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PAPER -1

PHYSICAL & ARCHAEOLOGICAL ANTHROPOLOGY

1. Medieval mass burial shows centuries-earlier origin of Ashkenazi genetic bottleneck



In 2004, construction workers in Norwich, UK, unearthed human skeletal remains that led to a historical mystery – at least 17 bodies at the bottom of a medieval well. Using archeological records, historical documents, and ancient DNA, British researchers have now identified the individuals to be a group of Ashkenazi Jews who may have fallen victim to antisemitic violence during the 12th century. Their findings, presented on August 30 in the journal *Current Biology*, shed new light on Jewish medical history in Europe.

“It’s been over 12 years since we started looking into who these people are, and the technology finally caught up with our ambition,” says evolutionary geneticist and corresponding author Ian Barnes of the Natural History Museum, London. “Our main job was to establish the identity of those individuals at the ethnic level.” The deceased individuals were found to carry some genetic disorders, for which modern-day Ashkenazi Jewish populations are at higher risk. Genetic disorders that are particularly common in certain populations can arise during

bottleneck events, where a rapid reduction of population can lead to big jumps in the number of people carrying otherwise rare genetic mutations.

Using computer simulations, the team showed that the number of such disease mutations in the remains was similar to what they would expect if the diseases were as common then as they are now in Ashkenazi Jews. The results point to a bottleneck event that shaped the modern-day Ashkenazi Jewish population prior to the 12th century, earlier than previous beliefs, which dated the event about 500 to 700 years ago. Unlike other mass burial sites, where bodies were laid in an organized fashion, skeletons from this well were oddly positioned and mixed, most likely because they were deposited head first shortly after death.

Archeological investigations reported six adults and 11 children at the unusual burial location. Together, these findings hint at mass fatalities such as famine, disease, or murder. Radiocarbon dating of the remains placed their deaths around the late 12th to early 13th century – a period with well-documented outbreaks of antisemitic violence in England – leading researchers to consider foul play.

To piece together the individuals' past lives, the team dug into the DNA of six skeletons from the well by using new technology that decodes millions of DNA fragments at once.

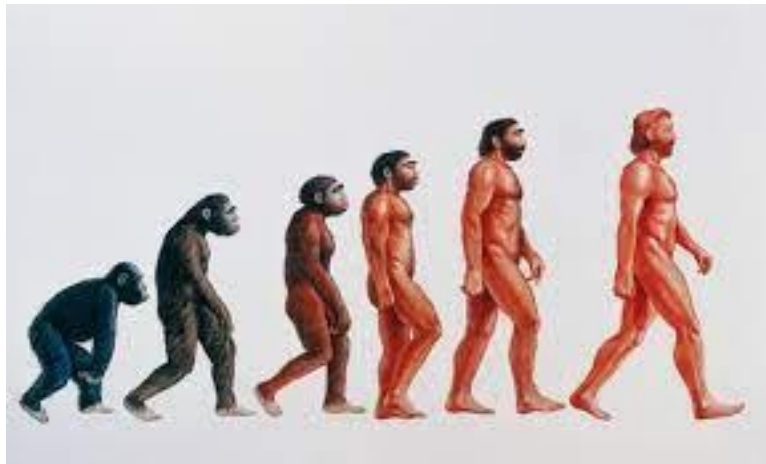
The results showed that the individuals were almost certainly Ashkenazi Jews. Among them, four were closely related, including three full-sibling sisters – a 5- to 10-year-old, a 10- to 15-year-old, and a young adult. DNA analysis also inferred the physical traits of a 0- to 3-year-old boy to include blue eyes and red hair, the latter a feature associated with historical stereotypes of European Jews.

“It was quite surprising that the initially unidentified remains filled the historical gap about when certain Jewish communities first formed and the origins of some genetic disorders,” says evolutionary geneticist and coauthor Mark Thomas of the University College London. “Nobody had analyzed Jewish ancient DNA before because of prohibitions on the disturbance of Jewish graves. However, we did not know this until after doing the genetic analyses.”

After learning the identity of the remains, the local community arranged a formal Jewish burial for the individuals. Barnes and Thomas say that they still don't know what directly caused the 17 individuals' demise, and it's a puzzle that ancient DNA can't solve. However, working with local historians, archeologists,

and the community, the researchers offered new insights into historical violence and the origins of the Ashkenazi Jewish population. "When you study ancient DNA from people who've died hundreds to thousands of years ago, you don't often get to work with a living community at the same time," says Barnes. "It's been really satisfying to work with this community on a story that's so important to them."

2. Human anatomy is evolving at fastest rate for centuries as wisdom teeth vanish and people grow new arteries



BABIES are being born without wisdom teeth as humans evolve faster than at any time in the past 250 years, says a new study. Shorter faces, extra leg and foot bones and a new artery in the forearm are also signs our bodies are changing. It poses no health risk - and even offers benefits by boosting blood supply. It can also be used as a replacement in surgical procedures in other parts of the body.

Dr Lucas said: "Since the 18th century, anatomists have been studying the prevalence of this artery in adults and our study shows it is clearly increasing. "If this trend continues, a majority of people will have median artery of the forearm by 2100." The researchers investigated the rate of retainment in each generation by analysing published records and dissecting cadavers from individuals born in the 20th century.



Senior author Professor Maciej Henneberg said: "This is 'micro evolution' in modern humans. "The median artery is a perfect example of how we are still evolving because people born more recently have a higher prevalence of this artery when compared to humans from previous generations." Other examples of human anatomy changing over time include the increasing absence of wisdom teeth. Dr Lucas said: "As our faces are getting a lot shorter there is not as much room for teeth because of smaller jaws. "This is happening in time as we have learnt to use fire and process foods more. A lot of people are just being born without wisdom teeth."

The study also identified more cases of spina bifida occulta - an opening of the sacral canal which is the bone at the base of the spine. Dr Lucas added: "We are also finding a lot of people have extra joints in the feet - abnormal connections between two or more bones. "There are also more being born with a small bone at the back of the knee called the fabella. None of these things can harm you." At the start of the millennium, the widely held belief human evolution halted before the reign of the pharaohs. But recent research has suggested genetic change has occurred 100 times quicker in the past 5,000 years than any other period.

3. Study shows role of pathogens in shaping human evolution

Every human cell harbors its own defenses against microbial invaders, relying on strategies that date back to some of the earliest events in the history of life, researchers report. Because this "cell-autonomous immunity" is so ancient and persistent, understanding it is essential to understanding human evolution and human medicine, the researchers said.

Like amoebae, most human cells can transform themselves to engulf and degrade foreign agents in a process known as phagocytosis, said Jessica Brinkworth, a professor of anthropology at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign who wrote the new report with former undergraduate student Alexander Alvarado. And the methods that human cells use to detect, pierce or hack up invading microbes are inherited from - and shared by - bacteria and viruses, she said. The authors reject the notion that the immune system is distinct from other bodily systems. "Immunity is literally everywhere," Brinkworth said.

"The whole of the organism, from the skin down to the level of the last enzyme floating anywhere in the body, almost all of it is engaged in protection in one form or another." For that reason, she suggests that medical approaches to fighting infection that try to tamp down evolutionarily conserved immune responses such as pro-inflammatory pathways are misguided. While it can be useful or necessary to use immune suppressing drugs against autoimmune conditions or in the case of organ transplants, such drugs do not appear to work against severe microbial infections.

"In the context of severe infections, there have been many attempts to come up with ways of reducing the immune response by throwing a bunch of steroids at it or blocking the body's ability to detect the pathogen," Brinkworth said. "But targeting these immune mechanisms that have been around for millions of years is potentially counterproductive." In the case of sepsis, which Brinkworth studies, this approach has not been fruitful. "More than 100 trials of immunomodulatory approaches to sepsis have failed," she said. "And the one drug that made it to market then failed.

Most of these drugs tried to block highly evolutionarily conserved defenses, like mechanisms of cell autonomous immunity." Many immunomodulatory drugs now being tested against the new coronavirus are failed sepsis drugs, she said. Similarly, anthropologists often fail to consider how millions of years of battle against infections at the cellular level have shaped human genetics, physiology and even behavior, Brinkworth said. "If you're talking about human evolution, if you're in any physiological system, you're going to have to address at some point how pathogens have shaped it," she said.

4. The Class of Taxila how Mortimer Wheeler set up the first Indian archaeology school



In 'Archeology and the public purpose', Nayanjot Lahiri writes on the gap between govt departments & universities bridged by The Taxila School of Archaeology. Following the Great Depression of the 1930s, the ASI had reached an unusually low ebb. Archaeological work was not being carried out through any sustained policy, nor were defects in the technical training of its cadres being addressed. The personnel pool had shrunk alarmingly because of a retrenchment policy that had resulted in the organization being surgically and unwisely pared. In the junior ranks, for instance, the Survey was so inadequately staffed that no trained succession to the senior posts could be guaranteed. There were, in fact, a mere three junior officers as against eleven senior posts that had to be filled in the early 1940s.

These were highlighted in a 1938 report penned by the British archaeologist Leonard Woolley, who had come to India on the invitation of the Indian government. It was he who apparently advised the government to appoint for a limited term a director general or advisor who was not an ASI man so that problems could be addressed with a disinterested eye. Accepting his advice, Mortimer Wheeler was appointed in 1944. Among the first deficiencies that Wheeler decided to address was the scarcity of junior archaeological staff and inadequate archaeological training. He proposed to set up a field training school in Taxila.

The most promising students, as he knew, were those at universities; the director general made a determined bid to identify suitable scholars there and

eventually employ them. With that in mind, earlier that year, he made an urgent appeal to nineteen university vice chancellors, for the recruitment of young university graduates for organized research and training in Indian archaeology. Wheeler also had a clear sense that if the study of India's heritage was to advance, one necessary condition would be the extension of research from a government department to the corridors of universities, from the monopoly of the civil servant to the free initiative of the educated public.

When he prepared a note a little later for the Standing Committee of the Indian Legislature on Education, he did not mince his words in describing the state of research in universities. The extract from that note reproduced here not only reveals Wheeler's intellectual clarity on this matter but also underlines that contrary to public perception that bureaucrats are obsequious by conviction if not compulsion, there have been government officers who have addressed legislators in a brutally frank way: You, gentlemen, are the Standing Committee on Education. I venture to ask you: Where in India today is there a university institute, even a university department, properly staffed and equipped to interpret, in humanistic and scientific terms, this unsurpassed inheritance? The answer is, Nowhere.



I take off my hat to one or two of your universities – Calcutta, Benara – for their earnest cries in the wilderness. But my answer remains the same. Occasionally in Ph.D. theses – but very rare – I find a faint and usually sentimental consciousness that this great inheritance exists; but nowhere do I detect any persevering attempt to understand it, in the only sense in which the word understanding can today be used. For it cannot be too often stressed that a great

building or an ancient city are not merely centres of sentimental pilgrimage; they are, above all, sources of knowledge and of inspiration. That is what I mean by understanding.

