderthal aesthetics. A growing body of evidence supported by meticulous analysis indicates that Neanderthals sometimes engaged with materials in ways that have no clear function. This includes altering surfaces by carefully incising lines on bones and applying mineral pigments, sometimes mixed in recipes with other things like sparkly fool's gold (iron pyrite). When we see pigments being used on unusual objects like fossil shells and raptor talons, it's a strong indication that Neanderthals possessed a proto-aesthetic sense.

8. Aggression was not the basis of their society. Assumptions that Neanderthals were by nature violent are not reflected in their bones or the archaeology. Hunting must have been collaborative, and the spoils were systematically butchered and transported elsewhere to waiting mouths. In some places it's even possible to see hints of resources being shared between hearths. Without intense competition over food, Neanderthal social groups were more likely based around close friendships, and perhaps open to meeting strangers.

9. Neanderthals had different ways of dealing with the dead. Debates over possible Neanderthal burials have existed since the early twentieth century, but a combination of revisiting old collections and excavating new skeletons has today's archaeologists homing in on two facts: First, it does appear that entire bodies were sometimes deposited, including in shallow pits. But even more interesting, Neanderthals were taking apart the bodies of the dead, sometimes consuming them even where food was abundant, and using bones as tools. In one case, incising a skull with more than 30 tiny lines that have no practical explanation.

10. We met them, many times. One of the greatest revolutions in our knowledge of Neanderthals – that they did not *entirely* vanish – came with the first sequencing of the Neanderthal genome in 2010. A decade on, archaeology has revealed

greater complexity. Early *Homo sapiens* were in Eurasia well before 100,000 years ago (Australia by 65,000 years ago), and further DNA samples and genetic analyses reveal multiple phases of interbreeding over this huge span of time, not just with Neanderthals, but with other hominins, including the little-known Denisovans. So unlike many of the first *H. sapiens* explorers who left no DNA traces in people today, the Neanderthals' bodies and way of life may have disappeared, but their genetic legacy lives on.

3. Burial practices point to an interconnected early Medieval Europe



Early Medieval Europe is frequently viewed as a time of cultural stagnation, often given the misnomer of the 'Dark Ages'. However, analysis has revealed new ideas could spread rapidly as communities were interconnected, creating a surprisingly unified culture in Europe.

Dr Emma Brownlee, Department of Archaeology, University of Cambridge, examined how a key change in Western European burial practices spread across the continent faster than previously believed -- between the 6th -- 8th centuries AD, burying people with regionally specific grave goods was largely abandoned in favour of a more standardised, unfurnished burial.

"Almost everyone from the eighth century onwards is buried very simply in a plain grave, with no accompanying objects, and this is a change that has been observed right across western Europe," said Dr Brownlee.

To explore this change, Emma examined over 33,000 graves from this period in one of the largest studies of its kind. Statistical analysis was used to create a 'heat map' of the practice, tracking how it changed in frequency over time.

The results of this analysis, published in the journal *Antiquity*, reveal that changes in grave good use began to decline from the mid-sixth century in England, France, Germany, and the Low Countries, and by the early eighth century, it had been abandoned entirely.

"The most important finding is that the change from burial with grave goods to burial without them was contemporary across western Europe," said Dr Brownlee. "Although we knew this was a widespread change before, no one has previously been able to show just how closely aligned the change was in areas that are geographically very far apart."

Crucially, this contemporary transition provides strong evidence that early Medieval Europe was a well-connected place, with regular contact and exchange of ideas across vast areas.

Evidence of increasing long-distance trade is seen around this period, which may have been how these connections were facilitated. As the idea spread between communities, social pressure drove more people to adopt it. As more people did, this pressure grew -- explaining why the spread of unfurnished funerals appeared to accelerate over time.

With people sharing more similarities, this likely reinforced the connections themselves as well.

"The change in burial practice will have further reinforced those connections; with everyone burying their dead in the same manner, a medieval traveller could have gone anywhere in Europe and seen practices they were familiar with," said Dr Brownlee.

An interconnected Europe with long-distance trade and travel facilitating the spread of new ideas to create a shared culture may sound modern, but in reality, Europe has been 'global' for over a millennium.

SOCIO – CULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY

1. Emotional Education: An Anthropological Approach

The importance of human adaptation in times of crisis is a must. It is therefore urgent that the state and society in general, develop “emotional education” as a fundamental requirement for personal and social equilibrium.

Topic in syllabus : Paper 1 - 9.7 & 9.8

As a social anthropologist, I am concerned with analysing the need and relevance of emotional education for people, from infancy, childhood and adolescence, with the aim of forging their character and personality, as well as cementing ethical and human values, reinforcing resilience or the capacity to face adverse situations.

The struggle for survival and personal fulfilment are activities inherent to every human being, for which, from birth, they have to forge their personality, character, skills and abilities to face social and working life.

At present, Peruvian society is not focusing adequately on the formation of the person, due to the fact that the formal education system gives more relevance to the learning of “knowledge”, “sciences” and “techniques”, to the detriment of emotional learning.

Health is not only the absence of illness, but is a state of holistic well-being that also includes psychological, emotional and social stability.

Most of the so-called “social problems” are the result of traumatic situations within the family, which then lead to psychological trauma, social maladjustment, which then develop into more serious problems such as gangs, addiction to drugs, alcohol and video games (compulsive gambling), behavioural problems, delinquency, organised crime, femicide, corruption of officials.

In order to be sustainable and prevent personal and social problems, it is necessary that the Peruvian state and society as a whole are concerned with developing strategies for the formation of people’s “emotional intelligence”, so

that individuals develop “resilience”, i.e., adaptation to adverse or frustrating situations. Only in this way will it be possible to have psychologically stable citizens who contribute positively to personal, family and social development.

Since prehistoric times, society has made demands on individuals in their daily struggle for existence. If the struggle for survival in a hostile environment, in the face of the forces of nature, was the driving force behind human existence, today human beings continue to struggle with the need to survive in an increasingly competitive environment. Achieving the basic needs of food, shelter, clothing, education and training, as well as the need to “be somebody” in life, remain.

However, modern life today is marked by the rise of new technologies, the internet, the speed of communications and the phenomenon of globalisation, the impact of social networks on daily life and now with the coronavirus pandemic that is causing more than five million deaths in the world, generating a permanent state of stress, anxiety and depression, as well as adaptation to the “new normal” and the norms of distance and the use of masks. The negative impact on the economy can be seen in unemployment, low profitability, social crisis, increased crime.

These factors affect the psyche of individuals. As in prehistoric times, those who survive are those who have the best qualities. And we are not only referring to “education”, “academic training”, “professional qualifications”, but also to a fundamental component: personality development and what psychologists call “resilience”, i.e., adaptation to adverse and frustrating situations.

In everyday life we often see cases of people who have had excellent grades at school, as evidenced by passing grades in traditional subjects, diplomas of excellence, but who then have had difficulties in their personal and family life. There are also many cases of young people who graduate from universities with very good grades, but who have failed in their personal lives.

2. An isolated island that became a melting pot of cultures : Lakshadweep



The socio-cultural life in the islands is unique. Though inhabited by a majority of Muslim residents, Islam practised in the Lakshadweep is unlike that followed anywhere else in the country.

“There is a story that the people in the Lakshadweep Islands came to know of Mahatma Gandhi’s assassination 14 days after it happened,” Dr N P Hafiz Mohamad, head of Sociology in Calicut University says.

Surrounded by the warm waters of the Arabian Sea and lying about 240 miles off the coast of Kerala, the Union Territory of Lakshadweep is politically and historically connected to India, but is also isolated from much of the developments taking place in the Indian mainland.

The socio-cultural life in the islands is unique. Though inhabited by a majority of Muslim residents, Islam practised in the Lakshadweep is unlike that followed anywhere else in the country. It is a matrilineal society, also influenced by Hindu traditions and caste structure. Further, although the islanders share ethnic, linguistic and cultural links with the Malayalam speaking people of Kerala, there is significant Arabic, Tamil and Kannada influence on Lakshadweep as well.

How Islam reached Lakshadweep and evolved

The discovery and settlement in the islands is frequently associated with the legend of Cheraman Perumal, the last of the Chera rulers in Kerala who governed the region. A popular oral tradition in Kerala suggests that the last Cheraman Perumal had a strange dream following which he converted to Islam and set out to Arabia for the sake of performing the Hajj. But he was to never return from Arabia and he settled and was later buried there.

When the Raja failed to return to Kerala, a tributary prince, the Raja of Kolattunad (north Malabar), is known to have sent a search party to look for him. This search party, on being caught in a severe storm, was stuck in one of the Lakshadweep islands. According to Lakshadweep's tradition, these castaways were the first settlers in the islands.

Scholar of Islamic studies Andrew W Forbes, in his article, 'Sources towards the history of the Laccadive islands' (2007) notes that while the story of Cheraman Perumal is hard to validate, "there can be little doubt that the first settlers on the Lakshadweep islands were Malabari sailors, quite possibly castaways".

He writes that even though it is unclear as to when the islands were first settled, there is strong evidence to suggest that a strong wave of immigration took place during the seventh century CE. These immigrants were Malabari Hindus, including Nambudiri Brahmins, Nairs, Tiyyars and probably Mukkuvans. "The existing caste structure of the Lakshadweep islands probably dates to this period, as does the prevailing marumakkathayam matrilineal system of inheritance," he writes.

Apart from the caste system, a pre-Islamic Hindu society in the islands can be deduced from the use of the ancient Malayalam script, Vattelutu in the islands before the use of the Arabic script, the discovery of a number of buried idols, probably of Hindu origins, and the existence of several traditional island songs in praise of Ram and alluding to snake worship.

The history of how the Lakshadweep settlers converted to Islam is also shrouded in myth and mystery. The process of conversion is credited to 'Ubaid Allah' who is known to have been the grandson of the first Caliph, Abu Bakr. He is believed to have landed on the shores of Amini Island in the Lakshadweep while he was on a journey that the Prophet had asked him to undertake in a dream. Once in Amini, Ubaid Allah had won over the people of the island and thereby they

converted to Islam. While this story is once again hard to verify historically, there does exist a tomb of Ubaid Allah inside the Jami mosque in Androth Island, an object of great veneration.

Forbes in his work is of the opinion that conversion to Islam in the islands happened over an extended period of time through regular contact with Arab merchants and sailors who had frequent trade relations with the neighbouring Malabar coast from the beginning of the eighth century CE. It is quite possible that the Arab ships passed through the Lakshadweep islands from that time. Possibly an Arab by the name of 'Ubaid Allah' played an important role in the conversion process. But as Forbes explains, it is certainly clear that Islamic influence in the Lakshadweep came through Arabic influence rather than through the Mappila community of Malabar. "Lakshadweep islanders speak Malayalam with a greater admixture of Arabic than the mainland Mappilas, and write Malayalam in the Arabic rather than Malayali script," he notes.

"Unlike north India, introduction of Islam in the Indian Ocean including the Lakshadweep islands, Kerala, Tamil Nadu was accompanied by very less political contest," says historian Mahmood Kooria. "Islam was introduced in these areas through other forms but mainly commercial interactions," he adds.

From the 16th century, the islands came under the control of the Arakkal kingdom of Kannur, the only Muslim dynasty to have ruled in Kerala, and also a matrilineal one. The male head of the kingdom was called Adi Raja while the ruling queen was Arakkal Beewi. By the 16th century though, the Arakkal kingdom was frequently at loggerheads with the European powers. Even though its control over trading networks reduced overtime, the kingdom drew prestige from its control over the Lakshadweep islands.

Historian Manu Pillai says "the Portuguese made strong efforts to take over the island, and in the mid-sixteenth century there was a massacre of hundreds of locals by them. However, because the Portuguese came to terms with mainland rulers like the Kolathiri and Arakkal, the islands would have eventually enjoyed a degree of protection."

