

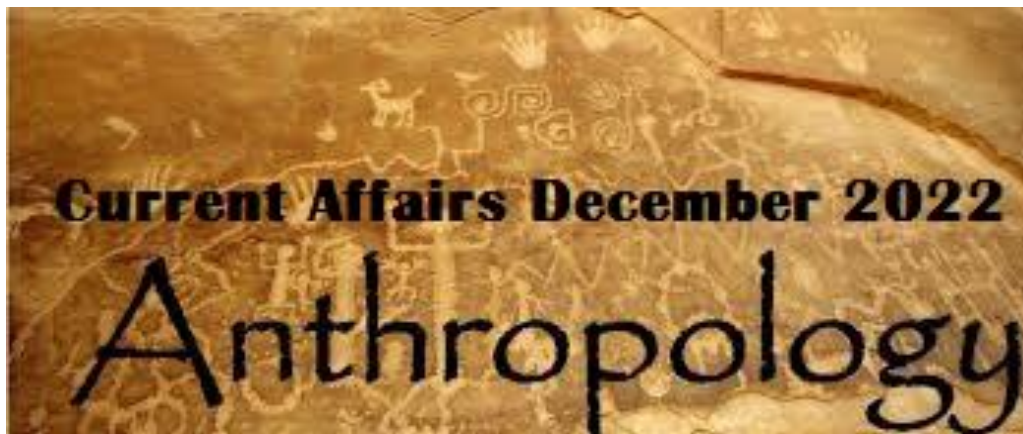
**ANTHROPOLOGY CURRENT AFFAIRS MAGAZINE
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PAPER -1

PHYSICAL & ARCHAEOLOGICAL ANTHROPOLOGY

1. Ancient skull uncovered in China could be million-year-old Homo erectus



Fieldwork is under way to excavate a rare, well-preserved specimen in central China.

Researchers are heralding the discovery of an ancient human skull in central China as an important find. As excavation of the remarkably intact fossil continues, archaeologists and palaeoanthropologists anticipate that the skull

could give a fuller picture of the diverse family tree of archaic humans living throughout Eurasia in prehistoric times.

The skull was discovered on 18 May at an excavation site 20 kilometres west of Yunyang – formerly known as Yunxian – in central China’s Hubei province. It lies 35 metres from where two skulls – dubbed the Yunxian Man skulls – were unearthed in 1989 and 1990¹, and probably belongs to the same species of ancient people, say researchers.

“It’s a wonderful discovery,” says palaeoanthropologist Amélie Vialet at the National Museum of Natural History in Paris, who has worked on the first two skulls, commonly referred to as Yunxian 1 and 2. Unlike those earlier discoveries, which were crushed and distorted after millennia underground, the third skull, Yunxian 3, seems to be in good condition.

In 2010, Vialet and her colleagues created digital reconstructions of the Yunxian 2 skull, and confirmed that it was probably a member of the archaic human species *Homo erectus*². Dating of sediment and animal fossils from the site suggest that the Yunxian humans lived between 1.1 million and 800,000 years ago.

Is Yunxian Man *Homo erectus*?

Homo erectus was first described from fossils found on the Indonesian island of Java in the late nineteenth century. Javanese fossils dating to 1.5 million years ago suggest that members of the species might have been the first early humans to have ventured out of Africa.

Homo erectus was both widespread and long-lived. Remains have been found in eastern Africa, eastern Asia and possibly Europe, and they span a period from 1.9 million to 250,000 years ago. Because of this, there is a great deal of variability in the species’ fossil record, and the precise relationships between different populations are a matter of debate.



The skulls of Yunxian 1 and 2 were distorted after millennia underground. Credit: Alamy

The Yunxian 3 skull is half-buried in an upright position. Researchers have uncovered the forehead, including the brow ridge and eye sockets, as well as the top, back and left cheekbone of the skull. It is not yet known whether teeth or a lower jawbone are attached to the skull, says Gao Xing at the Institute of Vertebrate Paleontology and Paleoanthropology in Beijing, who is leading the excavation.

Vialet says that the Yunxian 1 and 2 skulls share some features with older Javanese fossils, and others with younger *Homo erectus* fossils from mainland Asia. Like the Javanese fossils, they are large, big-brained skulls. But she says that they are less heavily built, a characteristic that usually indicates a more modern individual.

Researchers have found *Homo erectus* remains at more than a dozen sites across China. Vialet says that the ancient humans at Yunxian could be the ancestors of some of these populations, but their skulls bear distinct features that set them apart.

For example, fossils from around 700,000 years ago that were discovered in the Zhoukoudian cave system in suburban Beijing – known as the Peking Man Site – have a prominent sagittal keel, a crest that runs along the midline of the skull for the attachment of strong jaw muscles. The Yunxian skulls all seem to lack this feature, says Vialet.

Variable fossils

Yameng Zhang, a palaeoanthropologist at Shandong University, says that the *Homo erectus* fossils found in China are highly variable and researchers don't know why. It could be that each population evolved independently in Asia. Or they could have been the result of multiple waves of expansion out of Africa, he says. "More complete Chinese *H. erectus* like Yunxian 3 are crucial to answer this question."

Vialet says that the Yunxian 3 skull should be compared with Chinese as well as European hominin fossils, such as the 1.4-million-year-old face from the Sima del Elefante cave in Atapuerca, Spain, discovered in July. She is currently comparing Yunxian 2 with European hominin fossils, and says that the Yunxian people could be more similar to European populations from the middle Pleistocene epoch than they are to later specimens from China.

If the Yunxian 3 skull has teeth, especially molars, they could be useful for discerning evolutionary relationships with other early humans, says Clément Zanolli at the University of Bordeaux, France.

An age-old question

Once the Yunxian 3 skull is excavated, probably within the next few months, dating it will be an important task. Several techniques have been used to estimate the age of Yunxian 1 and Yunxian 2 at between 800,000 and 1.1 million years.

Wei Wang, a geochronologist at Shandong University, says that hominin fossils in China are often more difficult to date than fossils in Africa, because China lacks volcanic sediments that can be reliably dated by measuring the amounts of radioactive isotopes in the rock.

Jean-Jacques Bahain at the National Museum of Natural History in Paris dated sediments collected from the Yunxian site using electron spin resonance and uranium series dating³. This requires a close comparison between values taken from the fossil and the quartz in the sediment. But he says that the samples he measured weren't collected at the same time and location as the Yunxian 1 and 2 skulls.

The discovery of Yunxian 3 therefore represents a unique opportunity to collect sediment samples from the ground that the skull sits in, he says.

Small animal fossils surrounding the Yunxian 3 skull are slowing the extraction process, according to Gao. Bahain says that such specimens could help to pinpoint the age of the Yunxian 3 skull, and also connect it to early human remains elsewhere in China that have been found with prehistoric fauna.

2. What caused the disappearance of the Homo Neanderthalensis, a species that seemingly had as many capabilities as the Homo Sapiens?

There are several theories that attempt to explain it: the climate, competition with the Homo Sapiens, low genetic diversity... A study that Valencia University (UV) participates in has analysed the first cervical vertebra from several Neanderthals and confirms that the genetic diversity of the population was low, which hindered their ability to adapt to possible changes to their surroundings and, therefore, their survival. The study has been published in the 'Journal of Anatomy'. Professor Juan Alberto Sanchis Gimeno, from the Department of Human Anatomy and Embryology at the Faculty of Medicine and Dentistry of the UV, the National Museum of Natural Sciences (MNCN-CSIC) and the National Centre of Research on Human Evolution (CENIEH) all took part in the study.

Three vertebrae from the Kaprina (Croatia) site have been analysed, and material from other sites has been revised. Neanderthals populated the European continent merely 30,000 years ago, and their disappearance continues being a mystery. Work deciphering their genome has been conducted to learn their genetic diversity, as well as analysing different anatomic traits of the fossil register of the species. "In this study we focused on the anatomic variants of the first cervical vertebra, known as the atlas. The anatomic variants of this vertebra have a strong link with genetic diversity: the greater the prevalence of this type of anatomic variants, the lower the genetic diversity of the population," explains MNCN researcher Carlos A. Palancar. In Homo Sapiens, the anatomic variants of the atlas have been thoroughly studied in recent years. In the case of modern humans, the atlas shows anatomic variants in almost 30% of cases.

"However, probably due to the bad preservation of this cervical vertebra and the limited material recovered in the fossil register, the atlas of Neanderthals have been looked at this way," explains UV professor Juan Alberto Sanchis Gimeno. Recently, researchers from the Palaeoanthropology Group of the MNCN established the presence of several anatomic variants in the atlases of

Neanderthals of the El Sidrón (Asturias) site.

With the objective of confirming the high prevalence of the anatomic variants of this species, the fossil atlases of Neanderthals from the Krapina (Croatia) site have been thoroughly analysed. "Krapina is a site that is around 130,000 years old, compared to the 50,000 of El Sidrón. It is the site from where the largest amount of Neanderthal remains have been recovered, which makes it a sample of especial interest for the analysis of the genetic diversity of this species, as all individuals potentially belonged to the same population," says Daniel García-Martínez, researcher at the CENIEH.

The study of the anatomy of the three atlases recovered at this site has revealed the presence of anatomic variants in two of them (66%). One of them, known as Unclosed Transverse Foramen, UTF, has a prevalence of just 10% in modern humans. "Verifying the presence of these anatomic variants in Krapina, along with the revision of other atlases submitted to the scientific community, which has not been analysed from this viewpoint heretofore and which offers similar data (over 50%), suggest that the amount of variants in Neanderthals is significantly greater than in current humans," says Palancar. "This data supports the theory that their genetic diversity was very low and confirms that it could have been one of the causes for their disappearance," concludes MNCN researcher Markus Bastir.

