

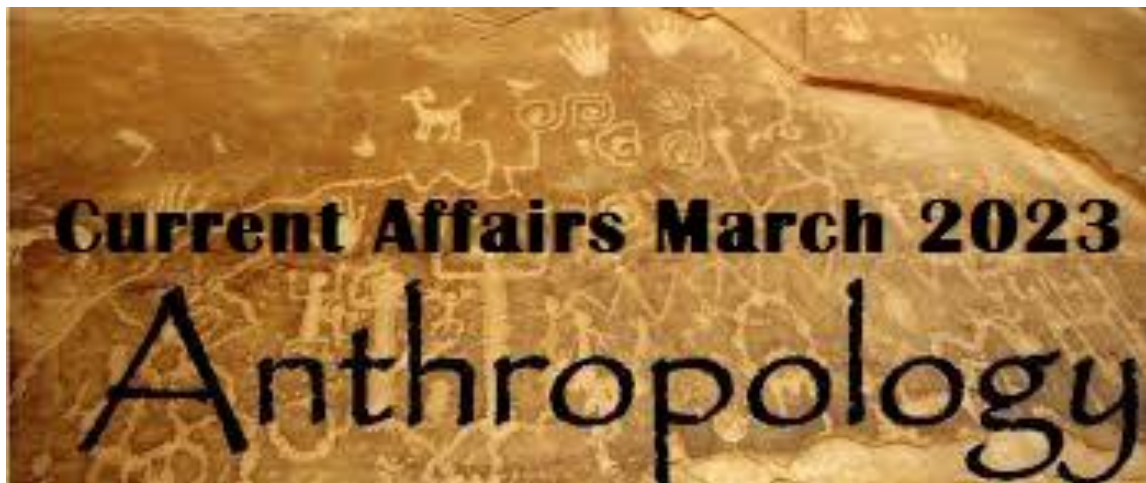
**ANTHROPOLOGY CURRENT AFFAIRS MAGAZINE  
MARCH 2023**

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## PAPER -1

### PHYSICAL & ARCHAEOLOGICAL ANTHROPOLOGY

#### 1. Answer to Darwin's question

Axel Meyer from the University of Konstanz responds to questions of adaptation and speciation In a paper published in Nature, evolutionary biologist Axel Meyer from the University of Konstanz analyses almost 500 genomes and provides answers to questions concerning the genomic basis of adaptations, the differences between species, and the mechanisms of speciation How do new species arise, and how quickly does this happen?

Evolutionary biologist Professor Axel Meyer from the University of Konstanz and his team have come one decisive step closer to answering fundamental questions in biology. Upon evaluation of an extensive data set collected during extensive research on extremely young species of cichlids in crater lakes in Nicaragua, empirical evidence suggests that the evolutionary divergence of a population in the same geographical area into a new species is more likely to occur when many genes across the genome are involved in producing species-distinguishing characteristics.

And, what is more, new species can emerge within only a few hundred years This contradicts the hitherto established theory that speciation is a slow process and that ecologically important interspecies differences with simple, genetically locally limited architecture are more likely to result in the formation of a new species than those on a so-called polygenic basis are. Ultimately, it is about the question that Darwin already asked: What is a species, and how and why do new species arise? The results of this large-scale multidisciplinary study.

**Which genes and how many of them are involved in speciation?** In genetics, the question of emergence of new species translates into: What is the pattern of changes in the genome that leads to the emergence of new species? What happens genetically during the continuum from initially no differences within a population up to the completed speciation of reproductively separate species? Since his doctoral thesis in the 1980s at the University of California, in Berkeley, USA, and since the end of the 1990s at the University of Konstanz, Axel Meyer has been researching the question of which and how many genes or genetic loci - i.e. regions on the genome - are involved in the development of adaptations and new species.

Here, the focus is on the study of very young species of cichlids, often only a few hundred generations old, living in crater lakes in Nicaragua. Although all these fishes descended from the same older original populations in the two large lakes of Nicaragua, Lake Managua and Lake Nicaragua, there are fish populations or even small species complexes of several species in each of the crater lakes that live exclusively in the respective lake, with specific phenotypic differences that are sometimes found in very similar fashion in several lakes, i.e. seem to have developed independently several times.

Multiple phenotypes in the same crater lake There are fishes with pronounced lips and such without lips, gold-coloured and black-and-white fishes, fishes that differ from others by having particularly slender bodies or certain delicate or robust tooth shapes. These phenotypes originated within the crater lakes, thus in the same geographical area ("sympatric speciation"), without external barriers such as rivers or mountains favouring this by limiting gene flow by gene exchange through reproduction. This is, thus, no "allopatric speciation".

The variations regarding the lips, colour, body and tooth shape of the fishes are genetically rooted in the original population, as Axel Meyer and his team (especially Dr Andreas Kautt, Dr Claudius Kratochwil and Dr Alexander Nater) were able to show after analysing complete

genomes of a total of almost 500 fishes from each of the small lakes. Thus, these represent not independently originated new mutations, but rather the sorting out and selective choosing of the same original gene variants, which have re-assorted themselves in the individual lakes.

Previously, it was unclear whether these are new species that have individually evolved through adaptation to new ecological conditions. In fact, the phenotypically different populations in the lakes also prefer to mate among themselves. **Many genes have a large effect** For Ernst Mayr - known by his contemporaries as the "Darwin of the 20th century" who helped to develop the biological species concept - this would be an indication that this is a species in its own right.

(Mayr, who was Axel Meyer's mentor from Harvard University, was awarded an honorary doctorate by the University of Konstanz in 1994 before passing away in 2005). However, the new results of genome sequencing suggest otherwise. After the sequencing of more than 450 piscine genomes, crossbreeding experiments and genome-wide association (GWA), it was found that the conspicuous differences, such as lip size and colour, in the genomes of these populations are determined by only one or two locally very limited genome regions via Mendelian inheritance. Fish with the same type of lips or colour reproduce almost exclusively with each other. These genes did not lead to genome-wide genetic differences as would be expected between species.

In contrast, surprisingly, the other sympatric species with the phenotypically far less conspicuous differences in body shape and special tooth shape showed much greater genome-wide genetic differences. This means that many genes at many positions in the genome each make a small contribution to genetic differentiation with the effects effectively adding up over the entire genome and leading to the emergence of new species.

The number of mutations in the entire genome between these young

species is ten times higher than in the physically very different polymorphisms of the large-lipped or golden versus black and white striped fishes, for example, that do not represent unique species. The combined effect of many genes thus has a stronger effect on the development of new species. "This is not what we expected.