A similar degree of insulation can also be seen during the period of British colonialism in the Malabar coast. While the Arakkal kingdom was forced to surrender most of its land in Malabar, they were allowed to retain part of the Lakshadweep in return for a tribute to the East India Company. Arakkal control over the islands in fact continued till as late as 1908 when they finally went to

British hands after a prolonged battle. In return it was decided that a tribute of Rs 23000 would be given annually in 12 monthly installments to the Arakkal family.

Though the islands shared historical relations with Islamic society in the Malabar region, it also had its differences. The Muslims of Kerala are popularly identified as Mappilas. Kooria explains that even though the term originally was used to identify Kerala Muslims, Jews and Christians, after British colonisation it came to be associated with Kerala Muslims alone in popular imagination. "Since the Muslims of Lakshadweep did not undergo the process of colonisation in the same way as did the Malabar region, they were not identified with the same term," he says. He adds that culturally the Lakshadweep inhabitants shared links with Kerala, but they shared a similar relationship with other regions of South India like Karnataka as well since it was under the rule of Tipu Sultan for a long time. In fact the islands' geographical proximity and social interactions with several different cultures is the reason why this rather small region has as many as three main languages: Malayalam, Jazari and Mahl.

In the late colonial period and after Independence, the Lakshadweep was part of the Malabar district. It is only in 1956 during the reorganisation of states that the Lakshadweep islands were separated from the Malabar district and organised as a separate Union Territory for administrative reasons.

"In terms of familial relationships, the Muslims of Lakshadweep are almost the same as the Muslims of the coastal region of Kerala. But economically and politically they share a lot of differences," explains Mohamad. "There is no Muslim League in the islands which is one of the biggest parties in Kerala."

A matrilineal society

What really marks out the Islamic society of Lakshadweep from the rest of India is the long existing tradition of matriliney wherein lineage and property is succeeded from mother to daughter.

Anthropologist and feminist scholar Leela Dube in her book, 'Matriliney and Islam: Religion and society in the Laccadives' (1969), explains the uniqueness of a matrilineal society in Islam when she writes, "perhaps nowhere would a social system appear so incompatible with the ideology of Islam and demand so much adjustment and accommodation as in a matrilineal society."

Kooria says “the islanders believe their practise in matriliney is not despite of Islam but because of Islam.” In other words, they make sense of their matrilineal practises in terms of Islam. “They believe that the Prophet lived with his first wife, Khadija in a matrilocal system. This is the religious sanction for their matrilineal practise,” says Mohamad.

Speaking about the roots of matriliney in the islands, Pillai says “one tradition has it that Amini, Kalpeni, Andrott, Kavaratti, and Agatti are the oldest islands that were inhabited, and certain families here claim to be descendants of converts to Islam from Nair and Namboodiri Brahmin families on the mainland. Matriliney was practiced by Nairs and several other castes, and was part of Kerala’s cultural pattern. Its existence in Lakshadweep is also part of the same pattern.”

Kooria explains that the practise of matriliney in the islands cannot be seen in connection with Kerala alone and that it is commonly found among the Muslims of the Indian Ocean region like in Mozambique, Indonesia, Malaysia, Tanzania etc.

However, the geographical isolation of the Lakshadweep has ensured that the islanders were not subjected to the kind of European colonial influence or the influence of conventional Islamic ideas from other parts of the Muslim world like the reformist Mujahid movement in south-west India in the 1930s. Consequently, unlike that in other parts of the Indian Ocean, the matrilineal tradition in the Lakshadweep has also been most long lasting.

In more recent times, however, the influence of modern lifestyles and a nuclear family system has impacted the traditional matrilineal practise in the islands. Maryam Mumtaz (29) a resident of Kalpeni island says that with younger people moving out in search of jobs and families becoming smaller, property is now getting divided. “If the reforms to develop the islands as a tourist hub does not take into account the intrinsic culture of the people, then the breakdown of our traditional ways of living will only intensify further,” she says.

3. DNA from ancient African foragers indicates cultural change



A new analysis of human remains buried in African archaeological sites has produced the earliest DNA from the continent, research finds.

The findings tell a fascinating tale about how early humans lived, traveled, and even found their significant others.

The research team outlines its work in the journal *Nature*, including findings from ancient DNA from six individuals buried in Malawi, Tanzania, and Zambia who lived between 18,000 and 5,000 years ago.

“This more than doubles the antiquity of reported ancient DNA data from sub-Saharan Africa,” says David Reich, a professor at Harvard University and investigator at the Howard Hughes Medical Institute whose lab generated the data in the paper.

The study also reanalyzes published data from 28 individuals buried at sites across the continent, generating new and improved data for 15 of them. The result was an unprecedented dataset of DNA from ancient African foragers – people who hunted, gathered, or fished. Their genetic legacy is difficult to reconstruct from present-day people because of the many population movements and mixtures that have occurred in the last few thousand years.

Thanks to this data, the researchers were able to outline major demographic shifts that took place between about 80,000 and 20,000 years ago. As far back as about 50,000 years ago, people from different regions of the continent moved and settled in other areas and developed alliances and networks over longer distances to trade, share information, and even find reproductive partners. This social network helped them survive and thrive, the researchers write.

Ancient DNA holds clues

Elizabeth Sawchuk, an author of the study and postdoctoral fellow at the University of Alberta and research assistant professor at Stony Brook University, says a dramatic cultural change took place during this timeframe, as beads, pigments, and other symbolic art became common across Africa.

Researchers long assumed that major changes in the archaeological record about 50,000 years ago reflected a shift in social networks and maybe even changes in population size. However, such hypotheses have remained difficult to test.

“We’ve never been able to directly explore these proposed demographic shifts, until now,” she says. “It has been difficult to reconstruct events in our deeper past using the DNA of people living today, and artifacts like stone tools and beads can’t tell us the whole story. Ancient DNA provides direct insight into the people themselves, which was the missing part of the puzzle.”

Social networks

Mary Prendergast, an author of the paper and associate professor of anthropology at Rice University, says there are arguments that the development and expansion of long-distance trade networks around this time helped humans weather the last Ice Age.

“Humans began relying on each other in new ways,” she says. “And this creativity and innovation might be what allowed people to thrive.”

The researchers were also able to demonstrate that by about 20,000 years ago, people had stopped moving around so much.

“Maybe it was because by that point, previously established social networks allowed for the flow of information and technologies without people having to move,” Sawchuk says.

Prendergast says the study provides a better understanding of how people moved and mingled in this part of Africa. Previously, the earliest African DNA came from what is now Morocco – but the individuals in this study lived as far from there as Bangladesh is from Norway, she notes.

“Our genetic study confirms an archaeological pattern of more local behavior in eastern Africa over time,” says Jessica Thompson, assistant professor of anthropology at Yale University, an author of the study and one of the researchers who uncovered the remains. “At first people found reproductive partners from wide geographic and cultural pools. Later, they prioritized partners who lived closer, and who were potentially more culturally similar.”

Human remains

The research team included scholars from Canada, Kenya, Malawi, Tanzania, the United States, Zambia, and many other countries. Critical contributions to the study came from curators and coauthors at African museums who are responsible for protecting and preserving the remains.

Potiphar Kaliba, director of research at the Malawi Department of Museums and Monuments and an author of the study, notes that some of the skeletons sampled for the study were excavated a half-century ago, yet their DNA is preserved despite hot and humid climates in the tropics.

“This work shows why it’s so important to invest in the stewardship of human remains and archaeological artifacts in African museums,” Kaliba says.

The work also helps address global imbalances in research, Prendergast says.

“There are around 30 times more published ancient DNA sequences from Europe than from Africa,” she says. “Given that Africa harbors the greatest human genetic diversity on the planet, we have much more to learn.”

“By associating archaeological artifacts with ancient DNA, the researchers have created a remarkable framework for exploring the prehistory of humans in Africa,” says archaeology and archaeometry program director John Yellen of the US National Science Foundation, one of the funders of the project. “This insight is charting a new way forward to understanding humanity and our complex shared history.”

4. How the transition to agriculture affects populations in the present day

Topic in syllabus : Paper 1 Chapter 3 , 11 & Paper 2 chapter 2



The transition of human societies from hunter-gatherers to farmers and pastoralists is a more nuanced process than generally thought, according to a new study of peoples living in the highlands of southwest Ethiopia. The work was published March 9 in *Current Biology*.

Much of the study of how people transitioned away from a lifestyle based mostly on food collected from the wild to one based on cultivated crops has focused on Europe, where the shift to agriculture, or “Neolithic transition,” concluded thousands of years ago. Based largely on genetic studies, the prevailing view is that the transition occurred mainly by population replacement rather than cultural change, said first author Shyamalika Gopalan, a graduate student at the time of the work advised by Brenna Henn, associate professor of anthropology at the University of California, Davis.

“The prevailing view has been that in Europe it was a wave of people that came through and replaced everyone,” Gopalan said.

The transition to agriculture is still underway in the highlands of southwest Ethiopia. Farmers and pastoralists started moving into the area 1,500 to 2,000 years ago, encroaching on the resident hunter-gatherers, and the groups have since been living alongside each other. That presents an opportunity to study this transition and the degree to which it represents replacement versus cultural change in the present day and a different global context.

The team, led by Henn and Barry Hewlett at Washington State University, Vancouver, collected DNA samples from five groups of people in the southwest highlands: the hunter-gatherer Chabu; the Majang, who practice small-scale cultivation of crops; and the Shekkacho, Bench and Sheko, who practice more intensive farming. The goals were to assess both the genetic ancestry of the different groups and demographic trends in the recent past.

“Based on genetics we can estimate the effective population size over the past 60 generations, or about 2,000 years,” Gopalan said.

Last hunter-gatherers

The Chabu are the last hunter-gatherers in the area. They were considered a subgroup of the Majang, but the research team found they have a distinct genetic profile, said Justin Myrick, field manager for the Henn laboratory and a staff researcher at the UC Davis Genome Center.

The new analysis shows that the Chabu are related to a hunter-gatherer ancestor who lived in the area about 4,500 years ago. Contrary to expectations based on the European Neolithic transition, the other agricultural groups in the study also have a majority genetic affinity with these hunter-gatherer ancestors, though they differ in their other ancestries. The Majang have genetic input from Nilo-Saharan speaking agriculturalists. The Bench and Sheko, in contrast, have contributions from East African Afro-Asiatic agricultural ancestors – from whom the Shekkacho are mainly descended.

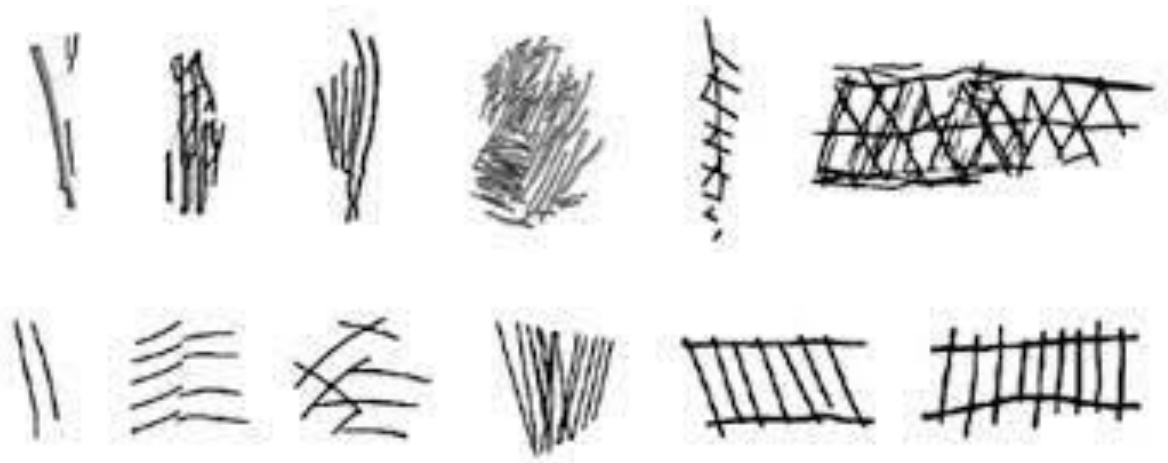
The population size estimates show that the Chabu have been declining over the past 2,000 years. That is often, but not always, the case for hunter-gatherer groups during an agricultural transition, Gopalan said, although at least from what we can see in Africa, demographic responses are heterogenous.