Genome of a Third Neanderthal Sequenced

Until now, only the genomes of two Neanderthals have been sequenced to high quality: one from Vindjia Cave in modern-day Croatia and one from Denisova Cave in Siberia's Altai Mountains. A research team led by Svante Pääbo from the Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology in Leipzig, Germany, has now sequenced the genome of a third Neanderthal whose remains were found - 106 kilometres away from the latter site - in Chagyrskaya Cave. The researchers extracted the DNA from bone powder and sequenced it to high quality.

They estimate that the female Neanderthal lived 60,000-80,000 years ago. From the variation in the genome they estimate that she and other Siberian Neanderthals lived in small groups of less than 60 individuals. The researchers also show that the Chagyrskaya Neanderthal was more closely related to the Croatian than to the other Siberian Neanderthal which lived some 40,000 years before the Chagyrskaya Neanderthal.

This shows that Neanderthal populations from the West at some point replaced other Neanderthal populations in Siberia. "We also found that genes expressed in the striatum of the brain during adolescence showed more changes that altered the resulting amino acid when compared to other areas of the brain", says Fabrizio AMafessoni, lead author of the study. 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.

3. Homo heidelbergensis was Extremely Resourceful, New Research Shows

New research pieces together the activities and movements of a group of *Homo heidelbergensis*, a poorly understood species of archaic humans that lived between 700,000 to 200,000 years ago, as they made tools, including the oldest bone tools documented in Europe, and extensively butchered a large horse at the 480,000-year old archaeological site near Boxgrove, Sussex, the United Kingdom. The Horse Butchery Site is one of many excavated in quarries near Boxgrove, an internationally significant area that is home to Britain's oldest human remains.

During the excavations in the 1980-90s, archaeologists recovered more than 2,000 razor sharp flint fragments from eight separate groupings, known as knapping scatters. These are places where individual early humans knelt to make their tools and left behind a dense concentration of material between their knees. Embarking on an ambitious jigsaw puzzle to piece together the individual flints, Dr. Matthew Pope from the Institute of Archaeology at University College London and his colleagues discovered that in every case *Homo heidelbergensis* were making large flint knives called bifaces, often described as the perfect butcher's tool.

"This was an exceptionally rare opportunity to examine a site pretty much as it had been left behind by an extinct population, after they had gathered to totally process the carcass of a dead horse on the edge of a coastal marshland," Dr. Pope said. "Incredibly, we've been able to get as close as we can to witnessing the minute-by-minute movement and behaviors of a single apparently tight-knit group of early humans: a community of people, young and old, working together in a cooperative and highly social way." "We established early on that there were at least eight individuals at the site making tools, and considered it likely that a small group of adults, a 'hunting party,' could have been responsible for the butchery," he said. "However, we were astonished to see traces of other activities and movement across the site,

which opened the possibility of a much larger group being present."The detailed study of the horse bones shows the animal was not just stripped of meat, but each bone was broken down using stone hammers so that the marrow and liquid grease could be sucked out.

The horse appears to have been completely processed, with the fat, marrow, internal organs and even the partially digested stomach contents providing a nutritious meal for the early human group of 30 or 40 individuals envisaged for the site. However, the horse provided more than just food, and the detailed analysis of the bones found that several bones had been used as tools called retouchers. "These are some of the earliest non-stone tools found in the archaeological record of human evolution," said Simon Parfitt, also from the Institute of Archaeology at University College London.

"They would have been essential for manufacturing the finely made flint knives found in the wider Boxgrove landscape." "The finding provides evidence that early human cultures understood the properties of different organic materials and how tools could be made to improve the manufacture of other tools," said Dr. Silvia Bello, a researcher at the Natural History Museum, London. "Along with the careful butchery of the horse and the complex social interaction hinted at by the stone refitting patterns, it provides further evidence that early human population at Boxgrove were cognitively, social and culturally sophisticated." Cooperative activity amongst larger numbers of people suggests these temporary sites could have been highly social spaces for interaction, learning and the sharing of tools and ideas. The Horse Butchery Site shows this behavior more vividly than any other site so far discovered in the archaeological record.

4. 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.

SOCIO – CULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY

1. Cultivating cooperation through kinship

Cooperation among biologically unrelated individuals is uniquely human. While the capability for organisms to work together is by no means novel, humans possess an unparalleled capacity for cooperation that seems to contradict Darwinian evolutionary principles. Humans often exhibit traits--such as sympathy, loyalty, courage, and patriotism--that prioritize collective well-being over individual fitness, and often cooperation occurs among individuals with no shared biological relation. This behavior, likewise, adapts in response to changing conditions, demonstrating the flexible nature of human cooperation.

In "Identity, Kinship, and the Evolution of Cooperation," published in *Current Anthropology*, Burton Voorhees, Dwight Read, and Liane Gabora argue that humans' tendency toward these cooperative traits or ultrasociality--sets them apart. They assert that components of human cooperation-- especially cooperative behavior between unrelated individuals--are unique, existing theories lack explanations for how this distinctly human shift to cooperative behavior arose and how cooperation is maintained within a population. Expanding upon the current literature, Voorhees, Read and Gabora present a theory that attributes unique elements of human cooperation to the cultivation of a shared social identity among members of a group.

The authors propose that evolutionary developments in the brain enabled the acquisition of this shared identity by providing humans with the capability for reflective self-consciousness. Reflective self-consciousness allows an individual to fully recognize their own personhood and point of view. In turn, recognition of their own experiences aided humans in identifying similar mental states in others, allowing humans to view themselves as part of a collective unit. The authors argue that cultural idea systems such as kinship systems, provided the necessary framework for cultivating this unique degree of cooperation among humanity.

Unlike culture-gene theories where group characteristics develop from individual traits, cultural idea systems provide a top-down, organizational structure that establishes expectations of behavior among individuals in a group and leads individuals to view other members as kin. As individuals are indoctrinated, or enculturated, in these systems, their worldviews are shaped. They develop an understanding of accepted cultural norms, how to interpret their environment and their experiences, and how to interact with one another. In particular, the authors assert that enculturation fosters feelings of obligation toward cultural kin. Emphasizing linkages between psychology and behavior, the authors suggest this obligation deterred individuals from deviating from accepted behaviors and in turn, sustained cooperative behavior within the group. A shared social identity provided beneficial advantages.

As a result, the authors propose that an association developed between an individual's social identity and their survival instincts. In kinship systems, emotions are experienced within a specific cultural context, resulting in culture-laden mental feelings that prompt behavior. Voorhees, Read, and Gabora likewise argue that external cues contradicting existing culture-laden mental feelings can result in emotional reactions. Any behavior that diverges from cultural norms and threatens an individual's identity could be physiologically perceived as endangering their survival. Group members will feel driven to punish defectors in response. This theory can thus explain why failure to meet group obligations may evoke guilt in those who deviate from cultural expectations.

2. Why Sanskrit has strong links to European languages and what it learnt in India

Newer scholarship has shown that even though Sanskrit did indeed share a common ancestral homeland with European and Iranian languages, it had also

borrowed quite a bit from pre-existing Indian languages in India. In 1783, the colonial stage in Bengal saw the entrance of William Jones who was appointed judge of the Supreme Court of Judicature at Fort William. In the next couple of years, Jones established himself as an authority on ancient Indian language and culture, a field of study that was hitherto untouched.

His obsession with the linguistic past of the subcontinent, led him to propose that there existed an intimate relationship between Sanskrit and languages spoken in Europe. Jones' claim rested on the evidence of several Sanskrit words that had similarities with Greek and Latin. For instance, the Sanskrit word for 'three', that is 'trayas', is similar to the Latin 'tres' and the Greek 'treis'. Similarly, the Sanskrit for 'snake', is 'sarpa', which shares a phonetic link with 'serpens' in Latin. As he studied the languages further, it became clearer that apart from Greek and Latin, Sanskrit words could be found in most other European languages. For instance, 'mata' or mother in Sanskrit, is 'mutter' in German. 'Dan' or 'to give' in Sanskrit is 'donor' in Spanish.

To Jones' surprise, there were many such words which were clearly born out of the same root. The Sanskrit for 'father', 'pitar' for instance, has remarkable phonetic relations across European languages. It is 'pater' in Greek and Latin, 'padre' in Spanish, 'pere' in French, and 'vader' in German. "Jones' hypothesis was picked up enthusiastically by European linguists in the last decade of the 18th century. From then, till about the 1930s, linguist after linguist in Russia, Iran, India, and Europe actively sought out similar words, their interconnections and etymologies, compiled dictionaries and histories of grammar to see if Jones' thesis could be endorsed or refuted," says linguist G N Devy in a telephonic interview with indianexpress.com.

English scholar Thomas Young coined the term, 'Indo-European' for this widely spread group of related languages. But where did these languages come from and how did they migrate over such a large expanse of geographical territory? The question of the ancestral homeland of the Indo-European languages has, for more than two centuries, intrigued scholars. The issue has also led to several upheavals in the modern world, and continues to shape theories of racial supremacy. Yet, newer scholarship has shown that even though Sanskrit did indeed share a common ancestral homeland with European and Iranian languages, it had also borrowed quite a bit from pre-existing Indian languages in India. **The great Indo-European migration** In the middle of the 19th century, linguistic scholarship entered a new phase wherein the Indo-European languages were assumed to be derived from a common ancestral language called

'proto-Indo-European' (PIE).

The PIE was a theoretical construct, and we still do not know what this language was like or who precisely were its speakers. With the advancement of linguistics and archaeology, by the middle of the 20th century, some theories were put forward to explain the spread of the Indo-European languages. First is the Kurgan hypothesis, formulated in the 1950s by a Lithuanian-American archaeologist, Marija Gimbutas. It claimed that in the fourth millennium BCE people living in the Pontic steppe, north of the Black sea, were most likely to be the speakers of PIE. Anthropologist David Anthony, in his book 'The horse, the wheel, the language', claims the domestication of horses, and the invention of wheeled vehicles gave the speakers of PIE an advantage over other settled societies of Europe and Asia. "As the steppes dried and expanded, people tried to keep their animal herds fed by moving them frequently.