I would emphasise that this gap in our educational system is not merely a gap in a branch of research which concerns only a few misguided experts. It is a fundamental gap in the ordinary liberal education of the ordinary man and woman. But research remains in the foreground of the picture. Research, and a high standard of research, is a basic necessity in this as in all educational subjects. It is unnecessary for me to remind you, gentlemen, that, without a high standard of research at the back of it all, even the most general education will fall short of its goal. You and I may not be able to afford a Rolls Royce car; but it is the research and endeavour implied by the Rolls Royce that, more than anything, maintains the standard of the less intricate piece of machinery with which most of us have to be content.

The research carried out by the specialist is, or should be, directly reflected downwards to the educational standard even of the secondary school. In other words, the maintenance and interpretation of our material cultural heritage is not merely a sort of private perquisite of my Department. The work of the Survey can only become effective if it is based upon and backed by an informal public opinion. And an informed public opinion can only be created by effort from the top, from our Legislature and from our universities. Clearly, Wheeler took the system to task for removing heritage from the minds of Indians, a crime which, he believed, was as bad as a physical destruction of the country's heritage.

That is why, at the training school, he ensured access for all those in India who were involved in or who might be interested in archaeology: ASI staff, students, staff from Indian universities, museum men, and those from the archaeological departments of the princely states. Soon after Wheeler issued his appeal to the vice chancellors, there was a swift response, one whose scale took him by surprise. Some thirty years later, in his memoir, *My Archaeological Mission to India and Pakistan*, he recounted his reaction. Its warmth remains undimmed by the passage of time: The response was to me astonishing alike in quantity and quality and was almost instant.

Within a few weeks more than sixty young graduates had assembled from all directions amidst the inviting facilities of Taxila and quickly settled down in an assortment of tents and huts prepared for their reception in accordance with traditional needs and usages. It might indeed be fair to claim that this was the

last occasion in modern India when representatives of such a multiplicity of castes and other social variations voluntarily came together so earnestly on one spot with so unified an aim and fraught with so patent a sense of mutual good will. Such was 'The Taxila School of Archaeology, 1944', a tiny academic episode which those of us who shared in it like to remember with a certain pride and pleasure that may, in passing, be found worthy, perhaps, of the present casual but affectionate memorial. It was at least the first organized phase of a new Indo-Pakistan archaeology and the environment was a happy one.

Wheeler had chosen Taxila because of the richness of its sites and its excellent museum, as also its amenities for housing trainees. The reference to Pakistan, though, is somewhat surprising since its creation in 1944 was some years away. However, one can understand why Wheeler wove its shadow into his retrospective narrative. For one, the students who trained at Taxila would go on to hold important archaeological positions in India and Pakistan. For another, from 1947 onwards, he would be actively involved in the partitioning of archaeological assets and in ensuring the safe passage of archaeological staff and their families across the newly created borders.

If the teacher remembered the many social and geographical backgrounds of the Taxila students, an entertaining account, also about the culturally diverse people there, would be penned by a student. Braj Basi Lal had, as a twenty-three-year-old, attended the Taxila camp in 1944 and this is what he wrote more than sixty years later: A mess was being run for the trainees and Shri Mangat Rai was in-charge of it. He, being a Punjabi, gave preference to Punjabi food, little bothering about the taste of students from other parts of the country. The Bengalis termed his chapathis (breads) as 'card-board cakes', while the South Indian students very much missed their idlis, baras and sambhar. Referring to the trainees from South India, I am reminded of a very interesting episode.

Taxila is usually cold and surely cold enough for persons hailing from South India. To cap it all, in January it became exceedingly cold to the extent that one night it even snowed (such a thing, we were told, had not happened for the past three-four decades). Next morning, we found the excavated trenches full of snow and thus it was almost impossible to work. Amongst the trainees there was Shri Anujan Achan, a member of the Archaeological Department in Kerala. Having never seen a snow-fall, he was so excited about it that he collected a handful of snow and put it in the pocket of his overcoat. Just then the boss happened to come there. Noting what Achan was doing, the boss told him to

make a parcel of the snow that he had put in his pocket and send it to his home for the family to have a look at it.

The 'boss' was Wheeler and Lal wondered whether his remark was mere sarcasm or just a piece of innocent humour. Wheeler did have a habit of poking fun at his students and Lal himself had been at the receiving end on the very day that he first met him at Taxila. Wheeler had summoned him to his office where, while cross-examining him, he asked – since the young man was a student of Sanskrit, with no background of archaeology – whether he had come to Taxila to 'recite the Vedas'! Surely M.N. Deshpande would have had a similar Wheeler experience since, like Lal, he too was a scholar of languages.

5. Researchers Sequence Genome of Neanderthal Woman from Chagyrskaya Cave



Neanderthals and Denisovans are the closest evolutionary relatives of modern humans. Analyses of their genomes showed that they contributed genetically to present-day people outside sub-Saharan Africa. However, the genomes of only two Neanderthals and one Denisovan have been sequenced to high quality. One of these Neanderthal genomes was from an individual (Vindija 33) found in Vindija Cave in Croatia, whereas the other Neanderthal genome (Denisova 5 or the Altai Neanderthal) and the Denisovan genome (Denisova 3) both came from specimens discovered in Denisova Cave in the Altai Mountains.

In the new research, Dr. Fabrizio Mafessoni from the Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology and colleagues sequenced the genome from a Neanderthal phalanx (Chagyrskaya 8) found in 2011 at Chagyrskaya Cave, which is located about 100 km away from Denisova Cave. The researchers found that Chagyrskaya 8 lived 80,000 years ago, about 30,000 years after the Denisova 5 Neanderthal and 30,000 years before the Vindija 33 Neanderthal.

They also found that the Chagyrskaya Neanderthal was a female and that she was more closely related to Vindija 33 and other Neanderthals in western Eurasia than to Denisova 5 who lived earlier in the Altai Mountains.

“Chagyrskaya 8 is thus related to Neanderthal populations that moved east sometime between 120,000 and 80,000 years ago,” they said. “Interestingly, the artifacts found in Chagyrskaya Cave show similarities to artifact collections in central and eastern Europe, suggesting that Neanderthal populations coming from western Eurasia to Siberia may have brought their material culture with them.”

“Some of these incoming Neanderthals encountered local Denisovan populations, as shown by Denisova 11, who had a Denisovan father and a Neanderthal mother related to the population in which Chagyrskaya 8 lived.” From the variation in the genome, the authors estimated that Chagyrskaya 8 and other Siberian Neanderthals lived in relatively isolated populations of less than 60 individuals.



In contrast, a Neanderthal from Europe, a Denisovan from the Altai Mountains, and ancient modern humans seem to have lived in populations of larger sizes. When the team analyzed the Chagyrskaya 8 genome together with two previously sequenced Neanderthal genomes, they found that genes expressed in

a part of the brain called striatum may have changed especially much, suggesting that the striatum may have evolved unique functions in Neanderthals.

We found that genes expressed in the striatum during adolescence showed more changes that altered the resulting amino acid when compared to other areas of the brain," Dr. Mafessoni said. "The results suggest that the striatum – a part of the brain which coordinates various aspects of cognition, including planning, decision-making, motivation and reward perception – may have played a unique role in Neanderthals."

6. When Did We Become Fully Human? What Fossils and DNA Tell Us About the Evolution of Modern Intelligence

When did something like us first appear on the planet? It turns out there's remarkably little agreement on this question. Fossils and DNA suggest people looking like us, anatomically modern Homo sapiens, evolved around 300,000 years ago. Surprisingly, archaeology – tools, artifacts, cave art – suggest that complex technology and cultures, "behavioral modernity," evolved more recently: 50,000 to 65,000 years ago. Some scientists interpret this as suggesting the earliest Homo sapiens weren't entirely modern. Yet the different data tracks different things. Skulls and genes tell us about brains, artifacts about culture. Our brains probably became modern before our cultures.

The "Great Leap" For 200,000 to 300,000 years after Homo sapiens first appeared, tools and artifacts remained surprisingly simple, little better than Neanderthal technology, and simpler than those of modern hunter-gatherers such as certain indigenous Americans. Starting about 65,000 to 50,000 years ago, more advanced technology started appearing: complex projectile weapons such as bows and spear-throwers, fishhooks, ceramics, sewing needles. People made representational art – cave paintings of horses, ivory goddesses, lion-headed idols, showing artistic flair and imagination. A bird-bone flute hints at music. Meanwhile, arrival of humans in Australia 65,000 years ago shows we'd mastered seafaring. This sudden flourishing of technology is called the "great leap forward," supposedly reflecting the evolution of a fully modern human brain. But fossils and DNA suggest that human intelligence became modern far earlier.

Anatomical Modernity Bones of primitive Homo sapiens first appear 300,000 years ago in Africa, with brains as large or larger than ours. They're followed by anatomically modern Homo sapiens at least 200,000 years ago, and brain shape became essentially modern by at least 100,000 years ago. At this point, humans had braincases similar in size and shape to ours. Assuming the brain was as modern as the box that held it, our African ancestors theoretically could have discovered relativity, built space telescopes, written novels and love songs. Their bones say they were just as human as we are. Because the fossil record is so patchy, fossils provide only minimum dates.

Human DNA suggests even earlier origins for modernity. Comparing genetic differences between DNA in modern people and ancient Africans, it's estimated that our ancestors lived 260,000 to 350,000 years ago. All living humans descend from those people, suggesting that we inherited the fundamental commonalities of our species, our humanity, from them. All their descendants – Bantu, Berber, Aztec, Aboriginal, Tamil, San, Han, Maori, Inuit, Irish – share certain peculiar behaviors absent in other great apes. All human cultures form long-term pair bonds between men and women to care for children. We sing and dance. We make art. We preen our hair, adorn our bodies with ornaments, tattoos and makeup. We craft shelters.

We wield fire and complex tools. We form large, multigenerational social groups with dozens to thousands of people. We cooperate to wage war and help each other. We teach, tell stories, trade. We have morals, laws. We contemplate the stars, our place in the cosmos, life's meaning, what follows death. The details of our tools, fashions, families, morals and mythologies vary from tribe to tribe and culture to culture, but all living humans show these behaviors.

That suggests these behaviors – or at least, the capacity for them – are innate. These shared behaviors unite all people. They're the human condition, what it means to be human, and they result from shared ancestry. We inherited our humanity from peoples in southern Africa 300,000 years ago. The alternative – that everyone, everywhere coincidentally became fully human in the same way at the same time,

starting 65,000 years ago – isn't impossible, but a single origin is more likely. **The Network Effect** Archaeology and biology may seem to disagree, but they actually tell different parts of the human story.

Bones and DNA tell us about brain evolution, our hardware. Tools reflect brainpower, but also culture, our hardware and software. Just as you can upgrade your old computer's operating system, culture can evolve even if intelligence doesn't. Humans in ancient times lacked smartphones and spaceflight, but we know from studying philosophers such as Buddha and Aristotle that they were just as clever. Our brains didn't change, our culture did. That creates a puzzle. If Pleistocene hunter-gatherers were as smart as us, why did culture remain so primitive for so long? Why did we need hundreds of millennia to invent bows, sewing needles, boats? And what changed? Probably several things.