Hunter-gatherers may find new roles living alongside agriculturalists as specialists, providing services such as blacksmithing.

“What’s really interesting here is that we have groups in this study from the same area who have transitioned to agriculture at different times, with the Chabu in transition right now,” Myrick said. “What we see is a lot of variation in response to agriculture. The Chabu and Majang’s population sizes have been declining, though the Bench and Sheko have not despite all of them having majority indigenous hunter-gatherer ancestry.”

“The European Neolithic agriculturalist replacement model isn’t bearing out in East Africa – there’s more admixture going on and culture change,” Myrick said. “The process is very complicated, and there may be many factors contributing.”

5. Cognitive experiments give a glimpse into the ancient mind



New study shed light on some of the earliest examples of human symbolic behavior: Ancient engravings were likely produced with aesthetic intent and marked group identity.

Symbolic behaviour - such as language, account keeping, music, art, and narrative - constitutes a milestone in human cognitive evolution. But how, where and when did these complex practices evolve? This question is very challenging to address; human cognitive processes do not fossilize, making it very difficult to study the mental life of our Stone Age ancestors. However, in a new study published in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* journal PNAS, an interdisciplinary team of cognitive scientists and archaeologists from Denmark, South Africa and Australia takes up the challenge. They used engravings on ochre nodules and ostrich eggshells made between about 109 000 and 52 000 years ago in a series of five cognitive science experiments to investigate their potential symbolic function.

The engravings originate from the South African Middle Stone Age sites of Blombos Cave and Diepkloof Rock Shelter, and are considered among the

earliest examples of human symbolic behaviour. They were found in different layers of the cave sediments, which has made it possible to reconstruct the approximate time and order in which they were produced. Lead scientist Kristian Tylén, Associate Professor at the Department of Linguistics, Cognitive Science and Semiotics and at the Interacting Minds Centre, Aarhus University, Denmark, explains: "It is remarkable that we have a record of a practice of making engravings spanning more than 40 000 years.

This allows us to observe how the engraved patterns have been developed and re_fined incrementally over time to become better symbols - that is - tools for the human mind, similar to the way instrumental technologies, such as stone tools, are honed over time to do their job more efficiently". In the experiments, participants were shown the engraved patterns while the researchers measured their responses in terms of visual attention, recognition, memory, reaction times, and discrimination of patterns belonging to different points in time. The experiments suggest that over the period of more than 40 000 years, the engravings evolved to more effectively catch human visual attention, they became easier to recognize as human-made, easier to remember and reproduce, and they evolved elements of group-speci_c style.

However, they did not become easier to discriminate from each other within or between each of the two sites. Several previous studies have presented speculations on the possible symbolic function of the Blombos and Diepkloof engravings. Some have suggested that they should be regarded as fully-developed symbols pointing to distinct meanings, more or less like written glyphs. This suggestion is, however, not supported by the present study:

"It is difficult to make well-grounded interpretations of these ancient human behaviours", says archaeologist and co-author Niels N. Johannsen, Associate Professor at the Department of Archaeology and Heritage Studies and at the Interacting Minds Centre, Aarhus University, "and we have been missing a more systematic, scientific approach. The main advantage of our experimental procedure is that we work directly with the archaeological evidence, measuring cognitive consequences of the changes that these engravings have undergone through time - and from these data, we argue, we are in a better position to understand the possible function of the engravings made by our ancestors tens of thousands of years ago."

The experimental findings suggest that the engravings from Blombos and Diepkloof were created and refined over time to serve an aesthetic purpose, for instance as decorations. However, they also evolved elements of style that could

have worked to mark the identity of the group, that is, they could be recognized as coming from a particular group.

The experiments make use of contemporary participants and concerns could be raised that the measurements say little about cognitive processes unfolding in the minds of stone age humans 100 000 years ago.

Kristian Tylén explains:

"Previous investigations have relied exclusively on studies of archaeological artefacts, the size and shape of cranial casts, or the mapping of genes. These are very indirect measures of human cognitive processes. While our experimental approach is also indirect in the sense that we cannot travel back in time and directly record the cognitive processes of our Stone Age ancestors, it is, on the other hand, dealing directly with those basic cognitive processes critically involved in human symbolic behaviour."

The study can thus inform foundational discussions of the early evolution of human symbolic behaviour. Not unlike manual tools, the findings suggest that the engravings were incrementally refined over a period of more than 40 000 years to become more effective 'tools for the mind' as their producers became more skilled symbol makers and users. In the challenging pursuit of understanding human cognitive evolution, the approach and findings provide novel insights into the minds of our Stone Age ancestors that cannot be achieved through the traditional methods of archaeology and genetics, or by theoretical work alone.

INDIAN & TRIBAL ANTHROPOLOGY

1. UP's First Tribal Museum To Be Ready In 2022



Uttar Pradesh's first Tribal Museum, known as 'Tharu Janjati Museum, will come up at Imilia Koder village, a Tharu populated area in Balrampur district.

The state will get this Museum by March 2022 and it would largely concentrate on displaying the rich and diverse culture of the rare Tharu tribe, said officials.

A.K.Singh, director state Museum and director in-charge state archaeological department, said: "Tharu tribe is, perhaps, the most advanced tribe in Uttar Pradesh that has evolved with the changing times but are still well connected to their roots. They have kept their traditions and culture intact. Our Museum would highlight the same and much more about the people of the Tharu tribe."

The first Tribal Museum is said to be among the pet projects of Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath.

While highlighting the salient features of the grand Museum, Singh said the Museum will have everything about the Tharu tribe – starting from their evolution, their culture, religion, tradition, lifestyle, social life and the present life.

"There will be different sections for different topics and theme, highlighting the rare pictures, murals, their history and story of evolution, while some will feature their knowledge of medicinal herbs, some would highlight their fashion,

attires and jewellery while others will highlight their lifestyle including their clothing, utensils, recipes, food, furniture etc,” he said.

He added that a team from the state Museum directorate is visiting Tharu populated villages and is roping in individuals to make the Museum authentic.

Spread in around 5.5 acres of land, the construction work of the grand Tharu ethnic Museum is in its last phase.

“We are done with most of the construction work that largely includes boundary walls and other infrastructure. We expect to complete the finishing in the next couple of months,” said Nitin Kohli, the contractor who is carrying out the construction work.

Tharu tribe members have lauded the initiative.

“It is a good step. I believe that efforts should be made to preserve cultures of all such tribes as they are an important part of history,” said Lakshmi Devi, a Tharu and the head of Bela Parsua, a Tharu dominated village in Lakhimpur Kheri district.

The project was inaugurated in January 2020 by the Chief Minister but got delayed due to the disruptions caused by the Covid-19 pandemic outbreak. Officials hoped that the Museum will boost tourism in the area

The Tharu Tribals are the people living in the Terai lowlands, amidst the Sivaliks or lower Himalayas, generally in the southern part of Nepal and northern part of India. The tribe is known for their love of nature and are worshippers of Theravada Buddhism.

- **Tharu Culture**

- Tharus live in houses, outer walls of which are made completely out of clay, mud, dung and grass
- They have colourful and printed verandah. The designs are generally based on traditional learning and occasionally on modern aspects
- They consider themselves as the people of the forest as they have been residing there for years
- They grow rice, wheat, mustard, corn, vegetables, fruits and lentils near their houses for survival reasons

- Tharu women have a stronger right on the property. This is unlike the north Indian Hindu custom
- **Language**
 - Multiple Tharu dialects are spoken in India and in Nepal
 - These include Hindi, Urdu, Awadhi, Maithili
- **Religion**
 - Tharus are closely linked to the environment and worship Lord Shiva
 - The pantheon of their gods comprises a large number of deities that live in the forest
- **Food Habits**
 - Bagiya or Dhikri, a steamed dish of rice flour that is eaten with chutney or curry. Ghonghi, an edible snail that is cooked in a curry made of coriander, chilli, garlic, and onion are the two standard items present on a Tharus plate.

2. Govt sponsors 58 SC/ST students to pursue higher studies abroad



Another scheme is to provide financial assistance for 50 students belonging to primitive tribes pursuing Civil Service coaching in nationally accredited institutes.

Refuting allegations of restricting the career prospects of tribal communities, Minister for Welfare of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes K Radhakrishnan said the government has sponsored 58 students belonging to the Scheduled community to pursue higher studies in foreign universities this year.

“I had introduced the scheme in 1996. Only 25 students got the opportunity for foreign studies during the past 25 years while we sponsored 58 students this year. The department has also sponsored seven students belonging to the Scheduled community for pilot training at the Rajiv Gandhi Academy for Aviation Technology this year. Steps have been taken to sponsor one student each from Attappadi and Wayanad for pilot training this year, he said.

Among the 58 students selected for foreign education, 10 belong to the Scheduled Tribes. The government provides Rs 25 lakh for a student to pursue post-graduate courses not available in India in foreign universities.

Students who have passed graduation with 55 percent marks and are below 35 years are eligible for the sponsorship. This year 70 percent of the students who were selected for foreign studies were women, said an officer in the ST welfare department.

The government has launched a scheme called ‘wings’ to sponsor students belonging to the Scheduled communities for pilot training under which 7 have been selected this year. The government will provide 24 lakh for each student to pursue pilot training.

Another scheme is to provide financial assistance for 50 students belonging to primitive tribes pursuing Civil Service coaching in nationally accredited institutes. The students will be selected from vulnerable communities in Idukki, Wayanad and Attappadi, said the officer.

Meanwhile, Adivasi Aikya Vedi and All Kerala Scheduled Tribe Promoters’ Collective had alleged that the government was trying to retrench 1,000 of the 1,182 tribal promoters in the state by restricting the age limit to 35 years. “We will launch a statewide agitation against retrenching the tribal promoters. The government is restricting the career prospects of tribal youths to the posts of ST promoter and tribal watcher. They want us to continue as agricultural workers. There are 1,200 tribal youths in Wayanad alone who are jobless even after completing graduation. The government should conduct a special recruitment drive for ST community,” said tribal activist Chitra Nilambur.

“I had introduced the scheme for appointment of Scheduled Tribe youths who have studied up to Class VIII as ST promoters in 1996. The appointment is only for one year and the aim is to utilise their service to improve basic amenities in

the tribal hamlets. Meanwhile we give training to the selected youths to pursue their studies and explore career possibilities,” the minister told TNIE.

The minister said that the service of ST promoters appointed two years ago was extended due to Covid. “Most of the ST promoters end up as domestic helpers of the forest officers. They don’t even visit the hamlets. The government had set a target to enroll 2,000 children in the Model Residential Schools. The ST promoters did not help to enroll the students. Later, we held a campaign and got 1,600 students enrolled.”

3. Deucha Panchami: Mamata Banerjee increases monetary package for tribals



Amid protests over land issues over Deucha Panchami by various organizations on February 20, West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Monday increases the monetary package for the tribals in Deucha Panchami and emphasized that she has been part of the land movement herself and will not deprive the land owners.

The tribal people of Birbhum district’s Deucha Panchami, along with a gamut of social organisations including Jai Kisan Andolan, announced their plans initiated a protest movement on February 20, demanding withdrawal of the coal mining project at Deucha Pachami-Harinsingha-Dewanganj.

The Deucha-Panchami-Dewanganj-Harinsingha coal block has an estimated

2,102 million tonnes of coal, spread across 9.7 km. The CM had announced a Rs 10,000-crore compensation and rehabilitation package for the project. The region is home to more than 3,010 families, including 1,013 from tribal communities. Stating that the project will transform the economy of the state, Banerjee said “the total investment by the state government will be around Rs 35,000 crore”.

Alleging the illegal stone quarry operators in the area for misleading the tribal people in the area, Banerjee said, “I have fought the battle against land acquisition. I will not deprive anyone. Those who have no land rights but occupy the area have also been compensated.”