They discovered that with a wagon you could keep moving indefinitely," writes Anthony. "With a wagon full of tents and supplies, herders could take their herds out of the river and live for weeks or months out in the open steppes between the major rivers," he adds. Consequently, the Kurgan theory claimed that the PIE speakers expanded in several waves in the third millennium BCE. "They started moving because of their military superiority. Some of them came to India, some went to Iran and others to Europe. The branch that went to Iran became Indo-Iranian, and the one that came to India became Indo-Aryan," says Devi.

Even though other theories have emerged that have suggested the homeland of the proto-Indo-European speakers in Armenian highlands and in Asia Minor, scholars have largely refuted these claims and the Pontic steppe continues to be the most widely accepted region from where the source of Sanskrit and European languages emerged. It was this theory of Indo-European migration that became the basis of Adolf Hitler's Aryan supremacy theory. In India, Hindutva ideologues have long held the view that the Indo-European language speakers or the Aryans spread out from the subcontinent elsewhere. **The multiple migrations to India** Even as Hindutva ideologues have remained resistant to the theory of Sanskrit being a product of migration, newer research from 2010, particularly those based on genetics, have further complicated the picture. These studies of ancient DNA have shown that the Indo-European migration was preceded by several other rounds of migration and the South Asian language and culture is a product of different kinds of external and internal influences. In the hugely popular 2018 book 'Early Indians: The Story of

Our Ancestors and Where We Came From', journalist Tony Joseph claims there indeed was large-scale migration of Indo-European language speakers to South Asia in the second millennium BCE. However, he further goes on to explain that "population groups in India draw their genes from several migrations to India". He writes: "There is no such thing as a 'pure' group, race or caste that has existed since 'time immemorial'."

Yet another book, 'Who We Are and How We Got Here: Ancient DNA and the New Science of the Human Past', written by American geneticist David Reich in 2018, reiterated how the modern man is a product of several rounds of mass migration. "The formation of South Asian populations parallels that of Europeans. In both cases, a mass migration of farmers from the Near East nine thousand years ago mixed with previously established hunter-gatherers, and a second migration from the European steppe after five thousand years ago brought a different kind of ancestry and probably Indo-European languages as well," he writes. "Sanskrit arrived in the subcontinent around 1800 BCE at a time when there were already pre-existing languages here."

These pre-existing languages were fairly developed, capable of producing philosophy and poetry," says Devy. Devy explains how ancient Sanskrit developed in India in collaboration with these pre-existing languages. A good example to mention here is the addition of the sound 'ri' to Sanskrit, that produces words such as 'rishi', 'richa' and 'ritu'. "This sound is not present in Indo-Iranian languages. It is derived from the ancient mother of Assamese language that was already existing in India," says Devy. Yet another instance of Sanskrit borrowing from pre-existing languages in India is that of 'sandhi', or compound words. "Take the example of 'nava' and 'uday' it becomes 'navyodaya'."

This feature of compounding words, through which a phonetic change occurs in the original words, did not exist in the pre-Sanskrit version of Sanskrit. Neither will you see this feature in Greek, German or other European languages. Whether Sanskrit acquired it from an earlier version of Tamil or Pali is difficult to say. But it is clear that it did acquire this feature after coming to the Indian subcontinent," explains Devy. He goes on to remark that these are gifts that pre-existing languages in India gave to Sanskrit.

3. Married to a ghost

An international tradition Among the South Sudanese the tradition of “ghost marriage” is widely practiced by the Nilotic tribes with the aim of maintaining the family bloodline. Ghost marriage is nearly exclusive to the Dinka and Nuer tribes of South Sudan, although variations of such marriages also exist in Sudan, China and France. In Dinka and Nuer cultures the names of the dead family members live on from generation to generation to avoid “extinction”.

A brother’s duty David Mading Majok, a 60-year-old chief from Jonglei State based in Juba explains that in his family of six children, there were three boys and three girls and the two older brothers are deceased. Traditionally it is Mading’s duty to marry his brother’s wives. “It is my duty to marry their wives to ensure the continuation of our family lineage,” he says. Majok has three wives: the first belonging to his eldest brother, who died as a baby at the age of eight months, the second wife from his second brother, killed as a soldier during the 21 years of civil war in Sudan.

Following tradition Thirty-nine-year-old Adhar Bol Mabil, a mother of three children says that she married a deceased man to follow tradition. “It wasn’t my will to be married to a dead husband, rather the will of my parents.” “I have seen the picture of the husband that I am married to. I was only informed of his name and told a little bit about his background. All of my children are named after him. Since it’s our culture I have no other option,” she says. “As the Dinka people, we remain a majority because of ghost marriage,” says Peter Deng Manon. “We keep the names of our dead people alive through ghost marriage,” Manon praises ghost marriages.

4. All insults against SC/STs can't be termed as offence under SC/ST Act: Supreme Court

The Supreme Court on Thursday said that an offence under the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act is not made out on the fact that the complainant is a member of SC or ST. The Supreme Court on Thursday said that an offence under the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act is not made out on the fact that the complainant is a member of SC or ST. A bench comprising Justices L. Nageswara Rao, Hemant Gupta and Ajay Rastogi said: "All insults or intimidations to a person will not be an offence under the Act unless such insult or intimidation is on account of

victim belonging to Scheduled Caste or Scheduled Tribe."

The bench emphasised that the object of the Act is to improve the socio-economic conditions of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes as they are denied a number of civil rights. "Thus, an offence under the Act would be made out when a member of the vulnerable section of the society is subjected to indignities, humiliations and harassment," added the bench. The top court said that it is essential to establish that there is an intention to humiliate the victim because he belongs to such a caste.

The bench cited that another key ingredient of the provision, under Section 3 (1) (r), is that the insult or intimidation was done in "any place within public view". The judgment came on an appeal against a Uttarakhand High Court order, which dismissed a plea filed by one Hitesh Verma under Section 482 of the CrPC seeking quashing of a chargesheet and summoning order against him for an offence under Section 3(1)(r) of the SC/ST Act. An FIR was filed against him for entering the house of the respondent and hurling casteist abuses.

The bench noted that as per the FIR, the allegations of abuse were within the four walls of the building and there was no member of the public (not merely relatives or friends) at the time of the incident in the house. "Therefore, the basic ingredient that the words were uttered 'in any place within public view' is not made out," said the top court. The bench noted that the offence under the Act is not established merely on the fact that the informant is a member of Scheduled Caste unless there is an intention to humiliate a member of Scheduled Caste or Scheduled Tribe for the reason that the victim belongs to such a caste.

The top court quashed the chargesheet to the extent of offence under the special law against petitioner Hemant Verma and others. "In the present case, the parties are litigating over possession of the land. The allegation of hurling abuses is against a person who claims title over the property. If such a person happens to be a Scheduled Caste, the offence under Section 3(1) (r) of the Act is not made out," the court said. The bench observed that the Act is intended to punish the acts of the upper caste against the vulnerable sections of the society for the reason that they belong to a particular community.

PAPER - 2

INDIAN & TRIBAL ANTHROPOLOGY

1. 36,428 villages to be developed as 'model tribal villages': Govt to LS

The Union Ministry of Tribal Affairs is working to develop 36,428 villages with at least 50% tribal population and 500 STs across the country into 'model tribal' villages.



Pradhan Mantri Adi Adarsh Gram Yojna

- The government revamped the existing Scheme of 'Special Central Assistance to Tribal Sub-Scheme (SCA to TSS) with the nomenclature 'Pradhan Mantri Adi Adarsh Gram Yojna (PMAAGY)'
- **Aim:** To transform villages with significant tribal populations into the model village (Adarsh Gram) covering about the population of 4.22 crore (About 40% of the total Tribal Population).

- It is envisaged to cover 36,428 villages having at least 50% tribal population and 500 STs across States / UTs with notified STs.
- **Objective:** To achieve integrated socio-economic development of selected villages through a convergence approach.
 - It includes **preparing Village Development Plan** based on the needs, potential, and aspirations.
 -
 - It also includes **maximizing the coverage of individual/family benefit schemes** of the Central / State Governments and improving the infrastructure in vital sectors like health, education, connectivity and livelihood.
- It envisions to **mitigate gaps prominently in 8 sectors of development** viz. Road connectivity (Internal and Intervillage / block), Telecom connectivity (Mobile / internet), Schools, Anganwadi Centres, Health Sub-Centre, Drinking water facility, Drainage and solid waste management.
- For **every new village selected**, the Scheme provides for a total of Rs. 21 lakh of which Rs.20.00 lakh is for the 'Gap-filling' component and Rs.1.00 lakh is meant for 'administrative expenses in the ratio of **1:1:1:2 at the Centre, State, District and Village level respectively.**

Vision of an 'Adarsh Gram':

- It provides for An 'Adarsh Gram' is one wherein people **have access to various basic services** so that the minimum needs of all the sections of the society are fully met and disparities are reduced to a minimum.
- These villages would have **all such infrastructure and its residents will have access to all such basic services that are necessary for a dignified living**, creating thereby an environment in which everyone is enabled to utilize her/his potential to the fullest.

2. Lifestyle diseases among top killers in tribal districts: ICMR

Recently, Indian Council of Medical Research released a report on diseases affecting tribals.

Key findings of report

□ Non communicable diseases (NCDs) were causing **66 percent** of deaths in tribal areas. Percentage of deaths due to NCDs in **non-tribal areas** were **63**

percent. It was mainly caused due to-cardiovascular diseases, cancers, chronic respiratory diseases and diabetes.

- After NCDs, maximum death was caused by **infectious diseases**": **15 percent** and **injuries** caused **11 percent**.
- Majority of tribals approx. **70 percent** died at **home**.
 - o This represents- **lack of awareness** and shortage of **healthcare infrastructure** in tribal districts. Nearly **one fourth** of the deceased were **not** on any **treatment** of their **pre-existing illness**.
- **29 percent** of deceased tribals had a history of high blood pressure.
- **Percentage** of death causing diseases-
 - o **Chronic respiratory disease/ asthma- 17 percent**.
 - o **Stroke in 12 percent**.
 - o **Heart disease in 11 percent**.
 - o **Cancer in 10 percent**.
 - o **Diabetes in 9 percent**.