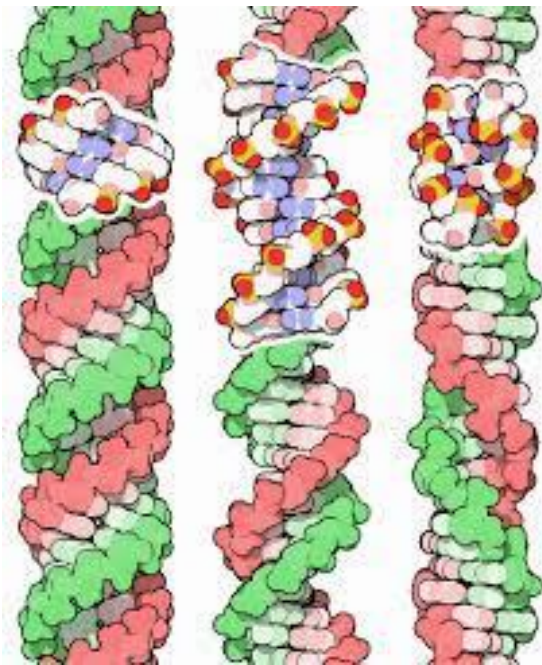
First, we journeyed out of Africa, occupying more of the planet. There were then simply more humans to invent, increasing the odds of a prehistoric Steve Jobs or Leonardo da Vinci. We also faced new environments in the Middle East, the Arctic, India, Indonesia, with unique climates, foods and dangers, including other human species. Survival demanded innovation. Many of these new lands were far more habitable than the Kalahari or the Congo. Climates were milder, but Homo sapiens also left behind African diseases and parasites. That let tribes grow larger, and larger tribes meant more heads to innovate and remember ideas, more manpower, and better ability to specialize.

Population drove innovation. This triggered feedback cycles. As new technologies appeared and spread – better weapons, clothing, shelters – human numbers could increase further, accelerating cultural evolution again. Numbers drove culture, culture increased numbers, accelerating cultural evolution, on and on, ultimately pushing human populations to outstrip their ecosystems, devastating the megafauna and forcing the evolution of farming. Finally, agriculture caused an explosive population increase, culminating in civilizations of millions of people. Now, cultural evolution kicked into hyperdrive. Artifacts reflect culture, and cultural complexity is an emergent property. That is, it's not just individual-level intelligence that makes cultures sophisticated, but interactions between individuals in groups, and between groups.

Like networking millions of processors to make a supercomputer, we increased cultural complexity by increasing the number of people and the links between them. So our societies and world evolved rapidly in the past 300,000 years, while

our brains evolved slowly. We expanded our numbers to almost eight billion, spread across the globe, reshaped the planet. We did it not by adapting our brains but by changing our cultures. And much of the difference between our ancient, simple hunter-gatherer societies and modern societies just reflects the fact that there are lots more of us and more connections between us.

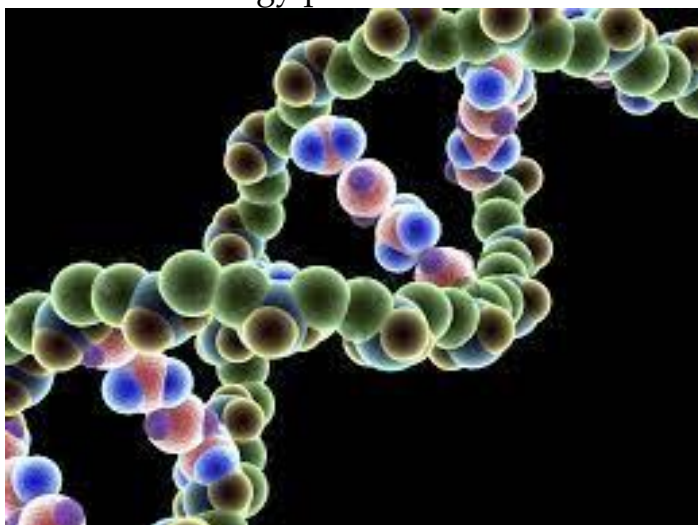
7. Genetic code evolution and Darwin's evolution theory should consider DNA an 'energy code'



'Survival of the fittest' phenomenon is only part of the evolution equation. The iconic genetic code can be viewed as an "energy code" that evolved by following the laws of thermodynamics (flow of energy), causing its evolution to culminate in a nearly singular code for all living species, according to the Rutgers co-authored study in the journal *Quarterly Reviews of Biophysics*.

"These revelations matter because they provide entirely new ways of analyzing the human genome and the genome of any living species, the blueprints of life," said senior author Kenneth J. Breslauer, Linus C. Pauling Distinguished University Professor in the Department of Chemistry and Chemical Biology in the School of Arts and Sciences at Rutgers University New Brunswick. He is also affiliated with the Rutgers Cancer Institute of New Jersey. "The origins of the evolution of the DNA genetic code and the evolution of all living species are

embedded in the different energy profiles of their molecular DNA blueprints.



Under the influence of the laws of thermodynamics, this energy code evolved, out of an astronomical number of alternative possibilities, into a nearly singular code across all living species." Scientists investigated this so-called "universal enigma," probing the origins of the astounding observation that the genetic code evolved into a nearly uniform blueprint that arose from trillions of possibilities.

The scientists expanded the underpinnings of the landmark "survival of the fittest" Darwinian evolutionary theory to include "molecular Darwinism." Darwin's revolutionary theory is based on the generational persistence of a species' physical features that allow it to survive in a given environment through "natural selection." Molecular Darwinism refers to physical characteristics that persist through generations because the regions of the molecular DNA that code for those traits are unusually stable.

Different DNA regions can exhibit differential energy signatures that may favor physical structures in organisms that enable specific biological functions, Breslauer said. Next steps include recasting and mapping the human genome chemical sequence into an "energy genome," so DNA regions with different energy stabilities can be correlated with physical structures and biological functions.

That would enable better selection of DNA targets for molecular-based therapeutics. Jens Völker, an associate research professor in Rutgers-New Brunswick's Department of Chemistry and Chemical Biology, co-authored the study, along with first author Horst H. Klump at the University of Cape Town.

SOCIO – CULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY

1. Why Do We Keep Using the Word “Caucasian”?

The word “Caucasian” is used in the U.S. to describe white people, but it doesn’t indicate anything real. It’s the wrong term to use! My colleague and one of my longtime writing partners, Carol Mukhopadhyay, has written a wonderful article, “Getting Rid of the Word ‘Caucasian,’” that is still relevant today for how it challenges us to critically examine the language that we use. It’s obvious that language shapes how we perceive and see the world. And we know how powerful the concept of race is and how the use of words related to the notion of race has shaped what we call the U.S. racial worldview. So why do we continue using the word “Caucasian”? To answer that question, it is helpful to understand where the term came from and its impact on our society.

The term “Caucasian” originated from a growing 18th-century European science of racial classification. German anatomist Johann Blumenbach visited the Caucasus Mountains, located between the Caspian and Black seas, and he must have been enchanted because he labeled the people there “Caucasians” and proposed that they were created in God’s image as an ideal form of humanity. And the label has stuck to this day. According to Mukhopadhyay, Blumenbach went on to name four other “races,” each considered “physically and morally ‘degenerate’ forms of ‘God’s original creation.’” He categorized Africans, excluding light-skinned North Africans, as “Ethiopians” or “black.” He divided non-Caucasian Asians into two separate races: the “Mongolian” or “yellow” race of Japan and China, and the “Malayan” or “brown” race, which included Aboriginal Australians and Pacific Islanders. And he called Native Americans the “red” race.

Blumenbach’s system of racial classification was adopted in the United States to justify racial discrimination – particularly slavery. Popular race science and evolutionary theories generally posited that there were separate races, that differences in behavior were tied to skin color, and that there were scientific ways to measure race. One way racial differences were defined was through craniometrics, which measured skull size to determine the intelligence of each

racial group. As you can imagine, this flawed application of the scientific method resulted in race scientists developing a flawed system of racial classification that ranked the five races from most primitive (black and brown races), to more advanced (the Asian races), to the most advanced (the white, or Caucasian, races). Even though the five-race topology was later disproven, “Caucasian” still has currency in the U.S.

One reason we keep using the term “Caucasian” is that the U.S. legal system made use of Blumenbach’s taxonomy. As early as 1790 the first naturalization law was passed, preventing foreigners who were not white from becoming citizens. But according to Mukhopadhyay, Blumenbach’s category of “Caucasian” posed a problem because his classification of white also included some North Africans, Armenians, Persians, Arabs, and North Indians. The definition of Caucasian had to be reinvented to focus the ideological category of whiteness on northern and western Europe. The term, even though its exact definition changed over time, was used to shape legal policy and the nature of our society. A second reason the term has had staying power is that, as new immigrants began to stream into the country in the 20th century, political leaders and scientists supported a new racial science called eugenics that built on 19th-century notions of race.

Eugenicists divided Caucasians into four ranked subraces: Nordic, Alpine, Mediterranean, and Jew (Semitic). I’m sure you will not be surprised to learn that the Nordics were ranked highest intellectually and morally. These rankings were used by our government to design and execute discriminatory immigration laws that preserved the political dominance of Nordics, who were largely Protestant Christians. Today, the word “Caucasian” is still used in many official government documents, and it continues to carry a kind of scientific weight. For example, it is found in social science and medical research, and is used by some colleges and universities in their data collection and distribution of student, staff, and faculty statistics.

In Mukhopadhyay’s research, she sampled government websites and official documents and was surprised to learn how many government offices, including the U.S. Census Bureau, still use the word. So “Caucasian” became entrenched in our legal, governmental, scientific, and social lives. And although the U.S. government reluctantly denounced or at least played down racial science after the atrocities of Adolf Hitler’s regime were fully exposed at the end of WWII, the term has not been discarded.

What can we do to change it? We need to acknowledge that the word “Caucasian” is still around and that its continued use is problematic. We should use terms that are more accurate, such as “European-American.” Doing so would at least be consistent with the use of descriptive terms like “African-American,” “Mexican-American,” and others that signify both a geographical and an American ancestry. The bottom line is that it is time for a modern – and accurate – terminology. The use of an outdated and disproven term that falsely purports to describe a separate race of people has no place in the U.S.

2. Polygyny highest among scheduled tribes: NFHS 2019-20



The percentage of polygyny is higher in tribal populations, which increases the percentage of polygyny for those states which have a greater tribal population, such as Meghalaya (6.1%) & Tripura (2%)

According to the latest National Family Health Survey (NFHS) data 2019-20, polygyny (the practice of having more than one wife at a time), though overall reducing, is being noticed in many communities in the country, even though it is legal only for Muslims.

Times of India reported that the prevalence for polygyny among communities stood at-

While the report stated, "In 1955, the Hindu Marriage Act of India prohibited the practice of polygyny. Although India has banned polygyny among Hindus, this practice still exists among some sections of the Hindus and the personal law of Muslims allows such practice."



But data from the report still showed that polygyny among Hindus increased in four states from 2005-06 to 2015-16 and again from 2015-16 to 2019-20 in four different states.

The International Institute of Population Studies in Mumbai did a comparison study on polygyny in the years 2005-06, 2015-16 and 2019-20, stating, "Overall, polygynous marriage was found to be higher among poor, uneducated, rural and older women. It indicated that socio-economic factors also played a role in this form of marriage in addition to region and religion."