She also sought everyone’s help as it is the government’s own project.

Chief Secretary H K Dwivedi announced today that “following cabinet approval package has been increased with 100 percent solacium to those who are land owners and those who have no land rights.”

“We will pay a subsistence allowance of Rs 1.5 lakh and additional benefits. The people will get houses and one member from each family will get a job,” the Chief Secretary said.

Mamata Banerjee mentioned that 5100 posts have been created to offer jobs to the locals as Group-C depending on the qualification and as homeguards.

“Hospitals, schools and colleges will be built in the area keeping in view the environmental issues. In addition, houses for the people ranging from 600-700 square feet will be built,” Mamata Banerjee said.

A joint platform under Birbhum Jomi, Jeebon, Jeebika o Prokriti Bachao Mahasabha, an umbrella organisation of the tribal people, plans to launch a movement against the coal mining project. It said that the gram sabha (public hearing in the village) was not even called to discuss the project. The villagers alleged that a section of the state administration was pressuring them to part with their land.

“The first step for acquiring land for any project is to receive people’s consent for the proposed project area. However, for the coal mining project, the view of the local people was never sought. The decision-making process through gram sabha or gram sansad has not been called,” Avik Saha, national president of Jai Kisan Andolan, told ET.

West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee announced in November 2021 that the first phase of the project in Dewanganj and Harinsngha blocks will “The first step for acquiring land for any project is to receive people’s consent for the proposed project area. However, for the coal mining project, the view of the local people was never sought. The decision-making process through gram sabha or gram sansad has not been called,” Avik Saha, national president of Jai Kisan Andolan, told ET.

West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee announced in November 2021 that the first phase of the project in Dewanganj and Harinsngha blocks will start in areas with less deep coal deposits. The total land area for the project is 3,400 acres, out of which 1,000 acre is owned by the state government, she said, adding that the area has 12 villages and 21,000 people reside in the area.

“We do not want any rehabilitation package but want the government to withdraw the project. The state government will give a package and a job to one member of a family. What will other family members do?” Lakshmi Ram Baske, convenor of Birbhum Jomi, Jeebon, Jeebika o Prokriti Bachao Mahasabha, told ET. “Moreover, what will the future generation do after they part with their land?”

“We want to inform the state government that they should withdraw the project. No public hearing was held in the villages before the package was declared,” said Mohan Mondal, local leader of Jai Kishan Andolan. “The tribal people are unwilling to part with their land in lieu of any kind of package of job as they prefer to live in the jungle, close to their land.

4. CSR: Piramal Foundation campaigns to dispel vaccine hesitancy across tribal districts in India

Nearly 10 lac beneficiaries touched across 49 tribal districts. Engages faith leaders, tribal healers, Panchayati Raj Institutions, community influencers and youth for acceptance of vaccine.

Piramal Foundation in collaboration with Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Ministry of Tribal Affairs, USAID under the aegis of Anamaya, Tribal Health Collaborative launched campaign Aashwasan to dispel COVID-19

vaccine hesitancy, promote COVID Appropriate Behaviour, and actively find cases of tuberculosis among tribal population of India. In a phased manner, the campaign will cover all villages of blocks with over 25% tribal population in 177 tribal districts.

Implemented by Piramal Foundation, the initiative has so far touched nearly 10 lac beneficiaries in 49 districts across the states of Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Odisha, Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra.

The key objectives of Aashwasan are to:

- Generate awareness of COVID-19 and COVID Appropriate Behaviour (CAB)
- Reduce vaccine hesitancy
- Improve epidemic preparedness by involving community influencers, faith leaders, tribal healers and others
- Build awareness of TB, identify people with presumptive TB and link them with public services for screening, diagnosis and treatment

While efforts by the central and state governments with support from organisations have led to over 170 crore vaccine administrations, vaccine hesitancy in specific pockets of the country continues to be an issue due to fear, misconceptions, myths, and rumours. Addressing vaccine hesitancy is complex and context-specific. In tribal populations (over 104 million people) this necessitates a unique and customized approach to counter complex challenges of difficult terrain, limited health facilities and social discrimination that create disparity in their health status.

The Aashwasan campaign uses a multipronged approach to reach beneficiaries in tribal villages, dispel myths, misconceptions, rumours and allay fears:

- a. Develop micro plan to identify blocks and villages with low vaccination coverage by working closely with block and district administrations
- b. Build greater understanding and allay fears about vaccination through workshops with panchayat presidents, ward members, faith leaders, community influencers and others in high vaccine resistance blocks
- c. Raise awareness of the benefits of vaccination and urge people to get vaccinated by co-creating solutions with community influencers
- d. Heighten awareness about vaccination with the larger community by organizing sessions in local markets and haat bazaars

e. Enable identification of locations for vaccination camps to maximize the reach of vaccination by supporting local administrations

A multi-stakeholder collaborative platform with Piramal Foundation, Gates Foundation, and USAID as core partners, Anamaya is committed to end preventable deaths among tribal and marginalised communities in India by co-creating solutions that strengthen communities and public delivery systems alike. Anamaya works closely with the Ministry of Tribal Affairs, Central TB division, and other government stakeholders. It engages with national and international organisations, philanthropies, knowledge partners, NGOs, community organisations, and community leaders.

Piramal Foundation is a section 8 company, with a vision to transform Health, Education, Water and social sector ecosystems through partnerships, high impact solutions and thought leadership.

Aligned to the Sustainable Development Goals, it partners with Central Government and State Governments, international and national organisations and academia to help improve delivery of government services in line with its values of “Doing well and Doing good”.

By focusing on the most marginalized groups within India, strengthening State’s ability to deploy impactful initiatives, and engaging youth in nation building efforts, it has touched the lives of 100+ million Indians in the last 15 years.

5. Tripura tribal council inks deal with Apollo Hospitals for tele-medicine services



ADC executive member Kamal Kalai said, "This agreement will provide tele-medicine, tele-consultation and tele-emergency services; a tele-ICU facility administered by experts; and ambulatory services by Apollo specialists during health camps or outreach initiatives in far-flung areas. This is the first phase of our cooperation and understanding", Kalai said.

The Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council (TTAADC) has signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with Apollo Hospitals to set up tele-medicine services at the tribal council-run Kherengbar Hospital at Khumulwng, 25 km from Agartala.

Speaking to IndianExpress.com, Tripura ADC executive member Kamal Kalai Friday said the MoU was partially signed by Apollo Hospital authorities in February, when a team of the ADC visited Hyderabad. However, the TTAADC chief executive officer, who was in Uttar Pradesh as the Returning Officer for the Assembly elections, returned recently and completed the MoU signing yesterday.

“This agreement will provide tele-medicine, tele-consultation and tele-emergency services; a tele-ICU facility administered by experts; and ambulatory services by Apollo specialists during health camps or outreach initiatives in far-flung areas. This is the first phase of our cooperation and understanding”, Kalai said.

Kalai also said doctors and nurses from Kherengbar Hospital will be trained in Hyderabad to learn to coordinate in virtual mode while offering treatment.

He also said Apollo is in discussion with ADC authorities to set up a unit of the hospital at a later stage in Khumulwng.

Since royal scion Pradyot Kishore Manikya Debbarma-led TIPRA Motha’s assumed power in the state’s tribal council last year, the ADC has been trying to develop its public healthcare infrastructure, including equipping Kherengbar Hospital and different healthcare installations with oxygen concentrators and other modern healthcare facilities.

“This MoU would give the ADC a special opportunity to acquire advanced medical services, especially in far-flung rural areas,” the ADC executive member said.

Tripura Chief Minister Biplab Kumar Deb inaugurated a 150 LPM oxygen plant at Khumulwng last year as part of the state government’s initiatives to build healthcare infrastructure amid the Covid-19 pandemic. The state government also announced Rs 30 crore to ensure quality public healthcare for the tribals living in the ADC areas.

One-third of Tripura’s 37 lakh population are from 18 tribal communities. Most of them live in the TTAADC, which is spread across 7,132.56 square km and covers nearly 68 per cent of the state’s geographical area.

6. Entrepreneur Popularises Bastar's Mahua as Healthy Snacks, Employs 350 Rural Women



Entrepreneur Popularises Bastar's Mahua as Healthy Snacks, Employs 350 Rural Women

For long, the image of mahua (*Madhuca longifolia*), or the Indian Butter tree, has been synonymous with liquor, predominantly consumed by Adivasis.

In recent years, there have been attempts to shift this perception to focus on the flower's nutritious value instead. In May last year, the Maharashtra government lifted restrictions on the sale, transportation, and collection of mahua, while the Agriculture and Processed Foods Export Development Authority, exported dehydrated mahua flowers from the Korba district of Chhattisgarh to Paris.

Meanwhile, the Tribal Cooperative Marketing Development Federation is promoting Mahua Nutra beverage in Jharkhand, as well as mahua cookies mixed with millet flour in Madhya Pradesh. Hopping on this bandwagon, Chhattisgarh-based Razia Shaikh is involving the flower as an ingredient in a variety of value-added products including ladoos, cookies, nutri bars, and more, while uplifting rural women in Bastar district.

A microbiologist by profession, Shaikh set up Bastar Foods in 2018 after working as a researcher for the state government's 'Safe Motherhood' initiative.

Changing how we view mahua

“My job was to travel across remote parts of the state and study different plants,” she tells The Better India. “Once during a field study I met some women from Self-Help Groups (SHGs) in Kamanar village. They were making mahua ladoos, which intrigued me, and I learnt about the many benefits of mahua.”

The flower, mainly found in central and northern Indian forests, is rich in protein as well as vitamins and minerals. It has numerous phytochemical attributes and thus can be used as a medicine for many diseases including headache and diarrhoea, as well as skin and eye diseases. Other than liquor, its high sugar content makes it a natural sweetener in dishes such as halwa and kheer.

Razia also understood that the women did not have proper market linkages. “I wanted to help them popularise their products across India. I worked with them for nearly six months to set up the model,” the Jagdalpur native says.

And so, with a nutritionist, a few technicians, and six women, she began her food venture. After a while, the Bastar district administration and forest department extended their support by providing machinery and marketing opportunities, she notes.

But many other factors would come into play here. The tarnished image of the flower meant that people were hesitant to purchase Bastar Foods’ products. This was despite the fact that mahua holds cultural significance in food and medicine for indigenous and tribal populations of north India, alongside the fact that the company had obtained FSSAI and ISO certifications.

“This was expected, given that at first, even I had my apprehensions. Making the ladoos more delicious was challenging, as we wanted to avoid adding a lot of sugar to make them healthy. After conducting a lot of research, our team found a way to make them tasty and healthy in a natural way. Many said the business will fail,” she says.

To attract customers, Razia kept the price at just Rs 5, and as buyers increased, she formed ten self-help groups. Together, she and the women conducted new experiments on different types of mahua recipes and regularly organised workshops and trained everyone. She also set up stalls in exhibitions and food fairs to market mahua ladoos.

Razia also has an in-house laboratory for quality check. If the lab results are satisfactory, she sends the samples to the National Accreditation Board for Testing and Calibration Laboratories (NABL) accredited labs in Hyderabad and Nagpur.

As of now, Bastar Foods has eight manufacturing units across Chhattisgarh, benefiting a total of 350 women, who earlier had no jobs or jobs which barely paid anything. According to Razia, every woman earns a monthly average of Rs 4,000.

“We provide training in everything, from safely removing mahua flowers to dehydrating them, packaging, and so on. The women mostly use their spare time to earn extra for their family’s future,” says Razia.

Malti, 28, joined Bastar Foods in 2020 at a managerial position. She says that she, too, was surprised to see the versatility of mahua and the revenue it can bring. “Employment opportunities are few where I live. After finishing my studies, I was unemployed, because travelling far to look for a job was not an option for me. So when Razia ma’am set up her unit here, I applied to gain financial independence. I could not believe the increasing number of orders that mahua products get. I earn Rs 5,000 every month, which I am saving for my future. I am also getting exposure on how to manage people,” she says.