3. Educational complexes for tribal students



The Odisha government is planning to come up with **three mega educational complexes exclusively for tribal students**.

- These complexes will have **both academic and sports facilities**.

About the Plan:

- These **mega educational complexes** will be **established at Keonjhar, Sundargarh and Mayurbhanj** with a capacity to accommodate 3000 students.
- These campuses will have state-of-the-art facilities to **improve educational and sporting skills of tribal students** from **Standard I to XI**.
- The funds for these mega complexes will come from **Odisha Mineral Bearing Areas Development Corporation (OMBADC)**, which was formed for focused development of mineral-rich districts and these belts have a dominant tribal population.

Tribal population:

- According to the 2011 Census, tribal people constitute **8.6% of the nation's total population** i.e. over 104 million people.
- **Odisha's tribal population constitutes 9.17% of the country's tribal population** and the tribal population is 22.85% of the state's total population.
- With 62 tribal communities, Odisha has the most diverse tribes in India and out of India's total 75 **Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs)**, 13 reside in Odisha.
- **Santal and Bhuyan are two dominant tribal groups** living in Keonjhar, Mayurbhanj and Sundargarh district.
- In terms of **percentage tribal population, Odisha occupies the third position** in India, and the First and Second are Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra respectively.

About Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs)-

- In 1973, the **Dhebar Commission created Primitive Tribal Groups (PTGs)** as a separate category, who are less developed among the tribal groups.
- In 1975, the Government of India initiated to identify the most vulnerable tribal groups as a separate category called PVTGs.
- In 2006, the Government of India renamed the PTGs as **Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs)**.
- PVTGs are the **most vulnerable among the tribal groups** in India with declining or stagnant population, low level of literacy, pre-agricultural level of technology and are economically backward.

- They generally inhabit remote localities having poor infrastructure and administrative support.

Government Policies & Programmes for Tribal Education:

- **Post-Matric Scholarship Scheme-** It is a **Centrally Sponsored Scheme** implemented by the State Governments and Union Territory Administrations, and provide financial assistance to ST students pursuing post-matric courses in recognised institutions.
- **Eklavya Model Residential Schools (EMRS)-** They are established to impart quality education to ST children in remote areas in order to enable them to avail of opportunities in high and professional education courses and get employment in various sectors. They are based on Navodaya Model.
- **National Overseas Scholarship Scheme-** The scheme provides financial assistance to 20 students selected for pursuing higher studies abroad for PhD and post-doctoral studies.
- **Grants-in-Aid under Article 275(1) of the Constitution-** This grant is utilized for socio-economic development of Integrated Tribal Development Agency (ITDA), Integrated Tribal Development Project (ITDP).
- **Prime minister's research fellowship (PMRF)-**This facilitate 1000 best Btech students to do Ph.D in IITs and IISc with a handsome fellowship.
- **Adivasi Shiksha Rrinn Yojana-** Under this scheme, financial assistance up to ₹5.00 lakh at concessional rate of interest of 6% per annum is provided to ST students for pursuing professional/ technical education including Ph.D. in India.

Problems of Tribal Education:

There are **many critical issues and problems** in the field of tribal education:

- **Medium of language** - Language is one of the important constraints of tribal children which prevents them access to education.
- **The Location of the Village** - The physical barriers create a hindrance for the children of a tribal village to attend the school in a neighbouring village.
- **Economic Condition** - The economic condition of tribal people is so poor that they do not desire to spare their children or their labour power and allow them to attend schools.

- **Attitude of the parents** – As education does not yield any immediate economic return, the tribal parents prefer to engage their children in remunerative employment which supplements the family income.
- **Teacher Related Problems** –In the remote tribal areas the teacher absenteeism is a regular phenomenon and this affects largely the quality of education.
- **Lack of Proper monitoring**– Proper monitoring is hindered by poor coordination between the Tribal Welfare Department and School Education Department.

Way Forward:

- **Literacy campaign** – Proper awareness campaign should be organized to create awareness about the importance of education. Extensive literacy campaign in the tribal-dominated districts may be undertaken on a priority basis to literate the tribal.
- The **XaXa Committee recommended** a greater focus on **removing gender disparity in education.**
- **Attitude of the tribal parents** – The attitude of the tribal parents toward education should be improved through proper counselling and guidance.
- **Relevant study materials in local languages** – Most of the study materials should be supplied in local languages of tribes.
- **Appointment of Local teachers and female teachers** – It is suggested to appoint more tribal teachers and female teachers in the tribal areas. The ecological, cultural, psychological characteristics of tribal children should be considered carefully by the teachers in tribal areas.
- **Stipends and various scholarships** – Since higher education among the tribes is less, special ST scholarships should be provided to the tribal students perusing higher education, particularly in medical, engineering, and other vocational streams.
- **Residential schools** – More residential schools should be established in each state and districts and extended up to PG level in tribal areas.
- **Job opportunities**– The more emphasis should be **given on career or job-oriented courses** so that they get the job and improve their socio-economic conditions.

4. Parliament clears Bill to grant Scheduled Tribe status to Hatti community in Himachal Pradesh



Opposition members demand comprehensive legislation instead of piecemeal approach

The Constitution (Scheduled Tribes) Order (Third Amendment) Bill, 2022 to grant ST status to Hatti community in Himachal Pradesh was passed by the Parliament on Friday. While welcoming the move, several Opposition MPs demanded that instead of a “piecemeal” approach, the Centre should bring one comprehensive law on Scheduled Tribes.

“We need to protect rights of Adivasis, not just reservation,” Congress MP Saptagiri Sankar Ulaka said.

Replying to the debate on the Bill, Minister for Tribal Affairs Arjun Munda said once the Bill is passed, people of the Hatti community will enjoy ST status.

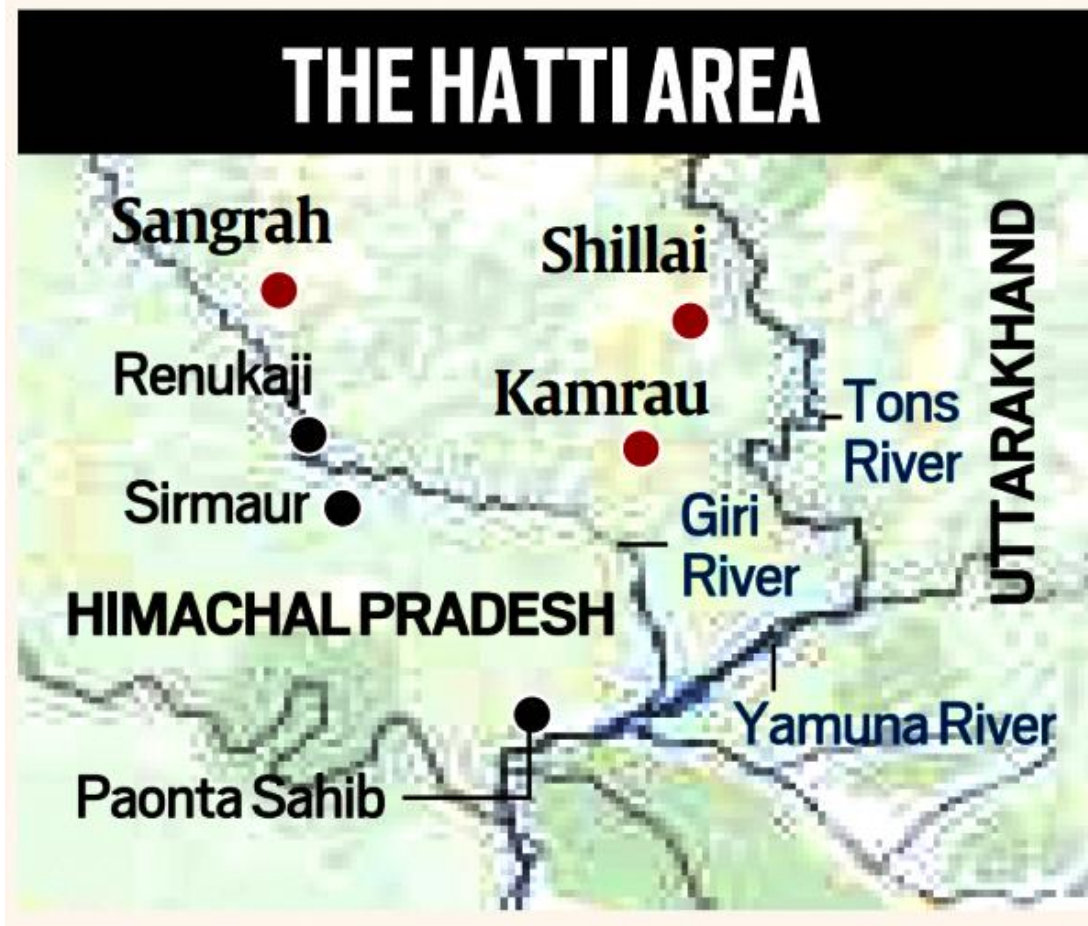
The Bill has already been cleared by the Rajya Sabha.

The government’s move to introduce the Bill came after the Himachal Pradesh government requested the Centre to include the community in the ST list, excluding those communities which are already notified as Scheduled Castes for Himachal Pradesh.

Munda has separate bills in the Winter Session to modify the list of STs in Chhattisgarh, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, and Himachal Pradesh.

In September this year, the Centre approved the inclusion, fulfilling long-pending demands from these states.

As per the 2011 Census, there are over 700 recognised Scheduled Tribes in India. However, states/UTs like Punjab, Chandigarh, Haryana, NCT of Delhi, and Puducherry have no listed STs at present.