It also contradicts large parts of the theory according to which individual loci with a great effect on the appearance of species, such as pronounced lips or colouration, should cause new species to develop more quickly," said Axel Meyer. And, it is especially surprising here, where the loci impact both the ecology and the choice of partners. "At least according to the criterion of the average difference in the entire genome, fishes with such conspicuous phenotypical differences are nevertheless not different species, but are at the level of mere polymorphisms (diversity) on the speciation continuum."

The geographical situation makes the crater lakes studied a "natural experiment". The original fish populations originate from two much older neighbouring lakes, to which there is no connection. This chain of crater lakes has been colonised by the fish populations independently of each other. When and how specimens from the original population got into each of the seven smaller lakes can only be calculated by simulation.

It took place, however, somewhere between just a few hundred and a few thousand generations ago, and there were not very many fish that colonised the crater lakes. The emergence of new species can thus, as demonstrated here, take place much faster than previously thought. Meyer compares the lakes with Petri dishes, all inoculated with the same initial genetic situation, which evolve independently over generations: "There are very few systems in the world, such as the Galapagos Islands or the crater lakes in Nicaragua, that are a natural experiment for evolutionary research."

## 2. Back to the time of the first Homo Sapiens with a futuristic clock, the new Radiocarbon 3.0



It is called **Radiocarbon 3.0**: it is the newest method developments in **radiocarbon dating**, and promises to reveal **valuable new insights about key events in the earliest human history**, starting with the interaction between *Homo Sapiens* and Neanderthals in Europe. This is shown by the combination of updated radiocarbon pretreatment, the latest AMS instrumental advances, and the application of the Bayesian model coupled with the new IntCal20, including the Kauri floating tree-ring section.

These important findings – published in the journal *PLOS ONE* – are the result of extensive research work, coordinated by Professor **Sahra Talamo**, director of the BRAVHO Radiocarbon Laboratory at the **University of Bologna**. Two international radiocarbon experts from the University of Heidelberg (Germany) and ETH Zurich (Switzerland) collaborated to the research as well as the isotope expert at Simon Fraser University (Canada).

The new publication presents an advanced evaluation and discussion of two earlier, widely recognized publications (Hublin et al. *Nature* 2020; Fewlass et al. *Nature Eco&Evo* 2020), focused on the earliest *Homo Sapiens* in Europe and their temporal relationship with Neanderthals. **The crucial challenge is high temporal resolution chronology**, which so far was severely limited by the low number of dates per site, low resolution of the Radiocarbon calibration curve, and limited Bayesian modelling.

In this new publication, **these central aspects are addressed in a new, fully integrated way**: (1) Only dates of samples pretreated in the state-of-the-art methodology are considered, (2) the most recent advances in the AMS



Radiocarbon measurement technique are applied, and (3) Radiocarbon calibration is now based on a section of high-resolution Glacial tree-ring chronologies in the age range of 44,000 and 41,000 calendar years BP (Before 1950 AD).

The concise amalgamation of these three aspects, called **Radiocarbon 3.0**, leads to a new level of temporal interrelation between *Homo Sapiens* at the site of **Bacho Kiro, Bulgaria**, and, for the first time, **a link between the respective presence of modern humans to climatic events (warm and cold phases) in the Glacial**, documented in Greenland ice cores.

"Using Radiocarbon 3.0, we were able to reconstruct more accurately the movements of ancient hominids, which occurred at major European archaeological sites, during different climatic phases," says **Sahra Talamo**, professor at the University of Bologna's Department of Chemistry "Giacomo Ciamician" and first author of the study. "Thanks to this kind of analyses, it is therefore possible to obtain new valuable information on the evolution of the earliest human settlements and the resilience of hominids in different climatic phases, all of which may have contributed to the global spread of *Homo Sapiens*."

**Radiocarbon** is the most widely applied dating method in archaeology, especially in studies of human evolution. In recent decades, it has enabled scholars around the world to make **important advances in reconstructing the chronology of key events in our history**. However, this method – based on the detection of a radioactive isotope of carbon, Carbon-14, in the organic samples studied – **does not always allow us to obtain sufficiently precise and accurate dates** to fully understand the important processes of human evolution, e.g., the interaction between Neanderthals and *Homo Sapiens*. The challenge was therefore **to expand the capabilities of radiocarbon**, increasing its high temporal resolution chronology.

Two new Bayesian models were constructed, **using the direct dates of *Homo Sapiens* at Bacho Kiro, and Neanderthal dates of Vindija, Croatia, and Fonds-de-Foret, Belgium**. Only the high-precision dates of Bach Kiro allow to assign the presence of *Homo Sapiens* at this site during the cold phase of GS 12 (Fig. 2 in the paper).

"In this study, we have shown that the **human occupation at Bacho Kiro did not occur at once**, but there were three different occupations (one around 44,650 to 44,430, one at 44,200 to 43,420 and one at 43110 to 42700 cal BP) or two different

one (one around 44,650 to 44,430, one at 44,310 to 43,710 cal BP), depending on the 14C dates considered and the Bayesian model used," explains **Talamo**.

At present, **both scenarios could be supported** because it is not yet known whether the Initial Upper Paleolithic may have lasted longer in Bacho Kiro than in the Levant or may have overlapped temporally with the Protoaurignacian dispersal.

"Moreover, obtaining a small 14C error in a time period around 42,000 years ago is a key point of radiocarbon 3.0," explains **Lukas Wacker**, at the ETH Zurich and co-author of the paper. "The better this error interval is defined and obtained, the more accurate the final age calibration process will be".

"In this paper, we have demonstrated the potential and advantages, both in terms of temporal and environmental accuracy, of discussing chronologies obtained from 14C ages with the same tight error intervals," says **Bernd Kromer** at the University of Heidelberg (Germany) and co-author of the paper. "In addition, the extent of the Initial Upper Paleolithic (IUP) is constrained better by the new models, compared to the previous publications"

"Our exercise shows that using radiocarbon 3.0 we are able to accomplish the definitive high resolution of European key archaeological sites during recurrent climate fluctuations, and model the human and faunal species' responses from a diachronic perspective," explains **Michael Richards** at Simon Fraser University (Canada) and co-author of the paper. "This is the way to promote knowledge exchange between archaeology, palaeoclimatology, geochronology, and geosciences in general, all essential disciplines in the study of the human past."

The study was published in the journal *PLOS ONE* under the title "Back to the future: the advantage of studying key events in human evolution using a new high-resolution radiocarbon method." It was carried out by an international research team, led by Prof. **Sahra Talamo** (University of Bologna), including **Bernd Kromer** (University of Heidelberg, Germany), **Michael P. Richards** (Simon Fraser University, Canada) and **Lukas Wacker** (ETH Zurich, Switzerland).