The percentage of polygyny is higher in tribal populations, which increases the percentage of polygyny for those states which have a greater tribal population, such as Meghalaya (6.1%) and Tripura (2%). The report said, "Among the districts, the prevalence was high in East Jantia Hills (20%), Kra Daadi (16.4%), West Jaintia Hills (14.5%), and West Khasi Hills (10.9%)."

But it's not just those states, since Bihar, Jharkhand, Odisha, and West Bengal also have higher percentages of polygyny than north Indian states.

There are exceptions too. In states like Chhattisgarh, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, and Tamil Nadu, polygyny is more prevalent in Hindus than in Muslims. TOI said, "no single background characteristic could be attributed as the reason for higher prevalence of polygyny."

According to TOI, the survey showed that Christians had a high polygyny rate, which can be attributed to polygyny being common in Northeastern states. While the survey found that polygyny was more common in poorer families where the women were uneducated and mostly aged over 35, polygyny was also common in places where the literacy rate was high.

According to the report by the International Institute of Population Studies, polygyny takes place for various reasons- "excess mortality of men than women, desire to have children to continue the family line, failure to produce children/son by first wife, the cultural practices of lengthy periods of sexual abstinence after child birth driving the men to seek another partner, etc". For this research, married women between the ages of 15-49 were asked if their husband had another wife.

3. Villagers in Kasara Valley deprived of both water and 'water wives'



Young women no longer want to get married to men in Kasara Ghat area, aware that they would be reduced to being beasts of burden

The likelihood of getting the first 'Adivasi' President in the Rashtrapati Bhavan is poor consolation to tribals around Thane. The area boasts of several dams, seven in all, which supply water to Thane, Kalyan and Mumbai. But not a drop of water goes to the adivasis living around the dams.

People are also not allowed to drill tube wells because of railway lines and tunnels in the area. The government has also stubbornly refused to arrange for water tankers to provide water in the area.

Barely 100 kilometres from Mumbai, these tribals in the valley of Kasara Ghat, claims former Sarpanch Suniti Bai, have been living there since long before Independence. But getting water has remained a daily nightmare.

For the 5,000 tribals living in 12 hamlets, water scarcity starts in February every year and gets progressively worse. But letters, petitions and pleas to local authorities, MLAs, ministers and the CM have had no effect.

Men, who go out to the cities for livelihood, depend on the women and children to fetch water. Having to walk several kilometres, often three or more, each way and return with heavy loads of water often make them fall sick. Young boys and girls drop out of school to fetch water, explains Bamanrao Thakre. The men, as in other parts of the state, would marry more than one woman, each time to a younger woman, so that water supply is taken care of.



But young women, especially if they are educated, no longer want to get married to boys in the area. Aware that they would be reduced to being beasts of burden, they give their consent only if the men live in Thane, Kalyan or Mumbai. After struggling in vain to find a suitable bride for five years, admits Rajendra Fodse, his parents eventually lied to his prospective in-laws and claimed that he came home only on weekends.

He himself claims to have given up studies because he had to accompany the women on their daily water errands. "Our day begins and ends with thought of water," he exclaims.

Ironically, there are several medium and big dams in the area like Bhatsa, Vaitarna, Tansa and Bhavali in Shahpur taluka. The dams and reservoirs supply water to adjacent cities of Kalyan, Thane and Mumbai throughout the year. But for the tribals living within a few kilometres, they have been of little use.

The authorities are oblivious to the social and economic cost of depriving the people of water. The women are also at risk as they negotiate highways with speeding vehicles balancing big handas (pots) on their head, reflects Thakre.

Social activist Ulka Mahajan and Indavi Tulpule, who are associated with Shramik Sangathana, point out that the valley falls in a scheduled area for which there are special funds and budget provisions. Villages too have access to funds from local bodies and there is no reason why water tankers cannot be arranged for them.

The only ray of hope is provided by former MLA from Shahpur, Pandurang Barora, who asserts that the Bahuli dam under construction would supply water to these hamlets first.

Till then these people's quest for water and water brides continues.

PAPER - 2

INDIAN & TRIBAL ANTHROPOLOGY

1. Baran's Sahariya Adivasis Reap the Harvest of their Struggle Against Slavery



The Sahariya tribe of Baran district in Rajasthan is classified as a Particularly Vulnerable Tribe. For years, they were forced to work as bonded agricultural labourers by the landed gentry of the region. The past decade has seen them fighting for their rights, and now with the help of some local NGOs, governmental support and their own unified efforts, they are slowly reaping the benefits of their struggle to be treated as free and equal citizens of this nation. Anumeha Yadav revisits the tribe to report on how they are faring.

For the last two years, Sahariya adivasi families in Baran district on Rajasthan's border with Madhya Pradesh have waged a powerful struggle against generations of slavery to local landlords. Since November 2010, more than 200 Sahariya families have refused to work as 'halis' – bonded agricultural workers – in return for small loans on which landlords charged 40 to 70 percent interest. Last year, The Better India had published an article detailing the freedom struggle of this tribe, and their efforts at re-building their lives. We revisit the

tribe a year later in this follow-up report to see how these erstwhile halis are faring with their new-found and hard-fought independence. Last month, 135 Sahariya families in Kishanganj block in Baran district sold the first portion of crop harvested on land they reclaimed from Sikh, Jat, Dhakad landlords.



“Last July, the former district Collector B Sarvanan held a public hearing for us to register our claims. The district administration then restored 625 bigha land encroached by landlords in Sunda village to 135 Sahariya families. Initially, there was fear that the landlords will retaliate so women from Sunda, Amroli, Kherla, Lakhimpura and Dabka stayed back near the land two months during the rains. We sowed mustard in 400 bigha, and wheat and coriander in the rest,” said Gyarsi Bai Sahariya a community worker with NGO Jagrut Mahila Sangathan (JMS). “The mustard from just 50 bigha fetched us Rs 1.5 lakhs, we may earn upto Rs 20 lakhs from the whole harvest,” she added.

Among the most vulnerable families among Baran’s Sahariyas have found a crucial support in finding a new means of livelihood in MNREGA (The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act 2005). Since 2011, hundreds of Sahariya tribals families trapped in bonded debt to rich landlords since decades have found employment under MNREGA.



Sahariyas are categorized as a Particularly Vulnerable Tribe (PTG), i.e., the most marginalized among tribes. The Sahariyas living in Baran came to national attention in 2000-2001 because of several hunger deaths in the community. The death of 47 Sahariyas because of starvation in the drought in 2001 triggered the Public Interest Litigation in the Supreme Court on right to food. Hunger deaths were reported among Sahariyas in 2004 and again in 2009.

In 2010, the NGO Sankalp and Jagrut Mahila Sangathan (JMS) organized a 'Mazdoor Haq Yatra' in four blocks in Baran with support from the Sochna evum Rozgaar Adhikar Abhiyaan Rajasthan. The yatra went on for 15 days. Following this, a 'mazdoor satyagraha' began in Jaipur on 2 October 2010. At this non-violent protest for minimum wages under MNREGA, the Sahariyas from Baran spoke up about having to work as halis, or bonded labourers, for landlords who had usurped their lands. They narrated how they had had lost their traditional access to tendu leaf, gum, timber as the forest deteriorated and become indebted to Sikh and Jat landowners who charged 40 to 70 percent rates of interest as halis or bonded agricultural labourers on their farms. The Bonded Labour (Abolition) Act 1976 bans hali among 31 forms of bonded debt.

Following a protracted struggle by the Sahariyas, in 2011 Rajasthan government waived off their bonded debt and entitled Sahariya families to 200 days of work under MNREGA, twice the national norm. Beginning October 2010, more than 250 Sahariya families have found work under MNREGA here.

The Sahariyas in Baran reached a decisive step in their struggle for self determination when the district administration recognized their claims over land seized from them by landlords. In July 2012, administration re-surveyed and gave possession of 625 bighas of land back to 135 Sahariya families. Using two tractors and seeds provided by the Area Development Committee officials, and fertilizers and fuel provided by Jagrut Mahila Sangathan (JMS), a local NGO, 15 Sahariyas families who had farming experience planted mustard over 400 bighas, wheat over 50 bighas, and coriander on 40 bighas, leaving the remaining land fallow.

The remaining households continued to work under MNREGA. Last month, the Sahariya families harvested the mustard planted in 50 bighas and earned over Rs 1,50,000 by selling their crop in the agricultural markets. With support from the District Vigilance Committee and JMS, women from all 150 families plan to now set up a cooperative society. Their brave struggle for their freedom, the work they found under MNREGA and their being able to reclaim their rights over land has enabled these adivasi families, among the poorest in the country, to live and work as equal and free citizens.

2. Govt considering giving tribal status to Hatti community



Recently, the Central Government is considering granting Tribal status to the Hatti Community of the Tans-Giri region of Himachal Pradesh's Sirmour district.

- The Hattis are a **close-knit community** that got their name from their **tradition of selling homegrown vegetables, crops, meat, and wool, etc. at small markets called 'haat' in towns.**

- Hatti men traditionally don a distinctive white headgear on ceremonial occasions.
- The Hatti homeland **straddles the Himachal-Uttarakhand border** in the basin of the **Giri and Tons rivers**, both tributaries of the Yamuna.
 - The Tons marks the border between the two states.
 - The Hattis who lives in the trans-Giri area in Himachal Pradesh and Jaunsar Bawar in Uttarakhand were once part of the royal estate of Sirmaur until Jaunsar Bawar's separation in 1814.
- There are **two Hatti clans**, in Trans-Giri and Jaunsar Bawar, have similar traditions, and inter-marriages are common.



- However, a fairly rigid caste system operates in the community – the **Bhat and Khash are upper castes**, and the **Badhois are below them**, and inter-caste marriages have traditionally been discouraged.
- The Hattis are **governed by a traditional council called 'khumbli'** which, like the 'khaps' of Haryana, decides community matters.
 - The Khumbli's power has remained unchallenged despite the establishment of the Panchayati raj system.
- They have **sizeable presence in about nine Assembly seats in the Sirmaur and Shimla regions**.
 - According to the 2011 Census of India, the total tribal population of Himachal Pradesh is 3,92,126, which is **5.7% of the total population of the state**.

What are their Demands?

- **Tribal Status:**
 - They are **demanding Schedule Tribe status since 1967** when tribal status was accorded to people living in Jaunsar Bawar in Uttarakhand, which shares a border with the Sirmaur district.
- **Issue:**
 - Due to **topographical disadvantages**, the Hattis living in the Kamrau, Sangrah, and Shilliai areas of Himachal Pradesh have **lagged behind in both education and employment.**

Status of Scheduled Tribes in India

- As per Census-1931, Schedule tribes are termed as "backward tribes" living in the "Excluded" and "Partially Excluded" areas. The **Government of India Act of 1935** called for the first time for representatives of "**backward tribes**" in provincial assemblies.
- The Constitution **does not define the criteria for recognition of Scheduled Tribes** and hence the definition contained in 1931 Census was used in the initial years after independence.
- However, **Article 366(25) of the Constitution only provides process to define Scheduled Tribes:** "Scheduled Tribes means 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."