Who are the Hattis?

- The Hattis are a **close-knit community** who got their name from their **tradition of selling homegrown vegetables, crops, meat and wool etc.** at small markets called 'haat' in towns.
- The Hatti community, whose men generally don a **distinctive white headgear during ceremonies**, is cut off from Sirmaur by two rivers called **Giri and Tons**.
 - Tons divides it from the Jaunsar Bawar area of Uttarakhand.
- The Hattis who live in the trans-Giri area and Jaunsar Bawar in Uttarakhand **were once part of the royal estate of Sirmaur until Jaunsar Bawar's separation in 1815**.
 - The two clans have **similar traditions, and inter-marriages are commonplace**.
- There is a rigid caste system among the Hattis — **the Bhat and Khash are the upper castes, while the Badhois are below them**.

- Inter-caste marriages have **traditionally remained a strict no-no**.
- Due to topographical disadvantages, **the Hattis living in the Kamrau, Sangrah, and Shilliai areas lag in education and employment.**
- The Hattis are governed by **a traditional council called Khumbli, which like the khaps of Haryana, decide community matters.**
- The Khumbli's power **has remained unchallenged** despite the establishment of the **Panchayati Raj System.**

5. Tribal students urge govt to give them better facilities for quality education



"The government talks about reservation (in jobs), but what will we do if we do not get a proper education?" said a student

Tribal students have appealed to the Centre to ensure "quality education" and proper facilities, including schools and hostels, for those belonging to scheduled tribes and said that reservation in government institutions and jobs alone is not the solution to their problems. They also urged the central government to formulate policies on the "basis of ground realities" for the welfare of tribal children.

Tribal students from across the country participated in a convention organised by the Adivasi Adhikar Manch and the Centre for Adivasi Research and Development here on Saturday to highlight their issues. "Please tell the government that we are not getting a quality education. There are no schools in some tribal areas. Even if there are, there are no teachers. At some places, tribal

students have to travel miles to reach school. "We need more hostels and good facilities. The government talks about reservation (in jobs), but what will we do if we do not get a proper education?" asked Sunil Tirki from Jharkhand.

Tribal students, who had come from faraway villages of Jharkhand, West Bengal, Chhattisgarh, Rajasthan, Karnataka, Tripura, and other states, also complained about poor hostel facilities at residential government schools. They said that hostels do not have proper drinking water and toilet facilities. At some places, there are no ceiling fans. So, the students sleep in the open during summers.

"Sometimes, we have to fetch water from nearby wells. Very often students fall sick and return home, as there are no proper medical facilities available for us," Lata Soren, a tribal student from Chattisgarh, said. The organisers claimed that because of the "flawed" policy framework of the government which is detached from the ground reality, "Adivasi children cannot sustain their education".

"The Centre is cutting down on the number of schools based on the number of students attending the classes. Now, in tribal areas, this is proving to be disastrous. Because of the geographical locations of these areas, one cannot hope that Adivasi children will sustain their education without a decentralized approach. "That's why compared to other children, the dropout rate among tribal students is higher. If the government wants to bridge this gap, then it needs a different policy framework," Brinda Karat, CPI(M) leader and member of the Adivasi Adhikar Rashtriya Manch, says. The students' parents, who also attended the convention, said that there are many villages which do not have schools.

"I want my two children to study, but there are no schools. If they want to go to school, they need to travel miles through forests. It is unsafe. Why cannot schools be built near our villages?" asks 25-year-old Phula Bai, who belongs to the Bhil tribe of Rajasthan. According to a recent survey conducted by the Adivasi Adhikar Manch and the Centre for Adivasi Research and Development, some tribal areas have recorded an increase in the dropout rate among girl students, as not many parents feel safe to send their daughters to the schools far-off.

6. Bills to modify ST list in four States

The government introduced four Bills that seek to modify the Scheduled Tribes list in the four States of Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Himachal Pradesh and Chhattisgarh in the Lok Sabha.



Highlights

- These are introduced via **amendments proposed in the Constitution (Scheduled Tribes) Order, 1950.**
- It seeks to add the **Narikoravan and Kuruvikkaran hill tribes** to the ST list of Tamil Nadu.
- The government moved a bill to introduce **Betta-Kuruba** as a synonym for the already categorised Kadu kuruba in the ST list of Karnataka.
- It moved a bill to **add a number of synonyms in Devnagri script** for the already categorised **Bhariya Bhumia tribe in the ST list of Chhattisgarh.**
- **The Hattee community** of Sirmaur district's Trans-Giri region was added to the ST list of Himachal Pradesh.

Scheduled Tribes

- The Constitution of India in Article 366 (25) prescribes that the Scheduled Tribes mean such tribes or tribal communities as are deemed under Article

342 of the Constitution to be Scheduled Tribes. The **Article 342** states that the President may specify the tribes or tribal communities which shall be deemed to be Scheduled Tribes in relation to that State or Union Territory.

- Scheduled Tribes (ST) constitute approximately **8.6% of the population** of India numbering around 10.4 crores. There are over 705 Scheduled tribes notified under article 342 of the Constitution of India.
- The **Fifth Schedule of the Constitution** deals with the administration and control of Scheduled Areas as well as of Scheduled Tribes residing in any State other than the States of Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura and Mizoram. It provides for establishment of a Tribes Advisory Council (TAC) in any State having Scheduled Areas. The States with Fifth Schedule Areas are Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Odisha, Rajasthan and Telangana.
- The **Sixth Schedule of the Constitution** provides for the administration of tribal areas in Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura and Mizoram to safeguard the rights of the tribal population in these states. The Sixth Schedule provides for autonomy in the administration of these areas through Autonomous District Councils (ADCs).

7. Centre plans to document cultures, social practices of indigenous, tribal societies



The President of India has addressed a National Workshop on 'Janjatiya Anusandhan - Asmita, Astitva evam Vikas', held at the Rashtrapati Bhavan. The workshop was organized by the National Commission for Scheduled Tribes (NCST).

Key highlights of her address

Firstly, the knowledge of tribal communities needs to be included in the Indian Knowledge System (IKS). The National Education Policy is now focusing on that.

Secondly, the population of Scheduled Tribes in India is more than 10 crore. To ensure the benefits of development reach all of them and at the same time, their cultural identity should remain intact.

Thirdly, history tells us that tribal society never accepted slavery. They were always at the forefront of retaliating against any attack on the country. Struggles and sacrifices in many revolts such as Santhal, Hul, Kol, Birsa, Bhil movement by tribal communities across the country can inspire all the citizens.

Steps being taken by NCST to preserve Tribal Culture

The National Commission for Scheduled Tribes (NCST) along with the Union government is now pushing for the "re-documentation" of the cultures and social practices of indigenous and tribal societies in India.

This is because the existing scholarly literature on tribals is heavily reliant on the body of knowledge created by the colonizing government.

The re-documentation will enable the government to understand tribal societies, identity and rights better.

8. After Helping Treat 1 Lakh Tribals; Doctor Couple Now Empowers Them Through Craft



“With healthcare off to a good start, our next goal was to help the women revive their traditional craft of Lambadi embroidery. That was the beginning of the Porgai Artisans Association.”

When Dr M Regi and Dr Lalitha Reji, a doctor couple hailing from Kerala, decided to backpack across the country for a year to document the most sensitive areas desperately in need of medical help, they encountered the unique Lambadi community, a nomadic tribe living in Sittilingi in Dharmapuri district, Tamil Nadu.

Residing near the foothills of the Kalrayan and Sitteri hill ranges, this remote tribal community was cut off from the rest of the modern world. They are called

the 'Malavasis' or 'Hill People' who found their living through rain-fed agriculture.

The doctor couple was shocked and troubled at the sheer lack of healthcare facilities in the area. During times of any medical emergency, these people would travel to Salem or to Dharmapurimore than 50 KM away.

That's when they decided to stay and make affordable healthcare available to Sittilingi's two lakh people and give them a source of livelihood to live a life of dignity and earn recognition for their traditional craft.

Bringing Relief to the Lambadi Tribals

After completing their medical training, Dr M Regi and Dr Lalitha Reji started working in a hospital in Gandhigram where they encountered people who had travelled miles for the treatment of preventable illnesses like diarrhoea and childhood pneumonia.

Rattled by the lack of healthcare access, the couple decided to delve into the country's primary healthcare setup by visiting many villages and taluks. This is when they came across the community of Lambadi tribals.

What pushed the couple further to help bring relief to these people was the fact that this hamlet recorded an Infant Mortality Rate (IMR) of 150 per 1,000 babies, the highest in all of India!

It has been 25 years now and the couple is still moving forward with their project, Tribal Health Initiative (THI).

"We had no money to buy land, so we set up a small clinic on government land, nothing more than a small hut built by the tribals. We worked out of this hut for three years, conducting deliveries and minor surgeries on the floor," informs Dr Regi

Today, the duo has come a long way from the thatched hut to a 35-bed full-fledged hospital, equipped with an ICU and ventilator, a dental clinic, a labour room, a neonatal room, an emergency room, a fully functional laboratory, a modern operation theatre and other facilities like X-Ray, Ultrasound, endoscopy, and echocardiography, like any other modern hospital.

Due to their incessant efforts, the IMR in Sittilingi has now reduced to 20 per

1,000, one of the lowest in India.

The Beginning Of 'Porgai'

But the doctor duo didn't stop at that. The couple decided to venture into preserving the history and cultural heritage of the tribe by reviving the dying art of Lambadi embroidery. "With healthcare off to a good start, our next goal was to help the women revive their traditional craft of Lambadi embroidery. That was the beginning of the Porgai Artisans Association.

This unique embroidery art form is an amalgamation of pattern darning, mirror work, cross-stitch, overlaid and quilting stitches with borders of '*Kangura*' patchwork done on loosely-woven dark blue or red handloom base fabric.

Often mistaken as Kutchi (Kachhi) embroidery because of the mirror work, the shells and coins are unique to this type of embroidery, with the stitches being different.