At present, Bastar Foods products are sold pan India via e-commerce platforms like Amazon. Razia hopes to expand her presence on Flipkart and other such websites with new products like daliya and organic rice.

7. Volunteers keep the learning boat afloat for tribal kids in Jharkhand



The COVID-19 pandemic has caused an unparalleled upheaval in education across the globe, and the ripples effects are being observed in other social factors. The state of Jharkhand has also seen an alarming increase in young girls being married off at tender ages or being forced to engage in manual labour during the lockdowns since March 2020.

According to the latest data from the National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5), 36.1 per cent of rural girls and 32.2 per cent of total girls in Jharkhand are married before the age of 18.

At the same time, only 60.2 per cent of girls in rural areas under the age of six are able to attend school. It is in this bleak scenario that there has been a ray of hope in the lives of Talamani Soren (7) and Sona Murmu (6) of Bhognadih village in the Barhait block of Sahibganj, a remote district of Jharkhand. The girls have been regularly attending an informal school for the past few months, learning to read, write and speak in Hindi and English.

Thanks to the efforts of the Sido-Kanhu Murmu Hul Foundation, these tribal girls are among the 350 children receiving free education amid the pandemic-induced lockdown. Before the revolt of 1857, the tribals in Bhognadih revolted

against the British under the leadership of Sido Murmu and his brother Kanu Murmu. This struggle, which locals believe to be the country's first rebellion against the British, took place in 1855 and has gone down in history as the Santal Hul ('Hul' means revolution or rebellion).

Sido and Kanu Murmu have a special place in the socio-political scene of Jharkhand, and the Sido-Kanhu Murmu Hul Foundation has been created by their successors and other youth to honour the duo. The foundation inculcates awareness and appreciation for tribal culture, lifestyle and music while sponsoring the education of children from economically-weak families.

The foundation began running the informal school in July 2021, in the rooms of the Sido-Kanhu Murmu Stadium in Bhognadih. What started with just 10 to 12 children being taught by volunteer teachers from the village, has now reached an impressive 350 students, most of them between five and 12 years. According to Mandal Murmu 25-year-old president of the Sido-Kanhu Murmu Foundation, an equal number of girls and boys belonging to the tribal community attend the school.

Manoj Hansda (28), secretary of the youth-run foundation, and a volunteer teacher himself, explained the circumstances that led to the launch of the school. "The condition of our area is dismal, with the education level being poor among the tribal community. During the lockdown, we didn't wish the children of the village to go without learning so we decided to run a free school for them." Hansda adds that all the teachers, who are volunteers from the village working pro bono, have received both their vaccine doses.

Primary class students have been divided into different groups and are also being taught by youth from the village. Apart from Manoj Hansda, Rinki Hansda and BA graduate, Meeru Kisku, also teach the children for free. During summer, classes are held from 3 pm to 5 pm, and in winter, between 8 a.m. and 10 a.m.

Government yet to give the green signal for primary classes. Primary schools in Jharkhand have been closed since March 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The government reopened schools during August-September 2021 for children from classes VI to XII, while primary classes remain shut.

Recently, economist and social activist Jean Dreze and his team protested in favour of the opening of primary classes in Jharkhand and sent a memorandum to Chief Minister Hemant Soren. On Human Rights Day December 10, 2021,

children and their parents demonstrated at the block office demanding the opening of the school in Manika of Latehar district. Village Swaraj Mazdoor Sangh Manika wrote a letter to the Governor demanding the reopening of the school.

A survey by the Gram Swaraj Mazdoor Sangh found that most children at the primary level could not even read simple sentences at the start of 2021.

Earlier on 19 November 2021, social activists led by Dreze demonstrated outside the JSCA International Stadium in Ranchi during the India-New Zealand T20 cricket match, demanding the opening of primary schools. In a letter to the Chief Minister, they pointed out that while 40,000 people had been allowed to enter the stadium to watch the match, primary schools remained shut despite public health experts advising the reopening of schools across the country.

Bhuneshwar Kewat, secretary of the Jharkhand Nirman Mazdoor Union and a close associate of Dreze, tells 101Reporters, "If the schools remain closed for a third year, an entire generation will fail. These children will lose interest in reading and writing and they won't be able to cope up in the higher classes." Upendra Nath Dubey, child rights activist and president of Latehar District Child Welfare Committee, points out, "How can children study online when they do not have the resources? The children's mid-day meal was also halted. The children of migrant labourers, who returned to their villages due to the Covid-19 lockdown, could not be enrolled anywhere."

On 31 January 2022, after Jean Dreze's correspondence and pressure from various groups, the Jharkhand government decided to open the schools. As per the decision of the government, schools have been opened in 17 districts from the first grade in 24 districts. Classes ninth and above have been opened in seven districts Ranchi, Deoghar, East Singhbhum, Bokaro, Chatra, Seraikela and Simdega where the rate of corona infection is high.

8. Country's first report on tribal health still awaits implementation



The health situation of the tribal population can be improved and... as things stand today, a lot of work needs to be done. There is need for urgent action. Applying the principles of Equity and Antyodaya, this committee has no hesitation in saying that tribal health must receive the first and the highest attention." This statement in the country's first 'Tribal Health Report' submitted by an Expert Committee on Tribal Health constituted by Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, and Union Ministry of Tribal Affairs, sums up how important it is to implement the recommendations in the report. Sadly, despite the report being submitted to the Government of India in 2018, precious little has happened.

"Two things have happened since submission of the report -- nothing much, and realisation that there is lack of a group to give political push to the issues of tribal health," says 'Padma Shri' Dr Abhay Bang, Founder and Director of Society for Education, Action and Research in Community Health (SEARCH), and also Chairman of the Expert Committee on Tribal Health. Dr Bang told 'The Hitavada' that nothing much had happened on the recommendations in the report because of competing priorities. Government launched Ayushman Bharat Scheme, due to which Government machinery got engaged in its

implementation, elaborated Dr Abhay Bang. COVID-19 also sapped a lot of attention of the Government. "So, in sum, no one opposed the report but there has been no implementation either. Time has come when it must dawn upon the authorities concerned that without improving tribal health, national average cannot improve. For, one section will be left behind every time while making an attempt to improve national average," he observed. According to Dr Bang, there is absence of unified political voice for tribals. As a result, there was lack of political push for tribal health and related matters.

There is a little story behind 'The Report of the Expert Committee on Tribal Health: Tribal Health in India - Bridging the Gap and a Roadmap for the Future'. Noted economist and Nobel laureate Prof Amartya Sen calls meeting of a group called 'Kolkata Group' to which the experts from India and Bangladesh, bureaucrats, social workers, leaders etc are invited. "I, too, was invited. During travel from hotel to the venue of the meeting, the then Health Secretary Keshav Desiraju was sitting next to me. During the conversation, I told him that needs of tribal and rural areas were different as far as health issues were concerned. So, I stressed, there has to be different response to addressing these needs in case of tribal areas and other rural areas," recalled Dr Bang. Two months later, Desiraju took efforts to understand the work in the domain and visited SEARCH with the then Tribal Affairs Secretary Vibha Puri Das. They spent time in understanding the ground situation from close quarters. On their return, they constituted an Expert Committee to prepare what is known as Tribal Health Report. However, preparing the country's first such report was a daunting task. The report came into being after five years of hard work put in by the committee. The darkness of information was astounding. The committee chief said, "We had to extract, derive, and collate the requisite data from various data-sets. We realised that since Independence, the Government had 'solved' issues pertaining to tribal health without even an estimation of the problem."

The committee found that the healthcare services in tribal areas, apart from being 'deficient in number, quality and resources, suffer from major design problems of inappropriateness to tribal society and lack of participation'. Further, the tribal people suffer from 'triple burden of disease'. As per the report, one set of burden is malnutrition and communicable diseases, another set is rapid urbanisation-environmental distress-changing lifestyle resulting in rise in prevalence of non-communicable diseases (cancer, hypertension, diabetis), and the third burden is mental illnesses especially addiction. Tribal communities in the country have poorer health indicators, greater burden of morbidity and mortality, and very

limited access to healthcare. Further, there is 'near complete absence' of data on the health situation of different tribal communities.

The expert committee submitted the report to the Government in 2018. The then Health Minister J P Nadda welcomed the report and promised action through implementation. NITI Aayog and Prime Minister's Office also wrote to the Ministry of Health. However, sadly, nothing much has happened on ground. So, 'what next?' Dr Abhay Bang gave a very interesting reply: "Well.. It is said that Shiva had cursed the 'Swara' (melody) that its existence would be momentary. In today's era, data has this curse. Any data can be of no use after some time. For, there may be several variations in the conditions, and especially time, in which the data was collected. Passage of time reduces the utility of data." Still, he said, when there is no data, whatever data is compiled for the first time has its relevance. For, this data becomes benchmark for the future endeavours. Similar is the case with Tribal Health Report. According to the globally renowned health expert, the data compiled in the report will serve as benchmark, whenever in future, the Government decides to implement the recommendations.

Some findings of the report deserve serious and urgent attention. For instance, though life expectancy at birth for Scheduled Tribe (ST) in India is 63.9 years as against 67 years for general population, the life expectancy for tribal people is likely to be an 'over-estimate' because child deaths are 'under-reported' amongst tribals. Dealing with various aspects of tribal health, the report points out that almost 50 per cent adolescent ST girls in the age-group of 15-19 years are 'under-weight' or have a body mass index or BMI of 'less than 18.5'. As many as 27 per cent tribal women still deliver at home, the highest among all population groups. "This could in part be attributed to the unfriendly attitude of health workers, language and understanding gap, and the lack of trust in an alien system. More importantly, maternal health services provided by the Government are often not in tune with the health beliefs and practices of the tribal people," states the report. "The infant mortality rate in ST in India was the highest in the world among the indigenous populations, next only to the Federally Administered Area in Pakistan. India cannot be proud of this," the report points out. Though there has been a major improvement that the tribal infant mortality rate has halved over a period of 26 years -- from 1988 to 2014, the annual rate of reduction in tribal IMR after peaking in 2004, declined during the 10 years -- 2004-2014. The report goes on to bring out several such points to ponder over for the Government, policy-makers, and health sector.

Key recommendations As part of the objective of the report to develop a national framework and roadmap to improve appropriateness, access, content, quality and utilisation of health services among tribal populations, the committee has made several recommendations. One key recommendation is to launch Tribal Health Mission with space for say of tribals through participation in its structure and design. Another recommendation is to appoint 1,000 Tribal Health Officers (THO). "At present, tribal healthcare is low on quality and resource-starved. One THO per 809 blocks in the country and District THO must be appointed, on the lines of IAS cadre. Further, there should be a mechanism of Tribal Health Council and Directorate to improve service delivery," Dr Bang added.

'Increase total public expenditure on tribal health to Rs 2,447/- per capita' As far as financing the whole effort for improvement in tribal health is concerned, the report mentions that there has to be 'strict adherence' to Tribal Sub-Plan guidelines ensuring additional allocation by Central and State Ministries of Health to public health allocation and expenditure in tribal areas, in proportion to the share of ST population -- to a total of Rs 15,676 crore, and ensuring that 70 per cent of this is spent on primary healthcare. Further, it presses for increasing the total public expenditure on tribal health to Rs 2,447/- per capita, to bring it to the level equivalent to 2.5 per cent of national GDP, matching the goal of the new National Health Policy-2016. As far as Maharashtra which has 9.40 per cent of ST population is concerned, the report expects allocation for tribal health in the health budget to be Rs 948 crore. "Sadly, there is no systematic account available about funds spent on tribal health. At best, this is feigned helplessness. Hence, we have recommended efficient fund flows from the Government matched by transparent accounts, financial monitoring and reliable data,".

9. This Fearless Tribe In Gujarat Lives In Harmony With The Wild Asiatic Lions Of Gir



The Gir National Park was home to 523 lions in 2015. And in a world where endangered species generally just get extinct, Gir's 600 lions in 2018 is a major contradiction. And the credit for such growth in their population could be given to the Maldhari tribe that lives on the forest grounds, in harmony with the lions.