3. In Odisha's Nayagarh, 24 villages receive community & forest resource rights



Traditional forest management systems have been recognised for title distribution for the first time in India

Twenty four villages in Odisha's Nayagarh district together received 14 community rights (CR) and community forest resource rights (CFRR) titles on November 2, 2021. These titles were assigned to them under the the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006 (known as FRA), 2006 as well as the 2012 amendment.

FRA gives Gram Sabhas the "right to protect, regenerate, conserve or manage any community forest resource which they have been traditionally protecting and conserving for sustainable use". This is reportedly the first time that traditional management systems have been recognised for title distribution in the country. Another unique feature of the title distribution is that besides the scheduled tribes, it includes several villages inhabited by other traditional forest dwellers.

Nayagarh District Welfare Officer Dayanidhi Naik said:

This is also the first step towards the recognition of community-led ecological restoration, forest conservation, sustainable forest-based livelihoods and biodiversity conservation in the district.

The district has a history of fighting for forest protection – they rose against the British rulers several times to prevent exploitation of natural resources. The 14 titles were given in the first phase and another 61 CR and CFRR would be distributed in the second phase of title distribution in the district, he added. “Increasing evidence across the globe pointed towards the fact that local communities managed, governed and protected forests better.”



They are part of Surukabadi, Kulasara, Bajrakota and Balabhadrapur Gram Panchayats under Ranpur block of Nayagarh. “We hope this event marks the way for a future course of action and accelerates the second phase of distribution,” said Arakhita Sahu, secretary of Maa Maninag Jungle Surakhsha Parishad (MMJSP) of Nayagarh. MMJSP has been facilitating the claim-filing process since the FRA was enforced. It is present in 136 villages and aims at facilitating forest conservation and management among the forest-dependent villages in Ranpur block.

The district-level committee (DLC) had approved the claims of these 24 villages in 2018 but the distribution has been pending since then. The communities protecting and preserving the forests had been reportedly putting pressure on the administration to implement the decision for a long time.

Finally, the titles were granted before the upcoming panchayat elections in Odisha. Nayagarh comprises 1,695 villages, out of which 1,239 villages have the potential for CR and CFRR. So far 3,868 Individual Forest Rights (IFR), 32 CR and 28 CFR titles have been granted in the district since the FRA came into force.

4. Santhal tribes in Jharkhand are reviving an old, low-cost tradition to get safe drinking water



Keeping water pots in a garsadi, a raised platform, have helped prevent contamination.

Sumitra Soren of Bhurkundi village in Deoghar district of Jharkhand has a greater wisdom in handling drinking water. Her simple practice of keeping drinking water covered in a pot on a raised platform called garsadi or ghirsuri has considerable significance. What Soren practices is not only the revival of an age-old tradition of the Santhal tribes, but also a scientific behaviour regarding drinking water hygiene.

Palojori, the administrative block under which Bhurkundi falls and Jama are part of the Santhal Pargana division where tribes constitute 29.88% of the population, a majority of them being Santhals. They practice rain-fed agriculture, though in recent times they have started growing winter and summer crops after the advent of various irrigation structures.

Being a hilly region, availability of safe drinking water is an issue, despite good annual rainfall of around 1,162 mm. People depend on hand pumps and wells for drinking water and for other household uses. During monsoon, the water in open wells becomes easily contaminated, and in summer, the water level dips low, making it turbid.

Lost practice

Santhals traditionally give high priority to hygiene and the greatest sanctity to drinking water. Their mud houses are so clean and beautified with native art that outsiders find it hard to believe that they are mud houses.

The Santhal tribes, and others too, once had a strong tradition of keeping their drinking water in a safe and hygienic manner. They used to store drinking water covered, in a ghara, an earthen pot with a narrow neck, and place it on a garsadi, or a raised platform, near the entrance of their courtyard. They would serve visitors water to drink as the first courtesy.



Gradually, the practice withered away for various reasons. Steel, aluminum, brass and plastic vessels have replaced the earthen pots. People keep the pots inside the house as they cost more and it is not safe to keep them outside any more.

Unlike the earthen pots, these do not leach and people keep them on the ground without fear of the floor becoming damp. According to villagers, the present generation does not want to take the extra effort in maintaining garsadis.

Many do not consider it modern. Speaking to VillageSquare.in, Maharani Marandi of Fuljori village revealed that when she suggested reviving garsadis in her self-help group, many women were reluctant, considering it a practice of the past.

Sources of contamination

As most people use water from hand pumps for drinking purpose now, safety of water at source is assured, unlike earlier, when people relied on open wells. But the biggest challenge arises during storage and usage when the chances of contamination are high.

In 2015, Collectives for Integrated Livelihood Initiatives of Tata Trusts, under its Water and Sanitation Program held a community meeting in Bhurkundi to discuss better management of safe drinking water. The community had great knowledge about safe handling. Jiyamuni Baski told the gathering about the tradition of keeping pots on a platform.

While storing water in an earthen pot on the ground, the leaching water makes the earthen ground damp and worms start living there, which is not healthy. Dust easily pollutes water. Often household pets also put their mouth in the pots. Kids pollute water by putting their hands in them.

Reviving tradition

Traditionally, the Santhals serve drinking water by tilting the pot so that the fingers do not touch the water. Speaking to VillageSquare.in, Gori Devi of Kherwa village recalled her mother's advice, asking her to clean the earthen pot before filling it and to keep it on an elevated corner. After a fair amount of discussion, the community decided to revive garsadi to ensure that the drinking water was safe.

Bringing about change was not easy. Though the idea came from the community, many resisted, saying that they were comfortable with the present practice. They knew it was better to keep water on garsadis but failed to see the established relationship between health hazards and unhygienic practices.

Many cited non-availability of bricks as a reason for not constructing garsadis. There was inadequate planning too. Garsadis were not the priority for some, who agreed to construct but did not. For many, the focus was on construction and use of toilets, at the cost of garsadis.

Despite the challenges, there is great scope for reviving the practice. As it is an age-old tradition, nobody opposes the idea. Moreover, construction involves almost no cost as it can be made with locally available materials, without a mason.

The implementing agencies used various tools like skits, animated movies, messages from local leaders and rallies by school children to inculcate the behavior of using garsadis that were once a part of their lives. They trained school children and also put posters that depicted the correct way of handling water. Photos from Gujarat, where people keep pictures of gods or decorate the place around water pots with utmost beauty motivated the community.

Changing attitudes

By making people aware and reviving the traditional practice, their attitude towards drinking water safety changed considerably, thus preventing possibilities of diarrhea. The Santhals' traditional knowledge and practice of water hygiene was a supporting factor. There is also scope for combining tradition with modernity by fixing a tap to the earthen pot.

The community carried out an evaluation in each village after about two months of campaign. They felicitated those who had adopted the practice, with garlands and stars. During this period, 80 households out of 279 had revived the tradition by constructing garsadis in their houses. The practice keeps spreading to many villages.

5. Over the Last 75 Years, Struggles of India's Tribal Communities Have Multiplied

Instead of being recognised for their conservation efforts and relationship with nature, tribal communities are paying the price for 'development'.

As the country waves flags and celebrates the 75th anniversary of India's independence, it is also time to take stock. What did India's founders and citizens dream of, how has India fared, what have been our challenges and successes?

The Wire's reporters and contributors bring stories of the period, of the traumas but also the hopes of Indians, as seen in personal accounts, in culture, in the economy and in the sciences. How did the modern state of India come about, what does the flag represent? How did literature and cinema tackle the trauma of Partition?

History stands witness to the glorious role Adivasi and indigenous farming communities have played in preserving water, forests and land in the past. They

fought off ferocious animals, cleared bushy forested regions, set up villages and inhabited those areas. The linguistic and cultural identity of the Adivasi and indigenous communities has evolved in the lap of nature amid these forests, rivers and mountains.

The Chotanagpur Tenancy (CNT) Act of 1908 and the Santhal Pargana Tenancy (SPT) Act of 1949 were passed with the sole aim to preserve and develop the relationship between tribal and indigenous communities and their natural and pro-environmental life values. In addition, the Fifth Schedule in the Constitution of India and the Panchayat (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act (or PESA), 1996 provides for the tribal community's rights on water and forest under the Khuntkatti System, as well as other traditional rights including Khatian of 1932, Khatian Part Two, Village Note, etc.

It is a well-known fact that special legal provisions have been made in the Indian Constitution to protect and develop forest land inhabited by the tribal communities as well as their socio-cultural and economic base. It has been clearly stated that the natural resources within and without the boundary of the village, such as gravel, soil, sand, shrubs, forest, land, river and, springs, are community property of the village and all the villagers have community rights over the area. All these community rights have got legal recognition under the CNT Act, SPT Act, PESA Act, Wilkinson Rule in Kolhan area and Right to Mundari Khuntkatti System. These rights were attained after a long struggle and martyrdom of thousands of tribal bravehearts including Tilka Manjhi, Sidvu, Kanhu, Phool-Jhano, Telanga Khadia, Sindrai Manki, Vindrai Manki, Bir Budvu Bhagat, Gaya Munda, Kanu Munda, Birsa Munda, Manki Munda and Jatra Tana Bhagat. The crucial role of the Adivasi communities in the independence struggle of the country against the British is etched in history.

Even post-independence, tribal communities have been continually struggling against encroachment on their land, water, forest, language, culture as well as identity. To protect the forest and the land, tribal and indigenous communities rose above caste, religion and politics, to mobilise successful mass movements like the Kendriya Jan Sangharsh Samiti's 45-year-long struggle to avert displacement of 256 villages in the Palamu-Gumla region and the Koel Karo people's movement going on for 40 years to oppose a hydel project which caused 245 villages to be uprooted owing to the construction of a dam on Koel and Karo rivers.

With the formation of Jharkhand as a separate state on November 15, 2000, the then BJP government started inviting leading investors to the state. During the next four years, the government signed MoUs with more than 150 companies. That's when the tribal and indigenous communities rose against it as an organised power. In Khunti-Gumla district, when steel giant ArcelorMittal proposed to set up a steel plant by displacing around 40 villages, the indigenous farmers of the area resisted with the slogan – 'We will not part with even an inch of land'. The protests against Bhushan Steel and Jindal Steel in East Singhbhum and against land acquisition by a coal company in Kathikund area of Dumka also yielded successful results.

What the Adivasi community has gained and lost during the last 75 years is a matter that needs to be assessed. Since independence, more than 22 lakh acres of forest land have been acquired for various projects in the name of development. For urbanisation, lakhs of acres of land is wrested from the tribal community every year. Lakhs of land owners in the state are now forced to work as daily-wage labourers. More than two crore tribal and indigenous people as well as Dalits have been displaced and left without a means of sustenance. In their own state, the tribal community has been reduced to a minority at 26.2%, which is expected to further slide down until the next census.

Tribal areas have been neglected when it comes to development in the education and health sectors. The amount sanctioned under the tribal sub-plan is being diverted to other heads and the money has been used in the construction of jails, roads and airports. As a result, the tribal population is bearing the brunt of 'development'.