'Porgai', which stands for 'pride' in the Lambadi dialect represents self-sufficiency and independence for the farmers, artisans and the community as a whole.

"We had a rich tradition of hand embroidery which our ancestors did on the clothing and other day to day articles. In course of time, when we stopped wearing the traditional dress, the craft was lost for more than two generations," says Neela, a part of the community.

"A majority of Porgai's products are made from organic cotton grown in our own villages. This cotton, untrammelled by pesticides and unpolluted by chemical fertilisers is then hand-spun, hand-woven and dyed with natural dyes by cooperatives," explains Dr Reji.

"Whether it is subtly embroidered Kurti or a cushion cover brightly emblazoned with traditional Lambadi designs when you buy a Porgai product, you are bringing home a world that values human passion and individual skill," explains Reji.

Porgai products have also drawn students from fashion designing schools as well. At least half-a-dozen interns from Bengaluru, Delhi and Mumbai have worked with the tribal women, helping them retain the ethnic embroidery work while trying to improvise on the design aspect and make them trendy.

Dr Regi observes, “Just building and running a hospital isn’t enough. Whether it is eating healthy chemical-free food by adopting organic farming or promoting entrepreneurship among women, the key to a healthy community is dependent on upliftment in different fields.”

9. No land for tribals displaced by Maoist-Salwa Judum conflict: Centre



Activists say that the displacement occurred because Chhattisgarh supported the Salwa Judum; Union minister Arjun Munda says Centre trying to rehabilitate tribals

Around 50,000 tribals from Chhattisgarh, who were forced to flee to Andhra Pradesh and Telangana due to the Maoist-Salwa Judum conflict in 2005, are not eligible for land entitlements, the Union Minister for Tribal Affairs has told *Down To Earth*.

The tribals have been categorised as Internally Displaced People (IDP). Section 3.1.m of the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers

(Recognition of Forest Rights) Act or FRA, 2006, gives rights to in situ or alternative land to those who have been displaced.

The section states:

Right to in situ rehabilitation including alternative land in cases where the Scheduled Tribes and other traditional forest dwellers have been illegally evicted or displaced from forest land of any description without receiving their legal entitlement to rehabilitation prior to the 13th day of December, 2005.

The Chhattisgarh IDPs are struggling to get land titles in the states they migrated to, under this section. Some 109 people from the two states staged a day-long protest at Jantar Mantar in New Delhi April 6, 2022.

However, minister Arjun Munda, in a conversation with *DTE* said the IDPs cannot be granted land under this section of the FRA as they were not displaced because of a government project.

“The section 3.1.m of FRA is applicable to the tribal people who were displaced because of diversion of government land for development and industrial projects, not for those who fled because of conflict,” Munda told *DTE* in a telephonic conversation.

Activists, on the other hand, say that while the tribals may have been displaced due to conflict, the displacement occurred because the Chhattisgarh government extended support to the Salwa Judum, a state-sponsored militia. Hence, technically, the line ‘illegally evicted or displaced’ stands true here.

“Maoists have been present in Chhattisgarh since the last five decades, but what happened in 2005 that forced so many people to seek shelter in other states?”

Shubhranshu Choudhary, an activist and founder of The New Peace Process, a non-profit working for tribal rights in Chhattisgarh, said.

“Besides, the section does not mention that the displacement has to be due to a government project,” he added.

He added that if it was a question of whether the tribals were displaced by the government or not, one can refer to the Supreme Court Order issued for the

petition filed by Nandini Sundar and Others versus the State of Chhattisgarh in 2011.

The order asked the state to withdraw support to the Salwa Judum or Special Police Officers (SPOs), whom the state was paying an honorarium of Rs 3,000.

The 2011 SC order states:

It is now clear to us, as alleged by the petitioners, that thousands of tribal youth are being appointed by the State of Chhattisgarh, with the consent of the Union of India, to engage in armed conflict with the Maoists / Naxalites.

The Union Ministry for Tribal Affairs (MoTA) was framing guidelines for this particular section in 2019 to get more clarity on the issue. However, Munda told *DTE* that no progress had been made on the guidelines so far.

“We have not made a lot of progress on the guidelines and it will take time,” Munda said. “When there is a question of allotting land titles in their native state, it is fairly easy. But allotting titles to natives of a different state who wish to settle in another state is very complicated under FRA.”

Munda added that the MoTA has asked the government of Chhattisgarh for the list of IDPs, so that they can be rehabilitated within the same state.

“We are trying to give them their land rights in Chhattisgarh, their home state. If Chhattisgarh is unable to do so, then we will initiate talks with the state governments of Telangana and Andhra Pradesh. We are discussing the issue with Chhattisgarh first and have asked them to make a list of the IDPs,” he said.

An official statement released by the government of Chhattisgarh April 4, 2020, said the state will welcome the tribals who were displaced from it 15 years back due to the conflict and provide them with safe areas for their rehabilitation.

The Commissioner of Bastar Division has been appointed as the nodal officer for rehabilitation and coordination with different states for the rehabilitation of IDPs of the Bastar region.

This was done on the instruction of Chief Minister Bhupesh Baghel after a meeting with activists working for the welfare of tribals

But the IDPs do not want to migrate back to their home-state as they have started their lives from scratch in the new settlements in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana.

“We have identified 262 villages in Telangana and Andhra Pradesh with around 6,721 IDP families. They are mostly in East and West Godavari districts of AP and Bhadrachalam and Mulugu districts of Telangana,” Choudhary said.

He added that around 1,086 people have filled the forms under the section 3.1.m of the FRA and are demanding land in the two states as they do not wish to go back to Chhattisgarh.

“My friends from the village were shot by the local youth who joined Salwa Judum. They were innocent farmers but were branded as Naxalites by the youth and killed for no reason,” Dudhi Ganga, an IDP, said.

“I, with my aged parents ran away from Sukma out of fear. Now, I have my family here. My children speak Telugu and consider Telangana as their own. This is a peaceful area and we wish to settle here permanently,” Ganga added.

10. India's abuses of tribal women defending ancestral lands from mining

This story is taken wholly from the text of a Survival International brochure summarising its 2022 report on the abuses of women in India.

'The truth about Adivasi women land defenders must come out: we are literally saving the country and the world ... and they are abusing us for it.'

Introduction

Adivasi (Indigenous) lands are increasingly under attack in central India under the premiership of Narendra Modi.

Mining companies - both state and private - are determined to access the resources beneath these lands, including coal and metal ores. Hundreds of thousands of Adivasi people - across six central Indian states - could be

dispossessed if this mining rush continues unchecked. Currently, the government plans to double coal mining to one billion tonnes a year.

Most of the proposed new mines are on Adivasi lands. The rights that the Adivasi communities have to their lands, their ways of life, their sacred spaces and to give or withhold their consent to mining are being violated in the rush for mineral riches. Ignored and abused by the state and national governments, Adivasi communities have no option but to resist through direct action. These brave resistance movements demand two things above all else: an end to the violation of their rights, and the protection of their lands from extractive industries.



Adivasi women of India's Hasdeo forests protest against new coal mines, including those by Adani, in central India. Image Vijay Ramamurthy

Rather than stand with their citizens, government agencies are acting in the interests of the mining corporations, attempting to crush the resistance movements, often violently. A Survival International report details the extent of that government-sanctioned repression.

At the heart of these movements are Adivasi women, sitting in front of bulldozers, organising marches and protests, protecting their trees, standing firm

against the assault on their lands and rights. They are paying a terrible price: Adivasi women are being abused at an appalling rate – physically and sexually – and are losing their liberty and even their lives. This is a triple punishment: for being Indigenous, for being women, and for standing up for their rights against powerful interests.

Adivasi women defending their lands

Over and over again, women have stood in the front line against the security forces that are acting in the interests of the mining corporations to protect their communities, lands and future. In so doing, they have faced police baton charges, teargas, rubber bullets and live rounds. Rather than protect them, the security forces are a major source of the violence the women experience.

In the coal belt across the state of Jharkhand, Adivasi women have been standing in front of mineworkers, using their words and bodies to stop the felling of trees and destruction of their lands. In Odisha state, there has been an accelerating rush for land and resources in the Adivasi areas since the 1980s, which has been strongly resisted by movements with women at their very centre.

In Gandhamadan in the 1980s, women put their babies on the road in front of the police and bulldozers to show that future generations' lives depend totally on stopping the mines. In the 2000s Dongria Kondh women stood firm against the mining of their sacred Niyamgiri Hills, even when they were arrested on trumped-up charges.

In West Bengal, Adivasi women are leading the resistance to the Deocha-Pachami coal mine project, which would displace 21,000 people. Women have declared their determination to stop the mine and held a huge protest meeting, which local politicians and police tried to stop. After one woman was beaten by police so severely that she miscarried, the women demanded – and received – a written apology from a local political leader. Their battle continues. Adivasi women are resisting in these ways because, they say, their land is their life: the centre of their cultural, economic and spiritual existence.

Brutal repression of Adivasi women defending their lands

Adivasi women who stand up for their lands and rights and against the injustices that their communities are facing are targeted for both their defiance and their gender. There are high rates of sexual abuse of Adivasi women in the districts with high levels of mining and resistance to mining. Women defending

their lands face threats of sexual violence, public stripping, acid attacks and defamation. By threatening and brutalising Adivasi women, the perpetrators – usually the security forces working in the interests of mining – hope to intimidate and suppress the whole community's resistance.

Sexual abuse of Adivasi women by security forces

Rape and sexual violence as weapons of punishment, intimidation and control are used with horrific frequency by India's security forces against Adivasi women across the mining belt. In 2016, the National Human Rights Commission slammed the Chhattisgarh government for the sexual abuse of Adivasi women by security forces in Bastar. They highlighted 16 cases – the tip of a vast iceberg. A report by Women Against Sexual Violence and State Repression (WSS) found sexual abuse by security forces to be 'rampant' and 'used as a systematic means of torture and repression'.