### **3. More Humans Are Growing an Extra Artery in Our Arms, Showing We're Still Evolving**

Picturing how our species might appear in the far future often invites wild speculation over stand-out features such as height, brain size, and skin complexion. Yet subtle shifts in our anatomy today demonstrate how unpredictable evolution can be. Take something as mundane as an extra blood vessel in our arms, which going by current trends could be common place within just a few generations. Researchers from Flinders University and the University of Adelaide in Australia have noticed an artery that temporarily runs down the centre of our forearms while we're still in the womb isn't vanishing as often as it used to.

That means there are more adults than ever running around with what amounts to be an extra channel of vascular tissue flowing under their wrist. "Since the 18th century, anatomists have been studying the prevalence of this artery in adults and our study shows it's clearly increasing," says Flinders University anatomist Teghan Lucas. "The prevalence was around 10 percent in people born in the mid-1880s compared to 30 percent in those born in the late 20th century, so that's a significant increase in a fairly short period of time, when it comes to evolution."

The median artery forms fairly early in development in all humans, transporting blood down the centre of our arms to feed our growing hands. At around 8 weeks, it usually regresses, leaving the task to two other vessels – the radial (which we can feel when we take a person's pulse) and the ulnar arteries. Anatomists have known for some time that this withering away of the median artery isn't a guarantee.

In some cases, it hangs around for another month or so. Sometimes we're born with it still pumping away, feeding either just the forearm, or in some cases the hand as well. To compare the prevalence of this persistent blood channel, Lucas and colleagues Maciej Henneberg and Jaliya Kumaratilake from the University of Adelaide examined 80 limbs from cadavers, all donated by Australians of European descent. The donors ranged from 51 to 101 on passing, which means they were nearly all born in the first half of the 20th century. Noting down how often they found a chunky median artery capable of carrying a good supply of blood, they compared the figures with records dug out of a literature search, taking into account tallies that could over-represent the vessel's appearance.

The fact the artery seems to be three times as common in adults today as it was more than a century ago is a startling find that suggests natural selection is favouring those who hold onto this extra bit of bloody supply. "This increase could have resulted from mutations of genes involved in median artery development or health problems in mothers during pregnancy, or both actually," says Lucas. We might imagine having a persistent median artery could give dextrous fingers or strong forearms a dependable boost of blood long after we're born. Yet having one also puts us at a greater risk of carpal tunnel syndrome, an uncomfortable condition that makes us less able to use our hands. Nailing down the kinds of factors that play a major role in the processes selecting for a persistent median artery will require a lot more sleuthing.

Whatever they might be, it's likely we'll continue to see more of these vessels in coming years. "If this trend continues, a majority of people will have median artery of the forearm by 2100," says Lucas. This rapid rise of the median artery in adults isn't unlike the reappearance of a knee bone called the fabella, which is also three times more common

today than it was a century ago. As small as these differences are, tiny microevolutionary changes add up to large-scale variations that come to define a species. Together they create new pressures themselves, putting us on new paths of health and disease that right now we might find hard to imagine today.

## **SOCIO – CULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY**

### **4. Study finds field of forensic anthropology lacks diversity**

The field of forensic anthropology is a relatively homogenous discipline in terms of diversity (people of color, LGBTQ+ individuals, people with mental and physical disabilities, etc.) and this is highly problematic for the field of study and for most forensic anthropologists. At the core of the forensic sciences are basic sciences and the STEM fields, which have struggled with increasing diversity and inclusion.

The lack of diversity in the STEM fields and the forensic sciences is concerning because it can limit the types of questions being asked in research. "As forensic practitioners, we do not reflect the demographics of the highly dynamic populations that we serve across the country. Relevant and successful research relies on a diversity of ideas, perspectives and experiences, and without such diversity, the field stagnates and does not keep up with important issues that are relevant to society," explained corresponding author Sean Tallman, Ph.D., RPA, assistant professor of anatomy and neurobiology at Boston University School of Medicine (BUSM).

In order to explore the demographics of the forensic anthropological community and perceptions of diversity and inclusion, an anonymous survey was sent out to the Anthropology Section of the American Academy of Forensic Sciences (AAFS), which included more than 500 individuals. The survey consisted of 48 questions that asked about

demographic information; whether participants believe that diversity exists in various educational contexts; their experience with diversity, inclusion, and harassment at the AAFS annual meetings; and what the field could do to increase diversity and inclusion.

The data then was analyzed for trends in order to propose actionable measures that could produce meaningful change that positively impacts diversity and inclusion in forensic anthropology. According to the researchers they found many forensic anthropologists had experienced or witnessed discriminatory behavior within the AAFS, which is the scientific society that most forensic practitioners maintain membership in the U.S. "Problematically, many individuals in forensic anthropology do not know how to report incidents of discrimination or harassment that occur at the AAFS," added Tallman.

While the discipline has been slow to address issues of diversity, inclusion and discrimination, Tallman believes the field can mitigate these issues through regular tracking of membership demographics by the AAFS, reassessing graduate admission requirements and indicators of success, creating mechanisms for reporting discrimination and harassment, targeted outreach, and developing mentorship opportunities.

"Striving for a culture of diversity through inclusion in forensic anthropology helps to reflect the greater populations that we serve and encourages us to challenge our own assumptions and inherent biases that can complicate the analysis of skeletal remains in forensic casework. Diversity and inclusion initiatives should be substantial and well-supported, rather than merely token gestures to increase the number of minorities or underrepresented groups."

## 5. Discrimination based on caste is pervasive in South Asian communities around the world – now Seattle has banned it



For now, this ordinance will help put the spotlight on this centuries-old system that denies equality to a substantive section of the population on the basis of an oppressive ideology. Seattle became the first city in the US to outlaw caste-based discrimination against immigrants from stigmatised groups in South Asia's traditional social hierarchy.

The ordinance, adding caste to Seattle's existing anti-discrimination policies, was proposed by Kshama Sawant, the only Indian American councilwoman in the city, which is home to an estimated 75,000 Indian Americans.

Sawant, herself from a privileged caste background, has been a vocal critic of the discriminatory caste system. Sawant said the ordinance – which was approved on February 21, 2023 – would help put an end to an "invisible and unaddressed" form of discrimination in Seattle. A year ago, in January 2022, the California State University, America's largest public higher education system, also added caste to its anti-discrimination policy, allowing students, staff and faculty across its 23 campuses to report caste bias and discrimination. Influential interest groups advocating for the Hindu community in the US have opposed the Seattle decision. The Coalition of Hindus in North America, a Hindu advocacy group, has called it "nothing but bigotry against the South Asian community by using racist, colonial tropes of caste."

While the caste system is often conflated in Western media with the Hindu religion and India alone, that is far from the truth. As social scientists specialising in South Asian studies, we assert that the caste system neither is exclusive to the Hindu religion nor is it restricted to India and Indians.