Tribals living in different parts of the country, including Jharkhand, have also intensified the demand for the Sarna Adivasi Religion Code arguing that when Jains with an estimated population of 4,451,753 across the country, according to the 2011 census, can have a separate religious code, why can 104,281,034 nature-worshipping tribals living all over the country not have a separate religious code? Since the formation of Jharkhand, the tribal population has declined. In Jharkhand alone, the tribal population reduced by 30 lakhs as no one knows under which religion they were categorised. All the political parties of Jharkhand support the idea of Sarna Dharma Code, but none of them took any initiative to implement it during the past 17 years. With its implementation, the tribal community will find an identity and communalism in the name of religion among tribal communities will stop.

After 2014, changes in constitutional policies related to public rights have attacked the rights of tribal, the indigenous, Dalit as well as hard-working labourer communities. Global policies, global capital and global markets have now replaced traditional rights of the community with corporate interests. The welfare government of the country is now giving priority to corporates. The Adivasi and indigenous communities have entered a new phase of struggle against these policy changes. Public politics in the country has been replaced by caste and religion, which has deeply impacted the tribal community.

Today, those who raise their voice for public concern, constitutional rights, human rights, forests and right to land, education and health are labelled as traitors and thrown behind bars by the 'welfare' government. In the present struggle, the tribal communities are faced with not one but thousands of challenges.

All laws like the Fifth Schedule, PESA Act, Forest Rights Act, CNT Act and SPT Act continue to exist on paper, but they have been rendered practically ineffective. The scheduled areas have been declared as backward areas. With land record digitisation, names of actual land owners are being replaced in land records and the land of tribals, farmers and Dalits is being forcibly seized and handed over to others.

Under the Union government's current ownership scheme, against the provision in the Fifth Schedule, Sixth Schedule, CNT Act, SPT Act, Mundari Khuntkatti System and Wilkinson Rule, that forest, water and land are community property, the rights of the villages over these resources are being steadily curbed and they are being seized by the government as its property. Soon, the traditional tribal village will completely disappear and their traditional system and authority will be completely destroyed. In the name of protecting a particular religion, mob lynching is being brazenly carried out. Religious fanaticism is being encouraged in the community in the name of stopping conversion.

Meanwhile, the community is being divided along caste and religion. Mass movements, federal structures of the country, and public institutions are being crushed. In such a situation, the only solution is for all the oppressed sections of the state as well as the country to unite on a single platform and bolster the organised movement of the oppressed communities. During the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 and 2021, the country's state machinery, political machinery, armed forces and diplomatic machinery remained a mute spectator as people

suffered and lost lives. Despite having money, people died because the government failed to provide oxygen. We must never forget.

Together, we must endeavour to strengthen tribal communities which are the role model in preservation of water, forest and land, and learn from their connection with nature and the surrounding environment for the sake of the entire human race.

6. Righting old wrongs



On the third Sampurna Vimukti Diwas, to mark Mahasweta Devi's birth anniversary, we reproduce this blog on Constitutional protection to Nomadic, Semi-Nomadic and Denotified Tribes

The Union Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment has recently invited comments from 22 ministries, commissions, and government think tanks on the recommendations of the National Commission for De-Notified, Nomadic and Semi- Nomadic Tribes (DNTs/ NTs/ SNTs).

The Commission, headed by Bhiku Ramji Idate, had submitted its report to the ministry in January this year. In the report, it had made a total of 20 recommendations, the most prominent of which is that these three communities be recognised as Scheduled. A separate schedule would pave the way for bringing them under the cover of reservation in jobs and education and the protection of Prevention of Atrocities Act.

It is a step in the right direction for, as the report said, these three groups are among the “most deprived” in India. But that leads to the question: Who are these people?

De-Notified Tribes (DNTs) are communities which were “notified” as “born criminal” by the British Government due to specific administrative as well as law and order reasons. This was done under a series of laws starting with the Criminal Tribes Act, 1871. After Independence, the Act was repealed in 1952, and the communities were “de-notified”, hence the name de-notified tribes.



Nomadic Tribes (NTs) are communities that do not have a fixed home and keep on moving from one place to another. They may have a story of their origin, the place where they lived before journeying eternally, but they do not have a place to return after travelling for their livelihood.

Semi- Nomadic Tribes (SNTs) are “partial nomads”. They have fixed habitations to which they return once in a year, or when their occupational activities are expected to cease for a while.

Traditionally, DNTs/NTs/ SNTs have followed occupations like acrobatics, puppetry, singing, dancing, acting, snake charming, monkey and bear charming, hunting, handicrafts, artisanship, fortune telling, traditional medico and herbal medicine selling, mendicancy, herding, construction and earth work, fishing and brewing liquor.

These traditional occupations followed by the DNTs/NTs/ SNTs are vanishing fast. A major reason is the promulgation of new laws that targeted these people's occupations. These laws include Prevention of Beggary Act (1959), Wild Life Protection Act (1972), Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act (1960), Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act (1999), Development of Irrigation System and Related Acts, Excise Act (1944), Drugs and Magic Remedies Act (1954), Prohibition Act and Cow Protection Act. Besides, industrialisation and automisation, the development of technology in the field of entertainment and the rise of building contractors have also contributed to their dispossession. Without their traditional occupations, these people have resorted to begging; rag picking and waste collection, prostitution, child labour, street vending, and unorganized labour.

Given their past, police generally treat the DNTs/NTs/ SNTs as criminals. They are falsely implicated in criminal cases and are restricted from moving in pursuit of their occupations. They are also victims of social discrimination by other castes, generally not permitted to stay permanently in villages, be allotted a piece of land for their settlement in villages and humiliated by sedentarised and established sections in the society.

The DNTs/NTs/ SNTs suffer from extreme poverty, landlessness, illiteracy and homelessness. They live in slums both, in urban and rural areas and have no civic amenities like drinking water, electricity and toilets, no ration card, BPL card, job card, voter identity card and caste. Their poor socio-economic conditions are hindering their growth and progress in the country.

Some of the nomadic communities included in the Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs) in Odisha are decreasing in population (As per the Censuses of 2001, 1991 and 1981).

The DNTs/NTs/ SNTs irrespective of their backward categories (SCs, STs and OBCs) are humiliated by the people from sedentarised and established sections of society. Sometimes, they are even humiliated by people from the backward categories other than DNTs, as they are carriers of social stigma. In this situation, effective and efficient implementation of the development policies and programmes is very important. Hence, DNTs need to be given a separate constitutional status, support and security (Right to Life) to bring them into mainstream society speedily.

7. New cultural hub for Banjaras in Hyderabad



Their colourful attires embellished with tiny pieces of mirrors, heavy metal jewellery and an armful of ivory bangles give the Banjaras their unique identity. Best known for their migration from one place to another in search of trade, the community has been a vital supply chain for villages historically. While this nomadic tribe was neglected for years, it is now all set to get a dedicated spot right in the city for conducting business, hosting exhibitions and cultural events, and organising functions.

Called Banjara Bhavan, the hall is spread over one-and-a-half acre land, and is located in Banjara Hills. Decorated with beautiful and colourful painting to resonate the spirit of the Banjara community, the bhavan will soon be inaugurated by the State government. The community members will be able to book the place free of cost.

To serve as a cultural hub for the community, Banjara Bhavan is equipped with three large rooms which can be used as shops by the community. "The areas are designated to be used as shops or exhibition venues for the community members, where they can display everything from attires, to jewellery and artwork of the tribe, We also have a big space designated to be the museum, housing various historical and cultural artefacts of the Banjara community," informs Totham Praveen, the site engineer for the project.



A huge function hall with a centre stage is also built inside the building, which can be used for various purposes. Equipped to accommodate about 1,000-1,500 people at a time, the venue will be suitable to host a cultural event or marriage. The hall also has a balcony area, which will soon be fitted with 100 comfortable seats.

For the benefit of people, the officials have also ensured a spacious and well-lit kitchen and dining area at the basement of the building, which can also take in about 800 to 1,000 people at a time. While the work is still in progress in this area, the site engineer informs that the kitchen will also have a sizable storage room.

The bhavan also has several meeting areas where members will be able to host business meetings. There are separate meeting areas for the VIP visitors. Apart from this, there are three smaller office spaces that can be used to host any meeting.

While most areas in the building are ready, a few minor things are yet to be done. "We are working towards finishing all the work in the next two to three months," informs Praveen.

8. Centre accords ST status to Himachal's Hattee community

Chhattisgarh's Brijia and Tamil Nadu's Narikuravar communities also make it to list of notified Scheduled Tribes

Ahead of the crucial Assembly elections in Himachal Pradesh, the Union Cabinet chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday approved a Constitution amendment Bill that seeks to grant tribal status to the Hattee community living in the Trans-Giri region of Sirmaur district in the hill state.

Announcing this in New Delhi on Wednesday, Union Tribal Affairs Minister Arjun Munda said, "The Union Cabinet approved a proposal to add the Hattee community in the Trans-Giri area of Himachal Pradesh's Sirmaur to the list of notified Scheduled Tribes."



Munda said the move will benefit around 1.60-lakh people of the community, adding that "a proposal to add the Brijia community in Chhattisgarh to the ST list has also been approved". The Cabinet also approved the proposal to add Narikuravar, one of the most deprived and vulnerable communities living in the hills of Tamil Nadu, to the ST list, Munda said.

The Hattees are a close-knit community that take their name from their traditional occupation of selling home-grown crops, vegetables, meat, and wool at small-town markets known as 'haats'. Their native area straddles the Himachal-Uttarakhand border, and the Hattees have been demanding ST status since 1967, when the same was accorded to people living in Jaunsar Bawar area in Uttarakhand, which shares a border with Sirmaur district.

In March, the Jai Ram Thakur government had sent a detailed proposal to the Centre, seeking the inclusion of the Hattees in the ST list of Himachal Pradesh.



Some changes/inclusions will also be made in the list of Scheduled Tribes of Chhattisgarh, as per the proposals okayed in the Cabinet meet on Wednesday. For instances, Bhuinya, Bhuiyan and Bhuyan have been added as synonyms of Bharia Bhumia; while Dhanuhar and Dhanuwar have been added as synonyms of Dhanwar in the list, to extend the benefits to various phonetic usages of the same term, the minister added.

The move will enable members of the communities newly listed in the revised list of Scheduled Tribes to derive benefits meant for STs under the existing schemes of the government. Some of the major benefits include post-matric scholarship, overseas scholarship and the national fellowship, besides education, concessional loans from the National Scheduled Tribes Finance and Development Corporation, and hostels for students. In addition, they will also be entitled to benefits of reservation in services and admission to educational institutions as per the government policy.

9. Turned away by neighbouring states over Maoist fears, displaced Bastar tribals have nowhere to go

The persisting issue of rehabilitation and resettlement of these internally displaced persons who were earlier cited as inhabitants of over 600 Bastar villages continues to hang fire.



Thousands of tribal families who are stated to have migrated from the Bastar region (south Chhattisgarh) following the outrage of Maoist terror to the adjoining states, some 15 years ago are now struggling with a new dilemma over their lost identity and living under duress to return. What added to their plight is the claim of the Chhattisgarh government that "no tribal family shifted from Bastar owing to Maoist menace".

The persisting issue of rehabilitation and resettlement of these internally displaced persons (IDP) who were earlier cited as inhabitants of over 600 Bastar villages continues to hang fire. Of late, the states of Telangana and Andhra Pradesh (AP) have reportedly begun nurturing an apprehension that the outlawed CPI (Maoist) might use the clusters of these migrated populations as their launching pad and again reinforce their presence.