The study concluded that 'perpetrators enjoy the impunity of the uniform, armed might and political and corporate backing' and the violent treatment of Adivasis aims to 'batter the citizens of Chhattisgarh into submission to corporate-led industrialisation'. Women are taken from their homes, fields, forests and dragged away. They are sexually abused in police lock-ups and in prison. They are even shot at and then raped when they are incapacitated.

In 2017, a deputy superintendent of Raipur jail, Chhattisgarh, Varsha Dongre, issued a whistle-blowing statement on the violence against Adivasi women and girls in prisons, for which she was suspended. She stated: 'The fact is that the forests are rich in natural mineral resources and in order to sell them to industrialists and capitalists, the forests need to be vacated. But the tribals will not vacate them because it is their home.

They too want Naxalism to end but the way the protectors of the country rape their daughters, burn their houses and send them to prison in false cases, who do they turn to for justice? ... I have seen 14-16-year-old Adivasi girls being stripped naked in police stations and tortured. They were given electric shocks on their wrists and breasts. I have seen the marks. It horrified me.'

Gender-specific violence

Adivasi women who stand up against the might of the state and corporations which are seeking control over their lands and resources are punished viciously. Security forces, for example, justify squeezing Adivasi women's breasts by

saying they need to ascertain if they are producing milk, claiming insurgents are rarely mothers. Adivasi women face gender-specific violence such as beatings of pregnant women and acid attacks. A particularly gruesome feature of the violence against them is the sexualized mutilation of victims - before and after death.

Extrajudicial killings

In areas with movements actively resisting mining, 'encounter killings' happen alarmingly regularly. The police and paramilitary forces claim they 'encounter' armed rebels and fire in self-defence. After huge efforts, activists have managed to get official investigations into some of these killings. They rarely corroborate the government's version of events. There is state complicity in these crimes at high levels. In 2021 an investigation into the extrajudicial shooting in 2013 of eight Adivasis, including four children in Edesmetta, concluded that the 'encounter' was a 'mistake' and the victims were unarmed Adivasis, not Maoists. In 2020 six women from the village were 'beaten up' for questioning police actions.

Fear, distrust and resentment are strong in the area. Wave upon wave of this brutality and state-sanctioned disregard for Adivasi lives have accumulated to make Adivasi people in mining areas extremely wary, and painfully aware that the government and its agents are acting directly against their interests and rights. Adivasis' vibrant, peaceful movements have proved amazingly effective in the face of such horrific repression, as shown, for example, by the Dongria Kondh tribe stopping a billion-dollar mine on their sacred Niyamgiri Hills.

Conclusion

Adivasi peoples are striving to keep the forests standing and the coal in the ground. They are fighting for their 'jal, jungle, jameen' (water, forest and land), and for all the species they coexist with, the climate and the future. Their sustainable ways of life are being undermined by the theft of their lands and persecution of their leaders and communities. For their central role in defending their lands, Adivasi women are being brutally repressed and abused. Sexual violence by so-called security forces is commonplace in the highly contested areas where Adivasi people are defending their lands, and the state is working with corporates to open the areas up to mining. Adivasi people say again and again they will lay down their lives before they will give up their lands, because their cultural, spiritual and economic connection is so strong.

11. Expedite categorization of DNTs: House panel

A Parliamentary panel has pulled up the Centre over the “very slow” process to categorize over 260 Denotified, nomadic and semi-nomadic tribes (DNTs) under either the SC/ST/OBC lists.

- The government officials also pointed ‘delay’ in the approval of benefits under the SEED (Scheme for Economic Empowerment of DNTs) scheme launched in February this year.
- There is a scheme in place with proper budgetary outlay, but there is no whereabouts of targeted beneficiaries for it. Imagine how ironical this is.

DNTs

- The term ‘De-notified Tribes’ stands for all those communities which were once notified under the Criminal Tribes Acts, enforced by the British Raj between 1871 and 1947.
- These Acts were repealed after Independence in 1952, and these communities were “De-Notified”.
- The DNTs (of whom most are the medieval period Banjaras) are the most neglected, marginalized, and economically and socially deprived communities.
- Most of them have been living a life of destitution for generations and still continue to do so with an uncertain and gloomy future.
- More than 10 crore Indians from over 1,400 communities are either denotified, nomadic or semi-nomadic.

SEED Scheme

- It has been formulated for families having income from all sources of Rs.2.50 lakh or less per annum and not availing any such benefits from similar Scheme of Centre Government or the State Government.
- The Scheme will be implemented through a portal, developed by the Department of Social Justice & Empowerment.
- Post verification, the funds will be transferred directly to the beneficiaries in their account.
- The other implementing agencies are Ministry of Rural Development, National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM) and National Health Authority (NHA).

Components of the scheme

The Scheme will have the following four components:

- **Free Coaching:** A component of free Coaching for DNT Students has been envisioned for the educational empowerment of these communities. It seeks to enable them to appear in competitive examinations/ admission to professional courses like medicine, engineering, MBA, etc. for obtaining an appropriate job in the Public/Private Sector.
- **Health Insurance:** Members of these communities are likely to have little or no access to medical facilities and other benefits available under the mainstream health policies. This would ensure a health insurance cover of Rs.5 lakhs per family per year for families as per norms of “Ayushman Bharat Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana.
- **Livelihood Initiatives:** The decline of traditional occupations of DNT/NT/SNT communities has exacerbated their poverty. A focus to support livelihood generation for these communities was required.
- **Financial support for Housing:** Considering the shortage of houses for DNTs, it has been proposed to earmark a separate outlay for PMAY to support specific importance in providing houses only for DNTs living in rural areas.

Why was such scheme launched?

- **DNTs are ignored communities:** They escaped the attention of our developmental framework and thus are deprived of the support unlike Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.
- **Most deprived section:** Historically, these communities never had access to private land or homeownership.
- **Ecological contribution:** These tribes used forests and grazing lands for their livelihood and residential use and had “strong ecological connections.

Status of DNT's identification

- **Anthropological Survey of India study:** AnSI had submitted reports on categorisation of 48 DNT communities so far. Further, the AnSI is finalising studies on 161 communities and is expected to finish studying the remaining communities (about 70) by the end of 2022.

- **Idate Commission:** It had categorised 1,262 communities under SC/ST/OBC lists and 267 communities were left uncategorised.

Why is there such delay?

- **Slow response from states:** Officials cannot begin processing the applications for the SEED scheme unless the State and district-level reviews are completed.
- **Duplication of communities:** There is inaccurate categorization/ duplication of communities which leading to hiccups in the approval process.

12. Adivasis at bottom rung of India's development pyramid, finds Tribal Development Report 2022



India's tribal communities have been pushed away from alluvial plains and fertile river basins, into the harshest ecological regions, the report notes

India's tribal communities form 8.6 per cent of the country's population according to the 2011 Census. But they are at the bottom of the country's development pyramid even after 75 years of independence, according to a new report released November 28, 2022.

The Tribal Development Report 2022, launched by the Bharat Rural Livelihood Foundation (BRLF) in two volumes, claims to be the first of its kind since 1947.

The report focuses on the status of tribal communities at an all-India level and central India in particular, concerning livelihoods, agriculture, natural resources, economy, migration, governance, human development, gender, health, education, art, and culture. Central India is home to 80% of the tribal communities in the country.

The authors of the report discussed their papers and findings during a two-day event at the India International Centre.

Damning findings

The BRLF was set up the Union Cabinet September 3, 2013 as an independent society under the Union Ministry of Rural Development to scale up civil society action in partnership with central and state governments.

Prathamesh Ambasta, chief executive of the BRLF, said:

Promod Boro the chief executive member of Bodoland Territorial Council, Assam, said November 29 that it is important to understand the special characteristics of tribal communities to frame policies for them.

“There are many tribal communities that prefer isolation and silence. They are shy and are not going to reach out to the outside world on their own. Policy makers and leaders of the country need to understand this trait and then work towards the welfare of Adivasis so that they connect with them in a better way,” he said.

“Tribal areas are also areas that have faced a lot of disturbance and conflict. This is one of the reasons why many government welfare schemes and policies are unable to take off in these areas. Distress in the area affects both sides,” he said.

The report stated that indigenous communities of India have been pushed farther away from alluvial plains and fertile river basins into the harshest ecological regions of the country like hills, forests, and drylands.

Of the 257 Scheduled Tribe districts, 230 (90 per cent) are either forested or hilly or dry. But they account for 80 per cent of India’s tribal population.

“Adivasi sub-districts belong to a larger contiguous backward region or Adivasi belt, which goes beyond the frozen administrative categories of state, district and sub-district. In fact, mapping of predominantly Adivasi concentrated sub-districts suggests a continuum of pockets of underdevelopment that are connected to one another and to the larger development processes around them,” the report noted.

It further stated that during British colonial rule, the bond between Adivasis and their relation of symbiosis with their immediate environment was ruptured.

After the enactment of the Forest Conservation Act in 1980, the conflict came to be seen as between environmental protection and the needs of local Adivasi communities, driving a wedge between people and forests.

It was in the National Forest Policy of 1988 that domestic requirements of local people were explicitly recognised for the very first time.

The Policy emphasised safeguarding their customary rights and closely associating Adivasis in the protection of forests. But the movement towards a people-oriented perspective has not been matched by reality on the ground.

The report combines data from government sources, case studies, archival research, and interviews on crucial dimensions of tribal lives and livelihoods.

The goal is to inform stakeholders, including key policymakers, practitioners, activists, and academics, to help understand the scope of tribal issues.

The report focuses on the overarching theme of livelihoods for tribal communities from central India. It presents a status report on the overall macroeconomic situation, agriculture, land, energy, and water use, especially groundwater management.