### **Caste in South Asia**

While the caste system originated in Hindu scriptures, it crystallised in its current form during British colonial rule and has stratified society in every South Asian religious community. In addition to India, it is present in Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Maldives and Bhutan.

Social, economic and political status in this pernicious system is tied to traditional occupations fixed by birth. Brahmins, for example, who were traditionally assigned priestly work, are at the top, and Dalits, relegated to the bottom, are forced into occupations that are considered abject in South Asia. These include janitorial work, maintaining sewage systems, skinning dead animals, and leather tanning. Strict rules of caste-based marriages maintain these boundaries firmly. Caste organises social life not only among Hindus but also in Muslim, Christian, Sikh and Buddhist communities in the region. It is an intergenerational system based on birth into a caste group. Caste identities stay even generations after someone converts out of Hinduism and into any of these faiths.

Among South Asian Christians, Anglo-Indians — of mixed descent from Indian and British parents — are parallel to Brahmins, who remain at the top of the hierarchy. Middle-level Hindu castes come next, followed by those from Indigenous backgrounds. Those who converted to Christianity from Dalit groups are placed at the bottom. In other words, the system remains unchanged. Muslims across the region are organised with the minority Ashraf communities at the top.

The Ashraf community claims noble status as the “original” Muslims in South Asia because of their descent from Central Asian, Iranian and Arab ethnic groups. The middle in this social hierarchy is composed of Ajlaf, considered to be “low-born” communities that converted from Hindu artisanal castes.

The group at the bottom includes converts from Dalit communities who are identified with the demeaning term Arzal, which means vile or vulgar. In the Sikh community, the powerful landowning caste, Jat-Sikhs, are at the top, followed by converts from Hindu trading communities in the middle and converts from lower-caste Hindu communities, Mazhabi Sikhs, at the bottom.

While Buddhism in India is close to being casteless, its dominant versions in Sri Lanka and Nepal have caste-based hierarchies.



### **Caste carries over after conversion**

While many of the so-called lower-caste groups converted to escape their persecution in Hinduism, their new religions did not treat them as fully equal.

South Asian Christians, Muslims, Sikhs and Buddhists with Dalit family histories continue to face prejudice from their new co-religionists. They are excluded from or experience segregation at shared places of worship and sites of burial or cremation across all these regions.

Social scientists have shown that strict caste-based rules continue to regulate social organisation and everyday interactions. Intercaste marriages are rare: for example in India, they have stagnated at about five per cent of all marriages over the past several decades. When they take place, rule-breaking individuals risk violent retribution.

While urbanisation and education have normalised everyday interactions across caste groups in shared urban spaces, entertaining lower-caste individuals in upper-caste households is still taboo in many families. A 2014 survey found one in every four Indians to be practicing untouchability, a dehumanising practice in which people from Dalit castes are not to be touched or allowed to come in contact with upper-caste individuals.

Untouchability was prohibited in India in 1950 when its egalitarian constitution came into force. However, homeownership is segregated by caste, and religion and caste discrimination is pervasive in the rental market, where residential associations use flimsy procedural excuses for keeping lower-caste individuals out. Lower castes are expected to defer to the higher status of upper castes, refrain from expressing themselves in shared spaces and avoid displaying material affluence.

They risk being punished by socioeconomic boycotts, which could include ostracizing the Dalits or keeping them out of employment. It may even include assault or murder. In Pakistan, anti-blasphemy laws are used as a pretext for caste violence against Dalits, many of whom have converted to Christianity.

### **Caste and life outcomes**

Studies show that caste-based identity is a major determinant of overall success in South Asia. Upper-caste individuals have better literacy and greater representation in higher education. They tend to be wealthier and dominate private-sector employment, as well as entrepreneurship.

While affirmative action programmes initiated by the British and continued in independent India have made improvements in the educational levels of lower-caste groups, employment opportunities for them have been limited. Studies also

demonstrate how caste identity affects nutrition and health through purchasing power and access to health services.

Most socioeconomic elites in South Asia, regardless of religion, are affiliated with upper-caste groups, and the vast majority of the poor come from lower-caste groups.

### **Caste in the diaspora**

Scholars have documented similar discriminatory practices in the diaspora in the UK, Australia, Canada and the African continent.

Caste has started getting recognition as a discriminatory category, especially in the US, in recent years. A 2016 survey, "Caste in the USA," the first formal documentation of caste discrimination within the US diaspora, found that caste discrimination is pervasive across workplaces, educational institutions, places of worship and even in romantic partnerships.

In 2020, the state of California sued Cisco Systems, a technology company in the Silicon Valley, on a complaint against caste-based discrimination. Harvard University, Colby College, University of California, Davis, and Brandeis University have recognised caste as a protected status and have included it in their nondiscrimination policies.

Seattle's new ordinance may trigger similar moves across other US cities where South Asian Americans from nonelite caste backgrounds are settling down and address caste-based discrimination among other South Asian faith communities as well. For now, this ordinance will help put the spotlight on this centuries-old system that denies equality to a substantive section of the population on the basis of an oppressive ideology.

## **6. In affidavit in SC, Centre defends exclusion of Dalit Christians, Dalit Muslims from scheduled castes' list**

**The Centre has defended the exclusion of Dalit Christians and Dalit Muslims from the list of scheduled castes, saying historical data shows no backwardness or oppression was ever faced by them**

The Centre has defended the exclusion of Dalit Christians and Dalit Muslims from the list of scheduled castes, saying historical data shows no backwardness or oppression was ever faced by them.

Contending that Dalit Christians and Dalit Muslims cannot claim benefits which scheduled castes are entitled to, the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment in an affidavit in the Supreme Court said the Constitution (Scheduled Castes) Order of 1950 does not suffer from any unconstitutionality.

The affidavit was filed in response to a plea of NGO Centre for Public Interest Litigation (CPIL) seeking extension of reservation and other benefits to people from Dalit communities who converted to Islam and Christianity.

The ministry also submitted that the identification of scheduled castes is centred around a specific social stigma that is limited to the communities identified in the Constitution (Scheduled Castes) Order, 1950.

The Constitution (Scheduled Caste) Order, 1950, "does not suffer from any unconstitutionality inasmuch as the exclusion of Christianity or Islam was due to the reason that the oppressive system of untouchability that leads to economic and social backwardness of some Hindu castes was not prevalent in Christian or Islamic societies", the affidavit said.

The Order "was based on historical data which clearly established that no such backwardness or oppression was ever faced by members of Christian or Islamic society", it said. "In fact, one of the reasons for which people from scheduled castes have been converting to religions like Islam or Christianity is so that they can come out of the oppressive system of untouchability which is not prevalent at all in Christianity or Islam," the affidavit said.