These tribals are now being pushed back by the authorities in Telangana and AP. Ironically Chhattisgarh denies that any tribal family had moved out to other states or districts from the Maoist-affected Bastar zone.



During the last two years of the Covid pandemic, the vulnerability of these migrated tribal families has further escalated. “Despite being the *adivasis*, they are not being recognised as tribals in the adjoining states and remain deprived of the benefits they deserve owing to their caste. On a number of occasions, police and forest officials in Telangana, AP and other places have tried to push them back to Chhattisgarh. With no concrete action plan for them, where will they settle now?”, said Shubhranshu Chowdhary the convenor of ‘The New Peace Process’ campaign in the Bastar zone.

Local Congress MLA from Mulugu constituency Danasari Seethakka sharing her concern admitted the pathetic conditions in which the migrated tribals are living in her Telangana state and other adjoining states.

“I have visited their inhabited place. Our (Telangana) government too is not willing to accept them and asking them to go back and the Chhattisgarh government remains indecisive. The deprived tribal population are paying the price. When the refugees in our country can access the basic amenities and other safeguards, why are these tribals being ignored?”, she told this newspaper.

The peace activists appealing to the different state governments and the Centre have been seeking their rehabilitation in places that should be officially regularised. As they migrated during the controversial Salwa Judum (anti-Maoist campaign) launched in Bastar in 2005, they continue to strive to live with their lost identity and livelihood.

“Now it has been almost 15 years and most of them don’t have any valid document to prove their domicile to Chhattisgarh. It’s a genuine national problem where besides the Centre (home ministry), the judiciary should

intervene”, affirmed Chowdhary. Last December, hundreds of displaced tribals have jointly written to the Chief Justice of India sharing their difficult situation.

The plight of IDP tribals gets further aggravated after the Chhattisgarh home minister Tamrhwaj Sahu in the state Assembly in March 2021 stated that there is not a single case that has come to light about any family migrated to other states or districts from Maoist-affected districts of the Bastar zone.

“This doesn't seem to be true as around 500 families had written me letters informing me that owing to the Maoist problem they were forced to shift to adjoining states. Recently I had written to the principal secretary of Chhattisgarh assembly to review the reply given by the home department”, said Lakheshwar Baghel, Congress MLA and chairman of Bastar Area Tribal Development Authority.

The National Commission for Scheduled Tribes had on 12 January asked the chief secretaries of five states-Chhattisgarh, Telangana, AP, Maharashtra, Odisha to respond on the status on "action taken regarding the rehabilitation and resettlement of about 5000 internally displaced tribal families from Bastar region".

10. Jharkhand increases reservations for SCs, STs, Others

The Jharkhand Government recently approved a proposal to grant 77 per cent reservation in the state government jobs for people belonging to Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, backward classes, OBC and other economically weaker sections.

The state government of Jharkhand has approved a bill to amend the Jharkhand Reservation of Vacancies in Posts and Services Act, 2001. The amendment bill provides 77 per cent reservation to SC, ST, BC, OBCs and economically weaker sections.

It has increased the OBC reservation to 27 per cent from the present 14 per cent. It provides quota of 12 per cent for people belonging to local SC communities and 28 per cent for local ST communities. The extremely Backward Class people are given 15 per cent reservation and OBCs are given 12 per cent reservation. Economically backward individuals who are not included in other reserved categories are given 10 per cent reservation. The reservations in the government jobs would curtail migration of people to other states across India. Increasing

reservation limits, especially for other backward classes (OBCs) has been a long-pending demand in Jharkhand.

The state government also approved the “Jharkhand definition of local persons and for extending the consequential, social, cultural and other benefits to such local persons Bill, 2022”. This bill considers people whose ancestors have their name in the 1932 khatiyani (land records) or before as local inhabitants of Jharkhand. Those who are landless or do not have their or their families’ names in the 1932 Khatiyani, respective gram sabha would have the power to certify them based on language and customary traditions.

This decision comes after the tribes demanded that the last land survey conducted by the British in 1932 must be used for determining who the local inhabitants were. The State Government has decided to request the Central Government to include the bill in the Ninth Schedule of the Constitution.

11. Gujjars oppose Paharis' demand for ST status

Days after Pahari-speaking people demanded Scheduled Tribe (ST) status and political reservation, leaders of the Gujjar community, who are already enjoying reservation under ST status, have openly come out against the demand, setting the tone for an issue that could snowball into a major political slugfest in the coming days.

All J&K Gujjar-Bakerwal Coordination Committee today stated that recent developments indicate that the “Paharis and their self-styled leaders having connections at the right places in the establishment have joined hands to convince the authorities in J&K and New Delhi to their spurious and unjustifiable claim to ST status so that they could share the benefits of tribals”.

The leaders of the committee also held a media conference in Jammu to put forward their demands.

Advocate Anwar Chowdhary and convener of the committee said that the tribal populace of J&K got ST status in 1991 after decades of a relentless struggle. It got 10 per cent reservation in job sector, professional and technical institutions.

“That the Paharis were granted 4 per cent reservation in the job sector and they are already enjoying 39 per cent reservation under different heads including Resident of Backward Area (RBA), Actual Line of Control (ALC), OBC and EWS among others established beyond any shadow of doubt that the conspirators are all out to jeopardise the legitimate rights and interests of the tribal,” alleged Chowdhary.

Both Paharis and Gujjars form strong political groups that different parties eye in J&K. With their presence in both Kashmir and Jammu divisions, they are vote-banks for parties from both regions that cannot be ignored. This is for the first time that any of the two groups have launched a direct attack against the other. “No authentic history book or book on anthropology and sociology refers to the Paharis as a tribe or even a group of tribal people,” said Chowdhary.



Leader of the BJP from Rajouri district and former vice-chairman of the advisory Board for the Development of Pahari-speaking people, Kuldeep Raj Gupta, had recently demanded that the government must roll out political reservation for the Paharis and grant ST status to them.

Interestingly, Arshad Choudhary, executive member of BJP, was also present during the presser of All J&K Gujjar-Bakerwal Coordination Committee. However the committee has stated that in case the government grants ST status

to Paharis, they would take legal course by going to the Supreme Court against the move.

Vote-banks that parties can't ignore

Both Paharis and Gujjars form strong political groups that different parties eye in J&K. With their presence in both Kashmir and Jammu divisions, they are vote-banks for parties from both regions that cannot be ignored.

12. A Former Top Cop's Silent Revolution In Jharkhand's Tribal Districts



Giving up a high-profile police job, one man has made not only his own dream, but those of many tribal children too, come true. Sudhir Kumar Mishra meets friend-mentor-guide Dr Arun Oraon

Eight years ago, Dr Arun Oraon, a 1992 batch IPS officer of the Punjab cadre and a qualified doctor, made a life-changing decision. He took voluntary retirement from his police job and began teaching youngsters at his home, in a remote village of Ranchi district. Oraon was determined to do something good for the society, especially the poor tribals of Jharkhand.

Initially, only a handful of youths in high school, college or preparing for competitive exams joined Oraon's classes while most villagers remained sceptical. However, even with a small base, the former policeman realised only too soon that his students lacked some basic skills that are taken for granted in the modern world. The youngsters were intelligent and hard-working, but unable to communicate fluently in English, use computers and the internet, or interact on social media.



Village youths pursuing higher education would also be trained to smoothly engage in normal classes. In fact, adults, too, were welcome. The first Kartik Oraon Ratri Pathshala, named after his father-in-law who was a freedom fighter and former Union Minister, was thus set up in Uchri village in Mandar block, close to the State capital. Oraon was helped greatly in this by fellow tribal Anil Oraon, who was among the first few to approach the former policeman for career guidance.

The night schools began operating from village community halls, anganwadi centres and dhumkuria (youth dormitories). Courses were framed to enable non-English speakers, or those with inadequate basic educational background, to easily grasp the subjects. Extracurricular activities were given adequate attention. Art and cultural functions, sports events, public speaking and quiz competitions were organised at regular intervals and good performers were felicitated.

The success of these schools motivated others too, and soon, the entire village was rallying around Oraon to help his cause. The schools are interlinked with each other through Facebook, WhatsApp and various other social media fora.

Parwati Oraon and Pramila Oraon, both belonging to the Uchri village and Preety from Totambi village of Mandar block are among those attending the night schools, which have “besides everything, made them more confident to face the world”. “We eagerly look forward to attending the classes,” they say.

The night schools have not only helped improve their educational standards but also helped in their personality development. Their public speaking skills have improved. It has inculcated discipline in them. They are more aware of hygiene. They have better social etiquettes now. Most importantly, they are now leading the fight against social evils like witch-hunting and drinking in their own ways,” Oraon, who has recently been made an independent Director in Coal India Ltd, elaborates

Such is the strength of the Kartik Oraon Ratri Pathshala network, that even the Covid lockdowns didn’t disturb their functioning. Oraon has managed the momentous task of giving thousands of tribal youngsters a level playing field at the threshold of their professional lives.

13. Govt programmes on tribal welfare outcome driven: Munda



Prime Minister Narendra Modi believes that without the development of tribal land and tribals, comprehensive development of the country is not possible, Tribal Affairs Minister Arjun Munda said.

LOK SABHA on Monday passed a Bill to include the Darlong community as a sub-tribe of the Kuki in the list of Scheduled Tribes of Tripura even as the government said all its schemes for tribal welfare were “outcome driven”.

Replying to the debate while consideration and passage of the Constitution (Scheduled Tribes) Order (Amendment) Bill, 2022, Tribal Affairs Minister Arjun Munda said the government is working towards betterment of living conditions of the tribal community, and good results will be visible on the health, education and employment fronts.

“Sufficient funds have been allocated for the purpose of tribal welfare,” he said.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi believes that without the development of tribal land and tribals, comprehensive development of the country is not possible, Munda said.

Responding to issues flagged by several members during the debate, he said the Information and Technology Ministry recently came up with a plan to develop broadband and 4G connectivity in aspirational districts. “Funds for it will be allocated under the Scheduled Tribes component,” he said.

During the debate, Opposition members made a strong pitch for a comprehensive legislation for inclusion of various castes from states into SCs and STs rather than doing it in a piecemeal manner.

Earlier in the day, the government introduced a Bill to amend SC/ST list in Uttar Pradesh. During the introduction, Congress leader in the House Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury urged the Centre to avoid piecemeal measures and instead bring comprehensive legislation for various states.

He also claimed that the Bill was brought keeping in mind the Uttar Pradesh polls, a charge rejected by Munda. “The polls are over. This has nothing to do with the elections,” the minister said.

14. 10 expectations from President Droupadi Murmu voiced by tribals



Tribals hoped that President Droupadi Murmu would be able to influence Government policies in favour of tribal communities. We shortlist 10 major expectations from her

Tribals across the country rejoiced on Monday as Droupadi Murmu was sworn in as the 15th President of the Republic. Although acutely aware of the symbolism of the moment and limitations of the President's office, many of them took to social media to express how proud they are.