13. Bengal forest department calls Gram Sabha 'illegal'; files FIR against 11



Villagers from the Gram Sabha gathered near Bamini falls on the eve of Birsa Munda's birthday

On the eve of Birsa Munda's birthday (November 15), the Ajodhya hills in West Bengal echoed with his call for Ulgulan. Hundreds had gathered to celebrate the cultural and political significance of Birsa Munda's life.

They marched to the nearby Bamini waterfalls, a popular tourist attraction, under the administration of the state forest department and hauled up the board bearing their Gram Sabha's name.

Though there were many more present in the making of this historical moment, a majority were those from the three villages of Dulgubera, Bandhghutu and Baruajera. These three hamlets had come together to form a common Gram Sabha and claimed Community Forest Resource Rights (CFR) over 504 hectares. Their Gram Sabha's name, they felt, should stand at the entrance of the waterfalls.

Under the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights Act), 2006, the Adivasis of these hamlets are entitled to individual and community forest resource rights, over the vast jungles that they have been living with since many generations. Their livelihoods and life worlds are intrinsically linked with these hills.

They started forming their Gram Sabhas in 2019. However, the forest department has filed a first information report against 11 persons, stating that the Gram Sabha itself is 'illegal' and, by extension, their actions too.

History of struggle

In December 2021, a divisional bench of the Calcutta High Court reinstated the in-principle clearance of the Turga Pumped Storage Hydroelectric Project (TPSHP) proposed over an area of 292 hectares in the Ajodhaya hills of West Bengal and the eastern-most part of the *Chota Nagpur* plateau.

The judgement came after the West Bengal government appealed against the single bench order of 2018 that had completely set aside the in-principle clearance for the project on the grounds of false consent, fabricated on behalf of the Ajodhaya *Gram Panchayat* members.

The protest of the Adivasi villagers against TPSHP, thus, dates back to 2017 and has been a long and tedious one comprising peaceful processions, marches, letters, deputations, awareness building and filing of a writ petition.

The state government tried various tactics, including recent oral promises of jobs and distribution of goats.

TPSHP is part of a larger project that was proposed by the West Bengal government as far back as 1979 over rivers Bamni, Turga, Bandu and Kathaljor, on which eight dams in very close proximity were to come up.

When the first one, the Purulia Pumped Storage Project (PPSP) station was set up (2002-2008), the villagers were promised a number of benefits but rather their fragile and complex forest-dependent existence was upset.

Sachar Soren from Shahebdi village said "our grazing commons disappeared, not a single youth got employment from our community and no one got any sort of compensation".

Sushatno Hembram, a resident of Puniasashan Gram Sabha, said:

Budhadeb Bhattachraya (former chief minister) had come and promised free electricity within 5 kilometres from the project but we got nothing...even the security guards employed are from outside.

The proposed TPSHP will affect nearly 1,600 people across 94 hamlets and lead to felling of more than 300,000 trees.

The environment impact assessment for the project declared the area to be a 'no-elephant' zone. But they are spotted by villagers every few days. "Turga is the only dense forest left for the herds after large areas were deforested for PPSP," said Dhirendranath Chanre. "Not only are our crops damaged, a man was killed in his village a month ago when the elephant entered and attacked."

State and FRA

The response of the Government of West Bengal to granting CFR has been more than indifferent, bordering on oppositional.

Mobilisation and formation of the Gram Sabha and Forest Rights Committee has been met with resistance and deemed by officials to be redundant on the faulty argument that there already exists a Gram Sansad and a Joint Forest Management Committee.

The 'Gram Sansad' (as per the West Bengal Panchayat Amendment Act 1994 comprises all the voters in the constituency of the Gram Panchayat and a constituency may comprise more than one village) was to replace the Gram Sabha of the FRA, according to a memo issued by the Backward Classes Welfare Department.

This was nothing but an attempt to thwart the new institutional setup in the very initial stages itself since the FRA clearly states that the Gram Sabha is to be formed at the hamlet level, the most decentralised unit.

The uptake of CFR is as low as 400 hectares in the state and the IFR titles which have been 'distributed' on a large scale only before the elections (2011 and 2016), do not have necessary details such as *khatiyon* number, plot number or even a date.

This attack on the Ajodhaya Gram Sabha cannot be seen in isolation. In the neighbouring Birbhum district in Deucha Panchami, tribals and non-tribal inhabitants have been opposing the proposed largest coal block in the country, which is expected to displace a minimum of 21,000 people and cause widespread irreversible environmental damage.

The Chief Minister has announced increased monetary packages and compensation for even those who do not own land. The local leaders (mostly Santhals) have taken up the FRA and started to form Gram Sabhas.

However, the treatment of the Ajodhaya Gram Sabha indicates the state is warning other Gram Sabhas who are in the process of not simply claiming their rights but also defending the environment against undemocratically planned projects in the name of energy security or even 'clean' energy.

Platforms like *Prakriti Bachao Adivasi Bachao Manch* have been bringing together, at state level, local movements. These include the most early CFR demands made by the Gram Sabhas of forest villages of North Bengal under the *Uttar Banga Ban Jan Shramjibi Manch*.

It is not the first time that the forest department has slapped cases against those who have tried to spread awareness about FRA, but the declaration of the Gram Sabha as 'illegal' throws up a dangerous precedent. The move itself is based on illegal grounds, especially in a tribal-majority landscape where even the Panchayat Extension to Scheduled Areas Act is not available.

14. 'Review 150,000 forest rights claims rejected without reason'



Procedures violated; Rights body demands findings reports for Scheduled Tribe, Other Traditional Forest Dwellers claims

As many as 150,000 applications for individual forest rights in Odisha have been rejected without reason, a national forum representing tribal communities and forest dwellers has alleged, calling for a review.

The Odisha chapter of Campaign for Survival and Dignity (CSD) – a national platform of tribal and forest dwellers’ organisation – and Gram Sabhas Collectives from 18 districts dominated by tribal communities have demanded a review over rejection of the claims,

The claimants alleged they were not informed or allowed to appeal against the rejection by the district-level committee (DLC) or the sub-divisional level committee (SDLC).

The state government must direct the SDLC and the DLC to follow proper procedure and return all the pending, incomplete, or rejected claims with findings reports, CSD demanded on November 7, 2022.

The reports must be submitted directly to the Gram Sabhas under Rule 12A of the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act 2006 (FRA) 2012 amendment. CSD also demanded a review of the rejected claims filed by the Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (OTFD).

By August 2022, around 140,347 IFR claims – 70,984 Scheduled Tribe claims and 69,399 OTFD ones – had been rejected at the DLC level in Odisha.

Several claims were filed many years ago and rejected long back, but the applicants were not informed, CSD said in a press note.

“Such massive rejections of IFR claims were without any intimation to the claimants or Gram Sabhas prescribed under Rule 12A (sub-rule 6,7,10) of Amended Rules 2012,” read the release. “The violation of the procedures in the processing of the claims is common in all the districts.”

SDLCs and DLCs had rejected OTFDs claims outright because of the lack of clarity and improper understanding about the eligibility, the forum further said. The types of evidence required by the officials responsible for the processing of claims in the two committees was also missing, it added.

“The implementing authorities have taken a fully biased approach towards OTFDs, even though Parliament itself has vested its complete faith in them when enacting this law and given OTFDs the same rights and powers as forest dwelling STs under FRA,” CSD said.

In 2019, a Supreme Court of India ordered chief secretaries of states to comply with the FRA rules and submit affidavits on the details of procedures followed for settlement of claims, orders of rejection of claims and main grounds of rejection, CSD noted.

Chief secretaries also had to state whether tribals were given opportunities to adduce the evidence.

Still, the state governments at the SDLC and DLC level adopted a Camp Court method and conducted the public hearings bypassing the authority and functions of Gram Sabha to take free, fair and conflict-neutral decisions, further violating the SC’s order to follow due procedures, the forum added.

15. All insults against SC/STs can't be termed as offence under SC/ST Act: Supreme Court

The Supreme Court on Thursday said that an offence under the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act is not made out on the fact that the complainant is a member of SC or ST. The Supreme

Court on Thursday said that an offence under the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act is not made out on the fact that the complainant is a member of SC or ST. A bench comprising Justices L. Nageswara Rao, Hemant Gupta and Ajay Rastogi said: "All insults or intimidations to a person will not be an offence under the Act unless such insult or intimidation is on account of victim belonging to Scheduled Caste or Scheduled Tribe."

The bench emphasised that the object of the Act is to improve the socio-economic conditions of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes as they are denied a number of civil rights. "Thus, an offence under the Act would be made out when a member of the vulnerable section of the society is subjected to indignities, humiliations and harassment," added the bench. The top court said that it is essential to establish that there is an intention to humiliate the victim because he belongs to such a caste.

The bench cited that another key ingredient of the provision, under Section 3(1)(r), is that the insult or intimidation was done in "any place within public view". The judgment came on an appeal against a Uttarakhand High Court order, which dismissed a plea filed by one Hitesh Verma under Section 482 of the CrPC seeking quashing of a chargesheet and summoning order against him for an offence under Section 3(1)(r) of the SC/ST Act. An FIR was filed against him for entering the house of the respondent and hurling casteist abuses.

The bench noted that as per the FIR, the allegations of abuse were within the four walls of the building and there was no member of the public (not merely relatives or friends) at the time of the incident in the house.

"Therefore, the basic ingredient that the words were uttered 'in any place within public view' is not made out," said the top court. The bench noted that the offence under the Act is not established merely on the fact that the informant is a member of Scheduled Caste unless there is an intention to humiliate a member of Scheduled Caste or Scheduled Tribe for the reason that the victim belongs to such a caste.

The top court quashed the chargesheet to the extent of offence under the special law against petitioner Hemant Verma and others. "In the present case, the parties are litigating over possession of the land. The allegation of hurling abuses is against a person who claims title over the property. If such

a person happens to be a Scheduled Caste, the offence under Section 3(1) (r) of the Act is not made out," the court said. The bench observed that the Act is intended to punish the acts of the upper caste against the vulnerable sections of the society for the reason that they belong to a particular community.