The ministry also refused to agree with the report of the Justice Ranganath Mishra Commission that recommended inclusion of Dalit Christians and Dalit Muslims in the scheduled castes list, and said it took a myopic view.

## **7. The Appalling Educational Status of Muslims in India Needs Urgent**

Education is one of the most important instruments for the development and empowerment of any marginalized community. Education plays an important role in helping people in gaining a respectful and dignified life within the society and is also helpful for enabling people to find a source of employment and livelihood. Sir Syed Ahmad Khan was a great socio-religious reformer and messiah of 'Muslims education' and he said, "It is the categorical verdict of all the nations and great seers of the world that national progress depends on education and training of the people. Keep in mind that life without education and training is like a bird without wings.

" Muslims are the second largest populous religious group after Hindus in the country. The National Minority Commission has identified Muslims as minorities along with Christians, Sikhs, Buddhists and Jains on the basis of religion. Among the minorities, Muslims have the highest population with 14.2 percent, followed by Christianity 1.7 percent, Sikhism 0.7 percent, Buddhism 0.5 percent, Jainism 0.4 percent and others at 0.7 percent. There are many states such as Jammu and Kashmir, West Bengal, Assam, and others in which population of Muslims is above 20% (Censes, 2011).

Muslims, despite being the largest religious minority of the country are lagging behind as compared to the other religious minorities on all indicators of human development, such as living standards, financial stability, political existence, education and other aspects, thereby showing poor performance in most fields. Their socio-economic status is far behind

that of other minorities and is also less than the national level. The factors of their educational backwardness have not fully and satisfactorily been studied by scholars and other governmental and non-governmental agencies.

Invariably most individual researchers, organizational surveys and government appointed committees find that Muslims are the most educationally backward community of the country. In this regard, a high level committee was headed by the Prime Minister of India in 2006, popularly called the Sachar Committee. The Committee found that Muslims have low level access to educational opportunities and their educational quality is even lower or is as bad as the Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs) and Other Backward Classes (OBCs).

The report has also revealed that one fourth of Muslim children in the age group of 6-14 years have either never attended school or are dropouts. For children above the age of 17 years, the educational attainment of Muslims at matriculation is 17%, as against national average at 26%. Only 50% of Muslims who complete middle schools are likely to complete secondary education, compared to 62% at the national level' (Ministry of Education, GOI). Their literacy rate, mean year of education, representation in senior secondary education and higher education is below other communities in India. For example, the literacy rate among Muslims is 57.3%, which is far behind the national average of 74.4%. When we see other minority communities in India their literacy levels are far better than the Muslims.

The majority Hindus have a literacy rate of 63.6%. Literacy among other minority such as Jains is 86.4%, Among Christians it is 74.3%, Among

Buddhists it is 71.8% and among Sikhs it is 67.5% in India. This shows that the Muslims have the highest illiteracy rate of any single religious community in India. Although the literacy rate for Muslim women was higher than SCs and STs women, but lower than others (Times of India, 2020). A study was conducted by S.M.I.A. Zaidi in 2006 and found that the highest literacy among Muslims was in Andaman and Nicobar Islands at 89.8%, followed by Kerala 89.4%, while lowest literacy was found in Haryana 40%, and Bihar 42%. In the major states of the country (i.e. Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, Bihar, and Haryana etc.) Muslims are educationally the most backward in comparison with other religious communities.

As per National Sample Survey Report of the 75th Round (2018), reported by the Times of India (2020) the Gross Attendance Ratio (GAR) of Muslims was lower (i.e., 100) than SCs (101), STs (102), OBCs, and minorities. The same case is also at upper primary level; here the GAR was lower than other communities. The GAR of Muslims at Secondary level was 71.9%, which was less than STs 79.8%, SCs 85.8% and from OBCs also. Similarly, in the case of higher secondary level and the GAR of Muslims was lowest i.e. 48.3%, below the SCs 52.8%, STs 60% and lowest compared to other communities as well. At the level higher secondary and above, their GAR has been 14.5%, just above the STs 14.4%, but below from the SCs 17.8% and other communities. In the age group of 3 to 35 years, among all communities, Muslims have the highest proportion that had never enrolled in formal educational institutions or programmes.

The enrolment of Muslims in higher education is pathological. As per All India

Survey on Higher Education Reports (AISHE) (conducted by MHRD, GOI), it was revealed that the representation of the community in higher education was also the lowest compared to the communities such as SCs, STs and OBCs. From the above table, the growth rate of Muslims in higher education from the years 2010-11 to 2018-19 was 26.92%, while that of the STs was 20%, and that of the SCs was recorded at 25.50 %, and OBCs 23.96%. This clearly shows that, among all the minorities, Muslims have the highest growth rate, but in terms of proportion their enrolment is the lowest among these communities.

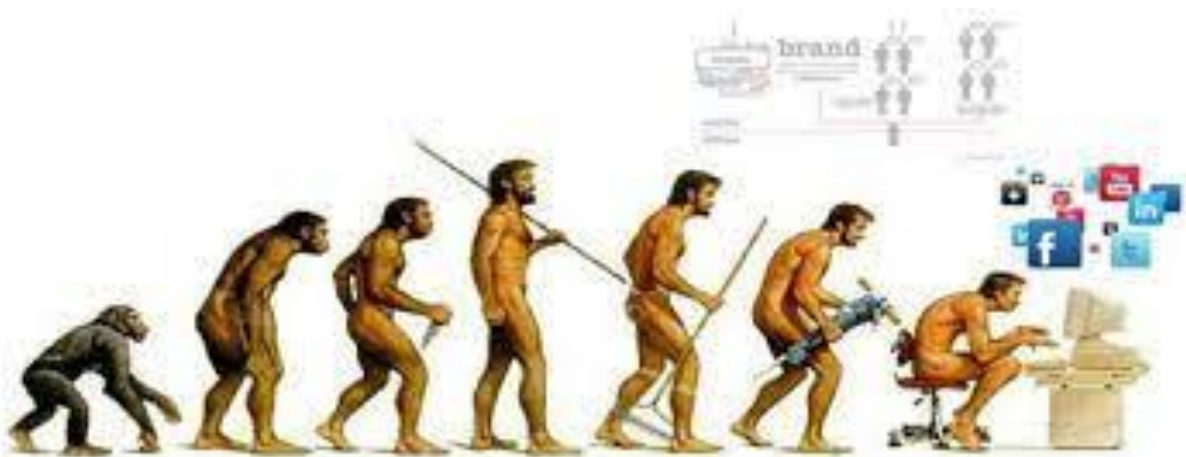
The importance of education and skill in the rise and fall of the communities is well known, and everyone also knows that in the present scenario (which is known as knowledge society) it is impossible to spend a self-dependent and dignified life without an education. From the above discussion and evidences, and various reports, it shows that, in the matter of education, the condition of Muslims at all levels (i.e. primary, upper primary, secondary, senior secondary and higher education) of education remains pathetic in comparison with other religious group as well as among SCs, STs and OBCs group.