A few were disappointed that President Murmu did not take her oath in Santhali, her mother tongue and the language she taught in school before plunging into politics. While she took her oath in Hindi, Santhali is indeed one of the 22 official languages listed in the 8th schedule of the Indian Constitution.

While there are over 600 distinct tribes in the country and they speak different languages and dialects and follow different customs, Santhals are among the 20 major tribes in the country. Santhali language is spoken by Santhals spread across Odisha, Jharkhand, Bengal and parts of Bhutan, Nepal and Bangladesh as well.

So, what are their expectations from President Murmu, the first tribal to become the President? The 10 major expectations, besides the demand to revive the SC/ST Sub Plan in the Union Budget, from President Murmu are the following:

1. 'Do not uproot what you cannot create' is a basic philosophy followed by tribes. The President therefore could urge the Government not to dilute the

Forest Rights Act and the Forest (Conservation) Rules and that the decisions pertaining to forests and mining should be taken only in consultation with tribes and forest dwellers living in the area.

2. Some recalled what scholar Nirmal Minz wrote, "Treat our relatives with respect and deal with them justly, be they other human beings, trees, animals or insects, water, air or sunshine." The President would do well to make the nation aware of the tribal way of life.

3. Thousands of innocent Adivasis, pointed out activists, are languishing in prison, falsely accused of being in league with Maoists. They pointed out the recent case of 121 Adivasis acquitted in Chhattisgarh after spending five years in jail. The President could order an urgent review of all these cases, as well as the cases against the minorities, and ensure speedy justice.

4. One-third of the Adivasis and half the Adivasi women are still illiterate. It is a national shame and a mission ought to be launched to ensure quality education in tribal regions.

5. Health experts have pointed out that the Adivasis' risk of contracting fatal but avoidable diseases like Tuberculosis is three times higher than that of the average population. The incidence of Adivasi children dying before their fifth birthday is twice as much as the national average.

6. All Governors be instructed to ensure that provisions of the Fifth Schedule in the Constitution dealing with tribal areas be implemented and state governments regularly consult the Tribes Advisory Committees provided.

7. As the head of the Judiciary, the President could urge the Government and the Chief Justice of India to appoint judges with knowledge of tribal customary rights, culture and practices. Adivasis often suffer injustice because of the ignorance of the judges.

8. With one tribal language or dialect becoming extinct every month or so, the President could take the initiative to ensure that Adivasis get the opportunity to learn and preserve their mother tongue. President Murmu could also nudge the Government into promoting the use of tribal languages on TV and Radio.

9. Ensure that traditional knowledge systems in tribal societies about food, medicine and justice be preserved.

10. Tribal subaltern history gets adequate attention while drawing up syllabi for schools and colleges, at least in tribal areas.

15. Odisha tribals to run into forests sighting vax team signals



Fear of the unknown, misinformation-fuelled anxiety, lack of trust, a cautious local community and a paucity of awareness campaigns mar vaccination efforts in the remote tribal villages of Odisha

Orda, a tribal village under Gobara panchayat in Cuttack district is untraceable on any digital device. Neither Google Maps nor any other search engine could tell you where exactly the village is. Last month, when a health department team reached Orda to inoculate the villagers, many fled into the bordering forests to avoid the Covid-19 vaccination doses.

Fear of the unknown, misinformation-fuelled anxiety, lack of trust, a cautious local community and a paucity of effective awareness campaigns mar vaccination efforts in the remote tribal villages of Odisha, as in many other parts of the country.

Most members of the local community here are now opposed to the mass vaccination drive. They are apprehensive about the government's medical intervention in an otherwise healthy community.



"We have seen in the past that several healthy people when given injections became sick and some have even died. We do not have any faith in injections when most of us are quite healthy and without any disease," said Kundia Hembram, a tribal from Orda.

"Recently we saw a man from our village that took some injection and died after that. We do not want to invite trouble by taking the injection," Singha Sundi, another villager told 101Reporters during our visit there.

Spending some time with villagers reveals how unexposed they are to the world outside their hamlet. This, in turn, contributes to the overall lack of trust and increases fear among the locals. The village is still not connected with a proper road and is easily cut-off during monsoons, making travel difficult even on a two-wheeler. The nearest health centre, Gurudijhatia Primary Health Centre, is around 12 km away from the village.

There are several other tribal-dominated areas like Orda that face similar challenges. Here rumours about COVID-19 and its prevention spread faster than authentic information. Pangapada in Tumudibandh Block of Kandhamal district is another such remote tribal village. There is barely any mobile network coverage and the lack of good roads adds to the villagers' woes.

Surath Patmajhi, who is a youth from the Dongria Kondh tribe in the village, has been vaccinated after being persuaded by some voluntary organisations. But the majority of the population of Pangapada remain elusive. He attributed this to several rumours doing the rounds in the village that are influencing villagers

against vaccination. It is important to note that Dongria Kondh is among the thirteen Primarily Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs).

"There are around 30 households in my village but till now not more than 10 persons have taken the vaccine. There are several myths in my community regarding the covid vaccines. They believe that these injections could make them sick; it could be used as a birth control measure and may make them infertile; while some also think that this could be a means to eradicate the tribal communities," said Surath. He also added that there had been very few attempts by the government to create awareness about the vaccines among the local community. A few voluntary organisations are trying to bridge the communication gap through the mobilisation of local communities.

Many of the organisations claim that the remoteness of these villages, the lack of telecom connectivity and the dearth of proper, accessible roads pose insurmountable challenges that prevent conventional media and government outreach programmes from helping these villages. According to a written statement provided by the Ministry of Communication before Lok Sabha in the last Budget Session Odisha hosts a maximum of 6,099 villages with no mobile connectivity which is around 24 per cent of the not connected villages of India.

"In tribal areas, the local community is more likely to believe their local leaders than the outsiders. There is a huge digital divide. Unlike urban areas or well-connected villages, these villagers are not exposed to the best practices. However, they continue to be under threat as many of them come to weekly haats or markets but many do not follow covid-appropriate behaviour," said Ruchika Kashyap, Executive Trustee of Atmashakti Trust, who is working in tribal areas of Raygada and Malkangiri to create awareness among the local communities. She also said that the condition of women and differently-abled people are more worrisome in tribal communities as they do not have a voice in the decision-making process of the village.

Y Giri Rao, a tribal livelihood expert from Vasundhara, Bhubaneswar, said that the way the vaccination drive was initially undertaken, rendered the whole exercise futile.

"The tribal communities in the state are very simple and isolated and not exposed to the ideas and experiments on the covid front. They hardly see people with PPE kits, masks, gloves and other protective gear except in hospitals. The visits of health teams wearing such attire, without taking the local people in

confidence first, led to opposition and reluctance among the community and affected the vaccination drive," he told 101Reporters.

Vaccination in tribal areas across the state ran into several operational hiccups due to the shortage of vaccines and the indiscriminate and innumerable closure of drives in several districts. Tribal areas remained the worst-affected as the closures were compounded by vaccine hesitancy and opposition from the community. Moreover, these areas had the least teledensity, smartphone penetration and lack of literacy making it harder for communities to register the fast-dwindling slots online.

Experts also claimed that in several tribal villages, different members of the households often visit forests to collect forest produce or for farming, and unscheduled visits by health teams in such areas have failed to evoke a good response. Some also suggested creative means of communication like skits and folk arts to win the trust of the communities and spread the message.

Gautam Mohanty, Programme Officer at Odisha Tribal Empowerment and Livelihood Programme (OTELP), which was the nodal agency responsible for vaccinating PVTGs, said that at least 20,346 members of the PVTGs above the age of 45 years have been vaccinated till now and a total of 2,342 persons in the 18-44 age group have also been vaccinated.

Mohanty said that although OTELP and the health department faced several challenges, it has worked on special plans to counter them.

"The situation was challenging initially, where we saw many people fleeing to forest areas in tribal villages to avoid vaccination but this has changed and we are proving successful now. We started taking the local leaders and volunteers from such areas into confidence and used them to create awareness in their own language and local beliefs."

Mohanty also said that village-to-village awareness campaigns with microphones, incentives to visit quarantine centres, special covid-kits for the villagers, etc. helped them to garner their support and that the situation is likely to improve soon.

16. Tribals become anthropologists



An academy that aims at converting tribals to anthropology; where the Bhils crossover from being mere objects of study to an active role in studying themselves

A woman in her mid-twenties, probably of European descent, is trying to explain something to a group of Bhil tribals in village Tejgadh, Chhota Udaipur block, about 90 kilometres east of Vadodara city, Gujarat. Huddled, in a makeshift building on a 10-acre plot, all those present pour over a couple of copies of some document.

This is the temporary 10,000-book library of the Tribal Academy run by Vadodara-based organisation Bhasha. The document they are discussing intently is a site plan. Narayan, one of the participants, turns around to explain the goings-on, "This is for our 'rural technology centre'. She (the woman we noticed earlier) is a design engineer on internship from Holland, and has built the plan. We're discussing its pros and cons."

Who are 'we'? "Oh, we are all teachers at the academy. We are planning a technology centre to showcase our traditional technologies and nuggets of the traditional wisdom passed down orally. We want to be sure we understand what the engineer has visualised," Narayan responds. A difficult task, because the 'teachers' at the academy are Bhil tribals, with little knowledge of English. They are the first pass outs of the diploma programme in tribal studies.

But Narayan is able to express the modification he'd like to make to the plans, "I want the earthen check dam we have built on the plot to be part of the museum. That too is our knowledge." Everyone agrees. Now they need to look for a solution to the problem of making a dam an exhibit in an exposition.



This is what Bhasha and the academy are all about. Begun by G N Devy, a renowned linguist based in Vadodara, the academy tries to make anthropologists out of the tribals. In an academic inversion of sorts, the Bhil tribals (so often the object of study) study themselves, and decide what about them is worth studying.

Bhasha's and the academy's work is a unique mix of academic endeavour and social development work. Bhasha brings out a magazine called Dhol in eight tribal languages of western India, including Kukna, Dehwal, Dungri bhili and Bhandu – recording the oral traditions of that region. In keeping with Bhasha's philosophy, the editors of each edition are the tribals themselves.

It also runs a microcredit scheme in and around Tejgadh, and tries to create and build a market for tribal products. The academy runs medical camps and operates schools in the region as well. The area being renowned for the pithora

paintings, Bhasha has helped form an artistes' cooperative society, which arranges workshops and exhibitions, and also provides monetary support.

"One cannot carry out academic work in isolation," says Nima Gadhia, a linguist who works with the academy. "The academy gives the people space to explore their own systems and record them in a format that others can understand easily. In return it gives them economic opportunities and instils pride in their existing social systems."

G N Devy is modest about his dream project, "We are not doing anything fantastic, it's an attempt at doing what we think is very necessary – building an understanding of how ecological rationality is a leitmotif in the tribal languages. We train tribals through the courses at the academy to inculcate a tribal idiom in education. Then our students – tribals from this region – become teachers and fan out to other villages, setting off a ripple effect. They run schools in their own language and provide a base for ideas to help their communities adapt to the changing realities of a developing world."

An onerous task, but Devy says he'll begin with the rural technology museum. The tribals themselves will build the museum around the check dam in two years' time. He invites Down To Earth to come back for the inauguration.