According to the Times of India, a study by the Wildlife Institute of India, the lions and the Maldhari tribes live in a 'win-win' situation.

A major portion of the everyday diet of the lions comes from the livestock owned by the Maldharis.

As a result, the Maldharis are free to roam the forest to collect resources safely without any fear. The study also states that the Gir Maldharis do not see the lions as a threat. There have been no lion attacks in over two decades. And the cattle that the lions have killed have been useless to the tribesmen for all purposes, such as bulls, ailing calves, aged, and dying cattle.

The study also shows that the loss caused by lions far outweighs the benefits. The loss comes up to Rs 3.5 lakhs per 100 livestock. (with compensation). Without government support, the loss can go as high as Rs 6.19 lakhs. However,

the families that have 100 livestock earn about Rs 11.04 lakh per annum (with compensation). Even when the government doesn't compensate for the losses, a family can make up to Rs 8.40 lakh per annum. So here we are, the world literally looking to drown itself in shit puddles of its own making and there are these people who live and grow with the lions and are prospering for it.

MALDHARIS TRIBE

- The Maldhari community is a **tribe of herdsmen** in the border state of Gujarat.

The name Maldhari means *owner of goods* - in this case, goods referring to cattle.

- The lions have been **periodically hunting** the Maldhari **cattle for food**, but the Maldharis understand the cycle of life.
- They consider the *taken* cows an **offering to the lions**, whose territory they share

DISTRIBUTION

The Maldharis have lived in the Gir National Park, in the Banni Grasslands Reserve area, for the past thousand years.

- They have **co-existed with the lions**, which the Gir National Park was created to preserve, for these thousand years.

THREATS

- The **unbridled development** over past few years has disturbed the centuries-long lifestyle of these **nomadic herdsmen**.
- Although the grassland reserve is off-limits to industries, several exist at its periphery and have been dumping **toxic contaminants** into the reserve's natural resources.
- Recently built **dams, overgrazing** have also taken their toll.

RIGHTS UNDER FRA

- Under the provisions of the Act, **forest dwellers cannot be displaced** unless the rights settlement process has been completed.

In the Gir region, which is a non-Schedule area, the process of rights recognition under FRA has not started at all.

- Only forest rights committees have been formed, but nothing has moved beyond that.
- Moreover, the Act has a special provision for setting up '**Critical Wildlife Habitats**' (CWH), for the conservation of the species.
- It is important that Project Lion restores sufficient exclusive lion habitat of about 1,000 sq km through **incentivised voluntary relocation**.

Asiatic lion population will get the space it requires for performing its ecological role.

- Presently Maldhari and lions coexist in a **win-win state** where lions get a considerable **part of their food** from Maldhari livestock and Maldharis profit substantially by **free access to forest resources**.

10. Teplu Helps Tribal Women To Set Up Their Business in Dairy Products



Teplu is helping small scale entrepreneurs start new small scale dairy units or overcome different production related issues.

Teplu, a new age dairy education & skills development company based out of Mumbai has conducted a two-day workshop on dairy products specifically for tribal women in Navsari District, Gujarat. 30 Women Trainees from different districts from Lachhakadi Center attended the workshop. All the trainees were from three districts namely Dang, Navsari & Valsad. They belonged to different gram panchayats such as Dharmpur, Mindhabari, Amdha, Gangpur, Umarpara etc.

Out of all the trainees, 23 were running existing micro enterprises from home (home-based business), 6 were running road side stalls and one woman was owning a shop. Products currently made by some of the women were buttermilk, curd and shrikhand in small quantities. Others were running food businesses. Dairy product types required by trainees: Majority of them wanted to manufacture Paneer, Buttermilk, Lassi, Curd and Shrikhand. A few wanted to make all other kinds of dairy products.

This training program was designed to solve the technical and practical issues faced by dairy manufacturers. It majorly focused on clearing the myths related to practices which are being passed on from generation to generation. When it comes to setting up a dairy business one should be aware about the latest techniques and the market because the dairy market is demand based in nature.

Speaking on the occasion Sanjay Bhattacharji Founder & Director of Teplu said, "A Study by the International Labour Office says that due to unequal access to education, rural women in India are not able to contribute to the economy. The best way to uplift women in rural areas is to upskill them and develop them into micro-entrepreneurs. If each house has a woman dairy entrepreneur, they can live an independent lifestyle and also uplift the community. India is the largest producer of milk in the world. Milk is available in every part of our country. This gives an opportunity for women who have spare time during the day to procure milk and convert them into value added products. At Teplu our vision is to take home-made dairy technology to every household in India. This will ensure that safe and unadulterated dairy products are available and also help increase incomes of women."

Teplu is helping small scale entrepreneurs start new small scale dairy units or overcome different production related issues. The company is also providing guidance on equipment purchase and how to sell the products. After the work

shop Teplu provides hand holding support to all the participants by creating a WhatsApp Group, where participants can get connected to the resource person for clearing their doubts and can solve their queries. Teplu also helps to provides the guidance and knowledge related to raw materials which can help in cost savings. Raw materials are also provided as per the requirements.

Teplu has close to 10000 users enrolled on their platform. They have paid users from 9 different countries such as USA, Botswana, Bangladesh, Singapore, Australia, UAE, South Africa, Rwanda and India. On our platform we have answered close to 2000 queries in the past 8 months. Our paid courses have a completion rate as high as 65%.

11. International Women's Day: Women lead innovative farming in this tribal village



Women in Akhapolan have taken to cultivating vegetables using trellis systems and are reaping the profits of their endeavour

It is a calm spring morning in the sleepy tribal village of Akhapolan, close to the Similipal National Park in Odisha. Kiamani Naik, a woman in her forties, is all smiles as she makes her way home with a handful of bitter gourds. “I will prepare *kalara bhaja* (bitter gourd fry) to be taken with watered rice for my family of four as breakfast,” Kiamani says as her eyes sparkle.

“Watered rice (*Pakhala Bhata*) with a little salt used to be our breakfast most of the days till my wife started cultivating vegetables with a trellis (lattice system for growing vines) structure two years ago,” Kiamani’s husband Narendra Naik, said.

Narendra used to work as a migrant labourer in Chennai before the COVID-induced lockdown started in March 2020.

“Now, dishes including those prepared with beans, bitter gourd, ridge gourd, cucumber and bottle gourd accompany all our meals. Apart from vegetables, we can now add chicken, mutton, fish and eggs, which we buy from the market, to our meals,” Narendra said.

Akhopolan falls under the Thakurmunda block of Mayurbhanj district. It is now dotted with lush green bitter gourd plantations.

There are as many 75 such structures – all developed by women.

“Women of one-third households of this village have adopted the trellis system,” Suvam Kumar Jena, a volunteer of the Centre for Youth and Social Development, a Bhubaneswar-based non-profit, said.

Jena has been instrumental in providing technical knowledge and handholding support to the villagers. The income of families has gone up considerably due to the efforts of women, he added.

Sagar Simnakhia used to work as a labourer in a Tamil Nadu-based cotton factory and sent Rs 3,000 to his family per month. He, along with his co-villagers, had to come back to Akhopolan after the lockdown started.

“It was too hard to make our ends meet after Sagar’s return,” his wife, Rebati, said. “I planned to grow vegetables on our land. Despite my husband’s constant dissuasion, I started preparing the land to sow seeds. At this time, motivated by a co-villager, I attended a training programme in my village on the trellis model,” she added.

Just five women, including Rebati, started the model. A hundred others, who had received the training, were reluctant. “We put our blood and sweat to make the model a success,” Rebati said.

Government officials and non-profits working on agriculture, visited the place to observe the successful models. These aesthetically appealing trellis structures also attracted the villagers, said Suvam. Inspired, the once reluctant women too developed these models on their land, he added.

What is a trellis?

A trellis structure is prepared using four pillars, bamboo poles and ropes, said Shiba Prasad Pattnaik, a community volunteer who works for promoting sustainable farming.

The plants climb vertically with the support of bamboo and ropes. Creepers like bitter gourd, pointed gourd, tomato, cowpea, beans and cucumber are cultivated in this system, he added.

One requires a one-time investment of Rs 3,400 to erect a trellis structure on 20 decimals of land. The efforts of the villagers got a boost as the Department of Horticulture provided Rs 12,550 per household for this, said Suvam.

According to Sushanta Kishore Khuntia, managing director of Dependable Agri Services, an agricultural consulting agency, the trellis model is an effective tool for sustainable and climate-resilient agriculture.

“Creepers are the worst sufferers of water stagnation due to extreme and untimely rainfall. The survival rate of creepers grown in the trellis system is higher than those grown in a flat-bed system,” Khuntia said.

He added that as plants grew vertically in a trellis system, there was little chance of rotting of stems, flowers and fruits due to water logging.

“Proper spacing in the system enhances the utilisation of nutrients, water, sunlight, carbon dioxide and oxygen. Proper ventilation helps in control of pests and diseases as well. Besides, with proper spacing, higher plant population can be taken up. All these result in higher yield for the farmer,” he added.

Apart from a good yield, a trellis system reduces the cost of cultivation by way of ease of weeding, hoeing, staking / propping, spraying and harvesting.

“The produce that is harvested is of better quality in terms of shape and size and is free of soil contamination. The trellis system ensures a longer post-harvest life for the produce,” Khuntia said.

How it helps

The method not only earned the women a double yield, but also a new identity and respect, said Binati Biswal, who harvested 8.5 quintals of cowpea from her farm and earned Rs 23,600 last year. The sum came as a great support for her daughter’s marriage, she said.

“Earlier, we were solely dependent on the income of the male members of our families. We neither had any say in our family matters or any respect. Thanks to the trellis system, we started contributing to our family income. We also have a say now not only in our families but in the community too,” Biswal added.

“The male members of the village, who used to work as migrant labourers outside, are now engaged in farming activities that is getting them enough income to meet their family expenses,” Ramesh Naik, the former sarpanch of Hatigoda, said.

“I am thankful to these courageous women whose initiative has absorbed the shock of reverse migration and checked the distress migration,” he added.

These women, who have recently renamed their producer group as ‘Trellis Producers’ Group’, are also at the forefront of marketing of their produce collectively.

“We are in talks with ‘Murgasuni Farmers Producers Company’ which has agreed to support us in input services and marketing activities. We have also developed marketing linkages with ORMAS Mandi in Baripada and the buyers of Anandapur, Thakurmunda, Balasore, Jajpur and West Bengal for collective marketing.

“The addition of vegetables to the only-cereal-based diet of the village met the nutritional requirement of the people. Women and adolescent girls, who were the worst sufferers of micronutrient deficiency, benefitted the most,” Saraswati Kisku, an Anganwadi worker of the village, said.

The women of Akhapolan have been an inspiration for those in neighbouring Hatigoda, Bhairanibeda, Khumthan, Koilipal, Tikarpada and Ghantiadara

villages. Many women of these villages have erected these models on their land, said Bali Soren of Hatigoda.

Sukanti Mohapatra of Hatigoda, who has already set up a trellis system said: "Apart from a good harvest, what inspired me was the use of organic fertilisers and pesticides. Besides earning, you can also provide quality and chemical-free food to your family."

"We mostly use cow dung and poultry manures as fertilisers; and *Neemastra* (pesticide made of neem leaves), *Mahulastra* (pesticide made of Mahua seeds) and *Bijamruta* as pesticides," Chhabirani Naik, Secretary, Trellis Producer Group, said.

12. Nomads, tribals use art to protest against Gehlot government, want tribal policy denotified



Hundreds of artists from the nomadic community protested against the

Rajasthan government, demanding that tribal policy be denotified.

Hundreds of artists from the nomadic community came together at Jaipur's Shaheed smarak on Sunday to voice their protest against the Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot's government in Rajasthan using their art.

The artists from the nomadic community put on a display of folk and tribal songs, puppet dance, etc. With these, they conveyed their resentment against the state government for not issuing Denotified Tribal (DNT) Policy in spite of allegedly promising to do so.