It is a serious constraint in planning for the education of Muslims. A large population of Muslims is not only poor, but also deprived of the legacy of education. It is very difficult to get education for those Muslims who earn their livelihood through hard work and small businesses.

There are only two ways for these poor and hard working class of Muslims to get education, either government schools and colleges or madarasas. For this reason, in my opinion, there is an urgent need for intellectuals and philanthropists to come together, generate awareness about the importance of education and make

them aware of the educational schemes, policies and programmes run by the government of India. Looking at the pathetic state of education among the muslims in India, state governments along with the Centre, need to pay special attention towards the education of Indian Muslims.

## 8. Lost in the metaverse? How digital anthropology can help leaders navigate uncertain futures



### **An anthropological approach to data analysis can address human concerns.**

By 2030, 700 million people will inhabit the metaverse. These digital worlds offer endless possibilities for human interactions and social transformations, but they also come with inherent threats. Without a deep understanding of the cultures and dynamics at play, we risk losing our ethical bearings. To fully grasp the human experience in the metaverse, we need to embrace new fields of social sciences such as digital anthropology.

### **Creating a metaverse that works for everyone**

The metaverse promises to seamlessly blend our physical and virtual lives, as the digital world moves towards an immersive and interactive future where humans and artificial intelligence (AI) coexist (as glimpsed by ChatGPT). The challenge is creating virtual worlds that are truly inclusive and ethical.



The question of how to shape the metaverse was discussed at the World Economic Forum's Annual Meeting in Davos in 2022 and in 2023, and twice Chris Cox, Chief Product Officer of Meta, framed the metaverse as merely a technical evolution of the internet, downplaying its potential social impact. Cox repeatedly described it as simply "the internet, but less flat". In contrast, Tom Boellstorff, a pioneering anthropologist exploring metaverse-like worlds, has called for an open the debate about what the metaverse is, recognizing how its definition will mould new social norms and standards.

Many uncertainties linger: Will the metaverse produce more or less disinformation? Will children be safe from inappropriate content? Will gaming and pornography drive its evolution? Will it extend discrimination and inequalities? We don't know, and that's worrying.

As the metaverse evolves, leaders need to consider how culture, technology and behaviours are intrinsically linked to ensure better outcomes for both businesses and society.

### **Decoding digital culture**

To understand digital human cultures, decision-makers must bring "thick data" to the conversation with speed and scale. Thick data is the emotions, stories, meanings and tones of a situation. This data is implicit, often invisible, and traditionally gathered through human observations.

Digital anthropology leverages thick data, which provides qualitative and contextual insights, to better understand digital communities. When combined with big data, which provides a quantitative and statistical perspective, digital anthropology can reveal the human perspectives that are often missing from our analysis. Also, digital anthropology's thick data informs better decision-making while avoiding biases and short-sightedness.

With digital anthropology tools, the metaverse can benefit everyone, as leaders can use them to counter discrimination, exclusion and exploitation of cognitive biases. For example, suppose data scientists identify a digital community that distributes threatening deepfake videos. In that case, digital anthropologists, equipped with new methods and technical innovations, could uncover the social and cultural reasons behind this behaviour and reveal the values that underpin this damaging practice. This science can also help us to protect women from online discrimination and violence, as we have confirmed in our work in 2022.

## How to observe the human side of the metaverse

The first step for a team that wants to integrate human insights into its thinking is to observe the digital world without prejudice and immerse itself in online communities. The next step is to scale the scope and speed of its observations using technology. Instead of humans, imagine bots hiking through virtual worlds and delivering selected observations to multidisciplinary research teams. These bots are created with what we call “cultural algorithms” and they have been recently used to monitor electoral violence and moderate extreme speech online.

Unlocking this new layer of observational data can spark a virtuous cycle of innovation and trust. When decision-makers understand and react to the behaviour and values of their digital audiences, institutions work better. This, in turn, helps institutions become value-driven and better aligned with their communities, leading to increased trust and support. This virtuous circle may be key in restoring confidence in institutions.

Communities, consumers and social movements have the power to disrupt global institutions, markets, and belief systems using social media. They can divide us or bring us together on peaceful common ground. The metaverse will be the next arena for them to act. But these new worlds are fragile, and we only have one opportunity to build them ethically and effectively for all.

As digital worlds continue to evolve and transform society, it is imperative that ethical considerations are at the forefront of their construction. This is exemplified by the worldwide adoption of UNESCO’s Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence, which raises critical questions about the impact of this rapidly advancing technology on individuals and societies.

The metaverse is not “the internet but less flat”. The metaverse is a human system, a place for people, cultures and communities to come together. It is a human place that needs to be understood by the social and human sciences.

## PAPER - 2

### INDIAN & TRIBAL ANTHROPOLOGY

#### 1. Unying Festival of Adi community of Arunachal Pradesh

Recently, the Union Minister of Ports, Shipping & Waterways and Ayush attended the colourful Siang Unying Festival.



#### About the festival:

- The festival of Unying is celebrated to herald the season of cultivation, beginning of the Adi community's new year, arrival of spring seasons as well as a great way to strengthen the bond among the community.
- The Adi tribes celebrate a number of festivals, but Unying Aaran is the prime festival for them.
- **Unying Aran is one of the oldest festivals of the Adi community commemorating the arrival of spring season.**
- Unying Aran is basically a hunting festival followed by the Adi tribesmen. It is the first festival of the Adi 'new year'.

- **It is the festival which unites all the members of the community and they all pray for the bumper harvest.**
- In this festival, it is tradition for all male members of a family to go on a hunting and stays in the jungles for a week.
- The majority of Adi traditionally follow the tribal Donyi-Polo religion. Worship of gods and goddesses like Kine Nane, Doying Bote, Gumin Soyin and Pedong Nane, etc.
- It is traditionally celebrated with 'Bari' songs sung by male elders and 'Yakjong' dance performed by youths (boys and girls) in villages. Through these performances, they narrate stories of the origin of the festival. Villagers also pray for the well-being of their tribesmen.

#### **About the tribe:**

- **The Adi people are one of the most populous groups of indigenous peoples in the Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh.**
- A few thousand are also found in the Tibet Autonomous Region, where they are called the Lhoba together with some of the Nishi people, Na people, Mishmi people and Tagin people.
- They live in a region of the Southern Himalayas which falls within the Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh and the Mainling, Lhunze, Zayu, Medog, and Nyingchi counties in the Tibet Autonomous Region, China.
- **All the ethnic groups recognizing themselves as "Adi" are believed to be descendants of the Abutani/Abotani.** The older term Abor is an exonym from Assamese and its literal meaning is "independent". The literal meaning of adi is "hill" or "mountain top".

#### **2. Scheduled Tribes panel requisitions FRA action reports from top court**

- Against the backdrop of a face-off between the Union Environment Ministry and the National Commission for Scheduled Tribes (NCST) over the Forest Conservation Rules, 2022, NCST has secured the implementation reports of the Forest Rights Act (FRA) of all States and UTs.
- As the Union government introduced the new Forest Conservation Rules, 2022, NCST had urged the Environment Ministry to put a hold on the implementation of the rules as they violate the provisions of the Forest Rights Act (FRA), 2006.

- However, the Ministry replied by saying that the rules were formulated under the Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980 and that NCST's apprehensions were "not legally tenable".
- NCST invoked its constitutional powers i.e. its powers under Clause 8d of Article 338A to approach the Supreme Court directly and sought all materials filed before the court in connection with a batch of petitions challenging the constitutionality of the FRA.
  - The Supreme Court has ordered that the sought documents must be provided to NCST.
- NCST is now looking to review the overall implementation of the FRA, and evaluate the rejection of titles and encroachments on forest land.
  - Further, the commission will propose recommendations to further secure the rights of forest dwellers based on its constitutional mandate.
- As per the data tabled in Rajya Sabha in December 2022, title rights were issued against just 50% of the claims over forest land made under the FRA as of June 2022, with maximum pendency and rejection seen in cases of individual claims.

### 3. Bru tribal community exercised their franchise in Tripura for the first time in assembly elections in March 2023



#### Bru-Reang Refugee Crisis:

- Bru or Reang is a community indigenous to Northeast India, living mostly in Tripura, Mizoram and Assam. In Tripura, they are recognised as a Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group.
- Around 5,000 families consisting of around 30,000 Bru-Reang tribes were forced to flee Mizoram and seek shelter in Tripura following ethnic tension.
- The Union government had been assisting the two-State governments for taking care of the refugees.
- An agreement was signed between the Union government, the two-State governments and representatives of Bru-Reang refugees in 2018, as a result of which the aid given to these families was increased substantially and 328 families consisting of 1369 individuals returned to Mizoram under the agreement.
- A large number of people from this community have been living in camps on the boundary of Mizoram and Tripura due to the reluctance of both State governments to allow them to settle in their territory.

- During the subsequent revision in the electoral rolls, names of most of the Brus were deleted from the electoral rolls in Mizoram.
- The people of Tripura were also reluctant to allow Brus to be enrolled as voters in Tripura. They were also denied rations and other State-sponsored facilities.
- The Bru-Reang agreement was signed between the Government of India, the Governments of Tripura and Mizoram and Bru-Reang representatives on January 17, 2020.
- The agreement promised Bru tribe all the rights and benefits of social welfare schemes of both the Union government and the State government that normal residents of the State receive.
- Most of the families have received the land, the 1.5 lakh to build a house alongside and the 4 lakh as fixed deposit per family. Monthly payment of 5,000 per family and the land for cultivation was also promised by the government.

#### 4. NCST functioning with less than 50% of sanctioned strength



ST Panel functioning without mandatory ST Member for three years now;  
Commission just has one Chairperson and one Member

Data presented by the Ministry of Tribal Affairs (MoTA) on Monday in Lok Sabha revealed that the National Commission for Scheduled Tribes (NCST) is



currently functioning with less than 50% of its sanctioned strength, with Commission officials disclosing to *The Hindu* that it is becoming increasingly difficult to undertake its function without the requisite staffers.

According to data from the Commission, rules provide for the ST panel to have one Chairperson, one Vice-Chairperson, and three Members (two among V-C and Members must be from ST community). Currently, it just has a Chairperson (Harsh Chouhan) and one Member (Ananta Nayak) with all other positions, including that of the mandatory ST Member, vacant for the last three years.

Responding to a question in Lok Sabha from Andhra Pradesh MP Chinta Anurdha (YSRCP), Minister of State for Tribal Affairs Bishweswar Tudu said, "As on 31.1.2023, against the total sanctioned posts of 124, 54 posts are filled and the vacant posts are 70." While Group A posts in the NCST are filled by the Ministry, Groups B and C posts are the NCST's responsibility.

One senior Commission official told *The Hindu* that the panel has been sanctioned one Superintendent of Police, one Law Officer and one Accounts Officer (all Group A posts), neither of which had been filled since 2004. "The recruitment rules for them have not yet been framed and this is a serious lapse on the Ministry's part," they said.

Another official added that it is very essential for NCST to have key positions like Research Officers, Investigators and Directors filled for it to function as per its Constitutional mandate. "Several positions in the Commission Secretariat are also vacant but the priority should be to at least appoint all sanctioned Members and Vice-Chairperson as per mandate," the official said.

In his reply in Parliament, Mr. Tudu said, "The Ministry of Tribal Affairs and National Commission for Scheduled Tribes are in the process of filling of vacant posts. Since, promotion and filling up of vacant positions in NCST is a continuous process, the Ministry of Tribal Affairs and the NCST are continuously making efforts for filling of vacant positions on priority basis."



### 5. Polygyny highest among scheduled tribes: NFHS

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

#### On the basis of religion/community

Community	2005-06	2019-20
Overall in the country	1.9%	1.4%
Christians	2.4%	2.1%
Muslims	2.6%	1.9%
Hindus	1.8%	1.3%
Scheduled tribes	3.1%	2.4%
Scheduled castes	2.2%	1.5%

**Polygyny percentage- Top 5 states**

States	2005-06	2019-2020
Meghalaya	4.6%	6.1%
Mizoram	2.4%	4.1%
Sikkim	5.6%	3.9%
Arunachal Pradesh	6.9%	3.7%
Telangana	-	2.9%

**Polygyny percentage- Bottom 5 states**

States	2005-06	2019-20
Goa	1.0%	0.2%
Haryana	0.2%	0.3%
Jammu and Kashmir	1.3%	0.4%
Punjab	0.5%	0.5%
Andaman and Nicobar Islands	-	0.5%
Lakshwadeep	-	0.5%

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

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

**States where polygyny among Hindus increased from 2005-06 to 2015-16**

States	2005-06	2015-16
Haryana	0.2%	0.4%
Chhattisgarh	2.0%	2.3%
Madhya Pradesh	1.5%	1.6%
Bihar	1.3%	1.5%

**States where polygyny among Hindus increased from 2015-16 to 2019-20**

States	2015-16	2019-20
Delhi	0.3%	0.5%
Rajasthan	0.5%	0.6%
Jharkhand	1.6%	2.0%
Maharashtra	1.1%	1.3%

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

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

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

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

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

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

## 6. Kasara Valley deprived of both water and 'water wives'



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## 7. Sighting vax team signals Odisha tribals to run into forests

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

There are several other tribal-dominated areas like Orda that face similar

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

Surath Patmajhi, who is a youth from the Dongria Kondh tribe in the village, has been vaccinated after being persuaded by some voluntary organisations. But the majority of the population of Pangapada remain elusive. He attributed this to several rumours doing the rounds in the village that are influencing villagers against vaccination. It is important to note that Dongria Kondh is among the thirteen Primarily Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs).