"Today, the nomadic people have reached Jaipur to demand answers to their questions from the Rajasthan government. They have their problems. There are 32 types of castes in Rajasthan which come under nomadic community. Those people do not have housing arrangements, people do not have houses. If someone has house, then they do not have patta and because of not having patta, they are repeatedly removed from there ... (These) people do not have lands for cremation ground. Sometimes, they do not get land for cremating their dead. Their earnings have been finishing. People do the job of singing, move around to make their earnings. So, they anyway, were in a very bad condition," social activist, Paras, told India Today.

" The government has not paid any heed to them. There is no arrangement for the education of their children. Their bastis are settled outside the town ... basic amenities of water, electricity, roads that should be there are not available to them and today, they are raising the demand from the government that the DNT policy announced by the government for them be implemented soon and implemented with the budget so that some welfare of theirs can happen," Paras stated

These artists lamented that they have been facing numerous problems including unavailability of accommodation, lack of amenities such as road, power, or clean drinking water.

Some of the protestors that India Today spoke with said that their children do not get proper education, that they do not have land titles in the absence of a denotified tribal policy and demanded that the government come out with one as soon as possible.

"(We want that) there be a puppet theatre ... some people who come, watch our art, reward us as well and some of our puppets, the foreigners who come, could buy to take away," a puppet artist, Moolchand Bharti said.

"I am from the Kalbeliya community. I am a dancer. Our girls, our widows are unable to manage with pension of Rs 500 and our program happens anywhere. We should be given good employment. The government should think about us. Our house should be good... the government should think for us artists as well," a dance artist, Rakhi Sapera, said.

13. MoU signed between National Tribal Research Institute (NTRI) New Delhi and the Bharatiya Adim Janajati Seva Sangathan (BAJSS) to establish BAJSS as resource center of NTRI

Conservation & Preservation of Tribal Museum and rare books on tribals at BAJSS building at Jhandewala, New Delhi

Key Highlights:

- National Tribal Research Institute, New Delhi, under the mentorship of TRI Uttarakhand, signs MoU with the Bharatiya Adim Janajati Seva Sangathan (BAJSS), New Delhi, to preserve, protect and digitize rare books on tribals and renovation and digitization of the tribal Museum
- Establishing a Digital Library with a repository of rare books and creating a Resource Centre at NTRI, New Delhi

The National Tribal Research Institute, New Delhi and Bharatiya Adim Janjati Seva Sangathan (BAJSS) signed an MoU for developing BAJSS as resource center of NTRI in the presence of Sh. Arjun Munda, Minister of Tribal Affairs on 21st February 2022. Sh. S.S.Toliya Director TRI Utrrakhand signed the MoU on behalf of NTRI and Sh. Nayan Chandra Hembram, President of Bharatiya Adim Janajati Seva Sangathan (BAJSS) signed on behalf of Institute.



On the occasion, Sh, Arjun Munda said that since Independence, several eminent personalities have been associated with BAJSS and Dr Rajendra Prasad was its first chairman. He said that BAJSS was established in 1948 by Sh. Thakkar Bapa, an eminent social worker for all-Inclusive & all-round upliftment of the tribal Communities of India. The eminent leaders-Social Workers like Sh. U.N. Dhebar, and Sh. Moraraji Desai have been associated with the organization and have offered their valuable services for the upliftment of tribal community. The Institution building at Jhandewala has collection of rare books in their library and a Museum with tribal artifacts. This heritage would have been lost if it is not preserved, repaired & maintained. By making BAJSS as the NTRI's Resource Centre, when the country is celebrating its 75th year of Independence, the students, researchers and visitors interested in tribal culture and history would be able to optimally use the facilities available in Delhi and coming generations will also come to know about rich cultural heritage.



Shri Anil Kumar Jha, Secretary of Ministry of Tribal Affairs said that the project has been undertaken under the guidance of Tribal Affairs Minister, who visited the premises with the officers of Ministry and had advised to develop the unique heritage as the resource centre of upcoming NTRI. Sh. Jha lauded the efforts of TRI Uttarakhand and TRI Odisha who have chalked out a plan to preserve this unique heritage.

Shri Nayan Chandra Hembram, President of BharatiyaAdimJanajati Seva Sangathan (BAJSS) thanked the Hon'ble Minister for visiting the site with the team of officers and undertaking the preservation of books and restoration of museum, which were otherwise neglected. He also briefed about pan India activities of BAJSS and its role in tribal policies and issues since independence.



Shri SN Tripathi, Director General, IIPA, said that IIT Kanpur is developing National Digital Library and when the books are digitized, these can be added to the vast resource available in national digital library.

Dr. Navaljit Kapoor, Joint Secretary, MoTA briefed about the details of activities which would be undertaken in the restoration project and the time line to complete the project.

A total amount of Rs.150 Lakhs has been sanctioned by the Ministry for preservation and digitization of Rare Books in BAJSS Library & to develop it in to an E-Library and for revamping of the tribal Museum, digitization of artefacts and making interactive kiosks so as to preserve the unique cultural heritage.

14. Why Odisha's Tribal Women Are Returning to Their Natural Roots for Guidance on Food



India's tribals often possess traditional knowledge that gets lost because of the younger generation's lack of interest. An organisation is trying to prevent the same from happening in Odisha.

Even in 21st century India, there is a sizeable number of children for whom life is riddled with poverty, food insecurity, poor nutrition, and minimal access to safe water, sanitation, and health services. In Odisha, tribals are among the most deprived and backward of ethnic groups, and they constitute 23 % of the population in the state. Such has been the cycle of desperation that, for women like Chandrabati Kadraka, Mangi Kumuruka, Pratima Kumuruka, Latika Toiba, Lalita Mandai, and hundreds of others like them, impoverishment, exploitation, and ill-health have always been a part of life. But these days they are gradually equipping themselves to break free. With support from Living Farms, a non-profit working on food and nutrition security, these women are going back to their native wisdom to, at least, secure the health of their coming generations.

Ever since she participated in the 15-day nutrition camp that was held in her Nuagaon village in the Bissam Cuttack block of Odisha's Rayagada district, Chandrabati Kadraka, 22, has been a happy woman. For the first time since her daughter, Tiki, was born two years and four months ago, she now knows how to

properly nurture her into a healthy child. Her baby girl is weak and, consequently, falls ill quite frequently, giving the young mother sleepless nights. “Fortunately, I have understood the importance of having a balanced meal put together from locally grown produce. We have a variety of foods, including various types of tubers and roots gathered from nearby forests, which are unique to our diet. Previously, we were hesitant to feed them to our kids. However, at the camp, I came to know how our tribal foods are highly nutritious, particularly for children,” elaborates Chandrabati.

In Nuagaon, 12 mothers with children under three years of age attended the camp.

According to Bichitra Biswal of Living Farms, “Kondh tribal farmers were growing different varieties of traditional foods in the upland and hill areas. But with time, most shifted to cash crop cultivation for money. Naturally, the highly nutritious foods have disappeared from their plates. Through the camps, we are trying to generate awareness around the good values of their indigenous fare.”

Nutritionist Tapaswini Swain explains, “Tribal people are believed to be the closest to nature. They consume foods with very minimal processing, and the duration from the field to the plate is less, hence the bio-availability of nutrients is very high.”

“Millets, for example, grow in abundance, and are a storehouse of nutrients as they contain protein, fibre as well as micro-nutrients such as beta carotene, iron and calcium.”

Every six months, Living Farms conducts an assessment of dietary diversity in 200 villages across Bissam Cuttack, Muniguda, and Chandrapur blocks. “In Rayagada, there is immense food diversity – from pulses, millets, and other grains to fruits, vegetables, tubers, and mushrooms. We are promoting their nutritive value aggressively in order to encourage the locals to consciously make them a part of their food regime so that their health parameters improve. During our assessments, we found a marked change among those consuming these items regularly,” reveals Biswal.

Emphasizing on the need to have fresh, locally grown or gathered produce, Mangi Kumuruka, 65, enumerates the wide array of millets they have to choose from. “There’s *mandia* or *ragi* (finger millet), *juara* (great millet), *bajra* (spiked millet), *kangu* (Italian millet), *kodua* (kodo millet), *khira* (barnyard millet), and *suan*

(little millet). Millets are full of iron and calcium, and it's important for pregnant women to have them. As it is, tribal women are largely dependent on deriving nutrition from forest foods, and it's even more critical to have these when they are expecting so that both mother and child remain healthy during those critical days," she explains.

Pratima Kumuruka, another Kondh tribal woman, adds, "There are no chemical fertilisers in our foods, so we do not see many pregnancy-related complications among tribal women. Rather, if we take millets and pulses regularly, our children are healthier." These days, Krushna Toiba and his wife, Latika, of Badeipadar village, too, are convinced that millets provide sufficient nutrition to children. That's why when the Accredited Social Health Assistant (ASHA) worker of their village asked them to start complementary feed for their seven-month-old child, the duo decided to give *mandia*. "Today, our daughter eats all types of millets, and she is healthy," shares Krushna with a smile.

After participating in the nutrition camp and interacting with Living Farms' activists, the tribals approach food differently. Notably, families like Toiba's have even started cultivating little kitchen gardens to ensure a steady supply, whatever the season. "Earlier they used to typically grow three or four types of vegetables, and that too during the monsoon season. Nowadays they sow 15-20 varieties and harvest throughout the year," says Biswal. Latika has grown nearly 27 varieties of vegetables and fruits for family consumption in the small patch in her backyard. "We do not buy from the local *haat* (market) as we produce enough for all of us," she declares proudly. Most women have taken to growing nutrition gardens in their backyard.

"We collected seeds from neighbouring villages by sharing seeds of traditional crops, and presently we have a variety of seeds. So much so that we do not have to buy them from the market; rather, we collect and preserve our own," says Majia Kumuruka.

Whereas good farming practices are one aspect of healthy eating, preparing meals is another. A few elderly tribal women have concerns about the indifference of the younger generation with regard to the traditional preparations. "Our food is our identity. Once our food is lost, we will be lost," remarks Rupa Kumuruka, 52, of Badeipadar village, rather ominously. However, since Living Farms has been organising recipe festivals, there's been a revival of interest. At these festivals, community elders rustle up some delicious dishes from millets and other forest foods. They tweak these versions to attract the

youngsters, who prefer spicy street fare easily available in *haats*. Young daughters-in-law are trying their hand at making *laddoos*, *halwa*, and *pakoda* from finger millet, niger and foxtail millet. "In the recipe festival, the emphasis is on making wholesome dishes that children will relish," says Biswal.

Lalita Mandai, whose son is going to turn three, says, "I have learnt how to use ingredients for interesting meals. I now know how to prepare a special kind of *chattua* (food powder) from millets and nuts. It is better than any kind of ready baby food." Chandrabati also adds millets, pulses, and tubers to their diet.

"At home, I used to make *khechudi* with cooked rice, pulse, and vegetables. But I have begun adding different tubers to this mix. Another dish Tiki loves is my millet *kheer* that is high on iron and calcium," she says.

Through special nutrition camps, the tribal community is now rediscovering agriculture, natural resource management, and nutrition.

15. Model for present day education of tribal people - Marlavai Training Centre



Marlavai village in Jainoor mandal of Adilabad district was not this sleepy when Austrian anthropologist Christoph von Furer-Haimendorf was at work during the decade of 1940.

He had launched his pioneering experiment in education of tribal people at this village.

This experiment, christened **Gond Education Scheme in Adilabad district**, was the first concrete step in tribal education in the then State of Hyderabad in 1943.

The scheme eventually became the model on which the present day education of tribal people in Andhra Pradesh is designed.

“Literacy is indispensable as the first step towards enabling tribal people to operate within the orbit of advanced communities,” the legendary researcher notes in his book ‘Tribes of India – The Struggle for Survival’.

He founded the Marlavai Training Centre (MTC) to **produce teachers who can teach in Gondi dialect** and others to work in Revenue and Forest Departments.

The MTC had a humble beginning with just five semi-literate Gonds as students. They underwent training as per the Gondi primers and readers composed in Devanagari script by Prof. Haimendorf himself.

In 1946, the government opened 30 primary schools where the teachers from MTC began teaching. In another three years, the number of primary schools reached 90, signifying the success of the Gond Education Scheme.

The Centre also produced five village officers, one Revenue inspector, five clerks and seven forest guards.

The excellent progress came to a naught in later years which became a cause of worry for Haimendorf. He makes a mention of this in ‘Tribes of India’ apparently piqued at the negative development as Marlavai produced only 11 literates until 1979 though the first primary school was started here in 1945.

16. Traditional healing practice and folk medicines used by Mishing community of North East India



Assam and Arunachal Pradesh have very rich tradition of herbal medicines used in the treatment of various ailments. Tribal communities practice different types of traditional healing practices. Enough documentation is available on the healing practices in other tribal communities except Mishing community of Assam and foot hill of East Siang district of Arunachal Pradesh hence the attempt was made for the same. A survey on folk medicinal plants and folk healers of Mishing tribe was conducted in few places of Lakhimpur and Dhemaji district of Assam and East Siang district of Arunachal Pradesh, where this ethnic group is living since time immemorial. All information was collected based on interview and field studies with local healers within the community. The identification of medicinal plants collected with help of indigenous healers was done. Such medicines have been shown to have significant healing power, either in their natural state or as the source of new products processed by them. This study is mainly concentrated with plants used to cure diseases and to enquire about different healing systems.

The traditional medical practitioner or traditional healer can be defined as “someone who is recognized by the community in which he lives as competent

to provide health care by using vegetable, animal and mineral substances and certain other methods based on the social, cultural and religious backgrounds as well as the prevailing knowledge, attitudes and beliefs regarding physical, mental and social well-being and the causation of disease and disability in the community". Traditional healers used different medicinal formulas from various natural substances (animal, mineral and vegetable). They have extensive knowledge on the use of plants and herbs for medicinal and nutritional purposes.

The Mishings are an ethnic group inhabiting the districts of Dhemaji, North Lakhimpur, Sonitpur, Tinsukia, Dibrugarh, Sibsagar, Jorhat and Golaghat of Assam. A few live in and around Pasighat of East Siang district of Arunachal Pradesh. They are the second largest tribal group in North-East India, followed by the Bodos. Their chief festival is Ali-Aye-Ligang, in the month of February, which marks the beginning of the sowing season.

Moreover, due to their affinity towards living close to river banks brings about Malaria and water-borne diseases and they developed traditional healing practices to protect themselves from different diseases and traditional healing practices of those days are still preferred by the people of this community in this modern era. Details of medicinal plants used in India were reported and records on Folk medicines used by Mishing tribes is lesser known. However, tribal communities in Arunachal Pradesh, resembling Mishings i.e. Adi, Apatani and Nyishi also use locally available herbs for treatment of ailments. Traditional healing practices amongst Mishing tribes is the method to treat ailments by using herbs in form of fresh drug, crushed juice, decoction of drug part and powdered medicine for oral intake and paste for local application on skin diseases and wounds. They use locally available medicinal herbs, cultivated drugs from different habitat as well as cultivating depleting medicinal plants, They have also faith on divines and worships for cure of ailments. The study reveals detailed documentation of healing practices used by traditional healers for their community health with full faith and confidence. Malaria and jaundice being the prominent diseases in North East India are widely treated by traditional healers and 68 herbs have been recorded treating malaria and about 88 for treating jaundice.

Traditional healing practice of Mishing community

Mishing community is one of the major tribal communities which are distributed from Arunachal Pradesh to plains of Assam and bifurcated from time to time

due to their migration from hills of Arunachal Pradesh to plains of Assam. During this migration they developed their knowledge by acquiring from other nearby communities and used herbs available in and around their villages for various treatments of ailments. As per information given on system it was found that long back the responsible persons in the villages was village head called Gaon Burha in Arunachal Mishng but during these interactions more than 3 persons belonging to same or different family are involved in healing practices by developing some cultivation of herbs used in their practices and not naturally occurring in the nearby areas just like *Aloe barbadensis*, *Barleria cristata*, *Glycyrrhiza glabra* etc. Under healing practices of Mishng community general herbalist, bone setters, *Ojhas* related with *Bhoot Badha*, *Dondai* using *Mantra Tantra* etc. the herbalists and their specialization described in . Some common type of treatment like cuts and wound, sprain and skin diseases where external application is involved is practiced by all those who get affected immediately. Use of certain herbs like *Centella asiatica*, *Houttuynia cordata*, *Phyllanthus emblica* and *Terminalia citrina* is in common practice as protective medicine and is commonly sold in vegetable shops.

Ethno medicinal plants used by Mishng Community

The ethno medicinal information regarding treatment of different diseases collected in course of field study is presented here in tabular form for easy reference.

The study shows that Malaria, Jaundice and female menstruation problems are the prominent diseases in this community as most of the traditional healers are prescribed medicine for these treatments.

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

The description of all above mentioned plants are on the basis of ethno medicinal knowledge. Plants are used by Mishng community in different places on the basis of availability of those plants and the proper knowledge about efficacy of those plants against the particular disease. For safe uses of different medicinal plants, we need randomised clinical trials for some of the manual therapies and further research is need to ascertain the efficacy and safety of several other practices and medicinal plants. We have to develop a proper study about the traditional medicine and the ratio of curative measurement applied to different

patients on the use of those plants. The study on such types of documentation is of great importance for North Eastern Institute of Folk Medicine in the sense that the Institute will get sufficient information on traditional healers and mode administration of medicine for treating ailments on one hand and sufficient tool for proving authenticity of drugs used in healing practice through pharmacology, phytochemistry and other pharmaceutical constants. Similarly services of these traditional healers are of great importance to public as they are rendering their services to public in very remote places where people are really in need of health services. These traditional healers need to be involved in all sorts of trainings to youngsters as well as refreshing their knowledge with healers of other communities. Though they are acquiring and correlating their knowledge with established records and information available with other communities. Involving cultivating and using *Aloe barbadensis* and *Glycyrrhiza glabra* is the example and availability of drugs from other climatic zones in the Crude drugs markets of major markets in Assam strengthen the concept of exchanging knowledge with other communities.

The role of government for the existence of this system of medicine should be: 1. To give due recognition to their contribution and involvement; 2. To delineate the specific scope, limit and role of traditional healers in public health promotion; 3. To undertake research and development activities; 4. To provide orientation and support to folk-healers; 5. To monitor and strengthen the role of folk-healers and to do proper follow up.

17. Atrocities against tribals increased by 25% in Madhya Pradesh



Tribal and human rights activists feel that a sudden spurt in cases of outrage and harassment of tribals was reported in 2020 since many tribals, who worked as migrant labourers, returned to MP during the Covid-induced nation-wide lockdown.

Madhya Pradesh recorded 2,401 cases of atrocities against tribals in 2020, which was 25% more than 2019. The state was ahead of Rajasthan's 1,878 cases by some margin, as per National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) 2020 report. The state also recorded the most rapes of tribal women in the same period.

In 2019, 1,922 cases of crime against tribals were registered in the state under SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act. MP has the highest tribal population in India and it has been registering most cases of atrocities against the tribal population for the past five years.

Tribal and human rights activists feel that a sudden spurt in cases of outrage and harassment of tribals was reported in 2020 since many tribals, who worked as migrant labourers, returned to MP during the Covid-induced nation-wide lockdown.

“The condition of scheduled caste and tribes remains the same in rural MP since Independence. Several of these people live as migrant labourers in different states and they were harassed on their return to MP during the lockdown, when many were forced to work as farm labourers without wages,” said Madhuri, a human rights activist, working in MP for the past two decades.

Jai Adiwasi Yuva Sangathan alleged the state government had been suppressing the voice of tribals and the NCRB data revealed the reality of their situation.

“The state government is not ready to accept the fact that the tribal people are in danger but the data revealed the reality. Tribals are feeling unsafe in MP due to the rise in crime against them. They are being thrashed for land and also being harassed by false cases lodged against them. The recent incident in Khargone, where police thrashed a tribal to force him to confess to a robbery, is a routine way of torturing tribals,” said Dr Anand Rai, spokesperson JAYS.

The opposition also attacked the BJP-led state government over an increase in the number of cases of atrocities against tribals.

MP Congress committee president Kamal Nath said, “This data is nothing but a report card of 16 years of development plan of chief minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan. During the BJP-led state government’s tenure, the cases of atrocities against tribals, Dalits and women have increased by many folds. The morale of anti-social elements and criminals is high and they do not fear the law.”

However, home minister Narottam Mishra said, “The data only shows that police records every case in MP and every person gets justice in the state. Now, we are coming with the Gangster Act to curb crime against tribals, scheduled caste, women and poor people.”

Recently, cases of atrocities against tribals in MP made headlines. A 40-year-old tribal man named Kanhaiyalal Bheel was beaten and dragged after he was tied to a vehicle in Neemuch by eight men on the suspicion of theft last month. The man died at a hospital.

18. Supreme Court seeks foolproof norms to identify Scheduled Tribes



The Supreme Court wants to fix foolproof parameters to determine if a person belongs to a Scheduled Tribe and is entitled to the benefits due to the community as it is no longer sure about an “affinity test”.

Affinity Test

- Affinity Test is used to shift through anthropological and ethnological traits to link a person to a tribe.
- There is the likelihood that contact with other cultures, migration and modernization would have erased the traditional characteristics of a tribe.
- The claim by an applicant that he is a part of a Scheduled Tribe and is entitled to the benefit extended to that tribe, cannot per se be disregarded on the ground that his present traits do not match his tribes.
- These include peculiar anthropological and ethnological traits, deity, rituals, mode of marriage, death ceremonies, method of burial of dead bodies etc.
- Worship is an integral part of the life of a community and tribes have specific modes which need to be ascertained by the officers who decide the claims (for ST status).

Who are the Scheduled Tribes?

- The term ‘Scheduled Tribes’ first appeared in the Constitution of India.
- Article 366 (25) defined scheduled tribes as “such tribes or tribal communities or parts of or groups within such tribes or tribal communities as are deemed under Article 342 to be Scheduled Tribes for the purposes of this constitution”.
- Article 342, which is reproduced below, prescribes procedure to be followed in the matter of specification of scheduled tribes.

- The first specification of Scheduled Tribes in relation to a particular State/ Union Territory is by a notified order of the President, after consultation with the State governments concerned.
- These orders can be modified subsequently only through an Act of Parliament.
- The above Article also provides for listing of scheduled tribes State/Union Territory wise and not on an all India basis.

What did the Supreme Court say?

- It has been considered it best to refer the question of fixing the parameters to a larger Bench.
- The Bench emphasized that the issue was a “matter of importance” when it came to the issuance of caste certificates.
- The affinity test may be used to corroborate the documentary evidence and should not be the sole criteria to reject a claim the apex court had warned.

Why discuss this?

- The Supreme Court has decided to refer the question to a larger Bench for an authoritative decision.
- It realised that the courts were faced with varied opinions about the efficacy of the affinity test.

Status of STs in India

- The Census 2011 has revealed that there are said to be 705 ethnic groups notified as Scheduled Tribes (STs).
- Over 10 crore Indians are notified as STs, of which 1.04 crore live in urban areas.
- The STs constitute 8.6% of the population and 11.3% of the rural population.

Precursor to this Judgements

- On one side, a full Bench of the Bombay High Court in *Shilpa Vishnu Thakur v State of Maharashtra* accepted the “relevance and importance of the affinity test”.
- The full Bench, in a decision in 2009, held that the affinity test was an “integral part” of the verification process for caste certificates.

- Scrutiny committees could easily determine the authenticity of a claim by running an affinity test on the basis of ethnicity and anthropology.
- The HC had said that the term 'affinity' meant the 'association' of the applicant for a caste certificate with a Scheduled Tribe into which he or she has been born.
- However, two years later, in 2011, the Supreme Court adopted a cautionary note. It indicated that the affinity test may have run its course.