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

A few voluntary organisations are trying to bridge the communication gap through the mobilisation of local communities. Many of the organisations claim that the remoteness of these villages, the lack of telecom connectivity and the dearth of proper, accessible roads pose insurmountable challenges that prevent conventional media and government outreach programmes from helping these villages.

According to a written statement provided by the Ministry of Communication before Lok Sabha in the last Budget Session (March 2021), Odisha hosts a maximum of 6,099 villages with no mobile connectivity which is around 24 per cent of the not connected villages of India.

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



communities. She also said that the condition of women and differently-abled people are more worrisome in tribal communities as they do not have a voice in the decision-making process of the village.

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

"The tribal communities in the state are very simple and isolated and not exposed to the ideas and experiments on the covid front. They hardly see people with PPE kits, masks, gloves and other protective gear except in hospitals. The visits of health teams wearing such attire, without taking the local people in confidence first, led to opposition and reluctance among the community and affected the vaccination drive," he told 101Reporters.

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

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

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

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

"The situation was challenging initially, where we saw many people fleeing to forest areas in tribal villages to avoid vaccination but this has changed and we

are proving successful now. We started taking the local leaders and volunteers from such areas into confidence and used them to create awareness in their own language and local beliefs."

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

### **8. Uproar in J'khand Assembly over the butchering of tribal woman**

**A huge uproar was observed at the beginning of the winter session of Jharkhand Assembly over the brutal murder of a 22-year-old woman, whose body was chopped into 50 pieces**

A huge uproar was observed at the beginning of the winter session of Jharkhand Assembly over the brutal murder of a 22-year-old woman, whose body was chopped into 50 pieces. BJP MLAs raised slogans inside and outside the House for more than an hour, demanding death penalty for the accused, Dildar Ansari.

The furore did not stop even during the placing of condolence motion in the House. BJP MLA Randhir Singh was marshalled out on Speaker's orders after he stood on the table and started screaming. Chief Minister Hemant Soren claimed of being aware of the public's sentiments and said that no one should engage in politics over the deceased.

Many BJP MLAs, including Manish Jaiswal, Bhanu Pratap Shahi, Randhir Singh and Shashi Bhushan Mehta, raised slogans at the main gate before the proceedings of the House began.

They raised slogans to stop 'Islamisation' of the state and to hang the accused. BJP MLA and former CM Babulal Marandi said that the barbaric massacre in Sahibganj was a matter of concern for the entire state.

Marandi accused the Bangladeshis settled in Sahibganj and surrounding districts under the government's protection of conspiring to change the demography of the Santhal Pargana through 'love jihad'.

He added that most women from the Santhal-Paharia tribe have been left behind as the men of the community left the state in search of jobs.

He underlined the need for NRC in the division to ascertain the authenticity of the dwellers and their duration of stay.

BJP MLA Manish Jaiswal said that incidents of murder and rape have become common in the state, adding that a tribal woman was hacked to pieces but the government is unable to take any action.

## 9. Kattunayakan Tribe



The **Elephant Whisperers**, which won an Oscar for the Best documentary, depicts the story of **Kattunayakan tribe** of the **Western Ghats**.

### About Kattunayakan

- Kattunayakan (Kattunayakar), is one of the 75 **Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs)** of India and can mainly be found in parts of **Tamil Nadu and Kerala** (Nilgiris and surrounding region).
  - They are also known by different names like **Jenu (honey) Kurumbas** and **Thenu (honey) Kurumbas** in different regions because of their expertise in **collection of honey**.

- They are designated **scheduled tribe** in the states of **Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Karnataka, and Andhra Pradesh**.
- **Origin of name:** They get their name from the words 'kadu' (forests) and 'nayakan' (leader/chief) depicting that they are the **lords of the forest**.
- **Economic activity:** The tribe has traditionally been **hunter-gatherers**. They are also engaged in other economic activities such as **fishing, trapping small birds and animals, and occasional farm labour**.
  - They also cultivate little ginger, coffee, pepper, tapioca and yam around their houses but are **generally not identified as cultivators**. Kattunayakans are **experts in basketry**.
- **Language:** They speak the **Kattunayakan language** which is also called as **nama basha** (our language) by them. It is basically of the **South Dravidian origin**.
  - The language contains elements of **Kannada, Malayalam and Tamil**.
- **Habitation:** The settlements are known as **padi** and a single hut in a settlement is called **manai**.
- **Social structure:** Kattunayakans are **patrilineal** and trace their descent through **male line**. **Monogamy** is generally practiced among the Kattunayakans.
- **Religious affiliation:** They generally **believe in Hinduism** and their main deity is **Lord Shiva** and **Nayakkar** under the name of **Bhairava**.
  - They also practice **animism** that includes worship of **animals, birds, trees, rock hillocks, and snakes**.

#### PVTG:

- PVTGs are the **most vulnerable categories** among tribal groups.
- **Criteria:** They have **declining or stagnant population, low literacy level, pre-agricultural level of technology** and are **economically backward**.
- **Status:** PVTGs inhabit **isolated, remote and difficult areas** in small and scattered hamlets/ habitats.
- **Distribution:** 75 such groups of tribals in **18 States and 1 Union Territory** have been identified and categorised as PVTGs.
- **Other facts:** **Odisha has the highest** number of PVTGs in India while there is **no population** in the states of **Punjab and Haryana**.
  - **Sahariya** has the highest population while **Sentinelese and Andamanese** have a very small population among all PVTGs.
- In 1973, the **Dhebar Commission created Primitive Tribal Groups (PTGs)** as a separate category, who are less developed among the tribal groups. In

2006, the Government of India renamed the PTGs as Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs).

### 10. Govt incentive to curb child marriage in tribal belt



To discourage child marriage among particularly vulnerable tribal groups (PVTGs), the state government has been providing a 'late marriage incentive' of Rs 20,000 since 2018-19 to tribal girls who get married after 18 years.

The incentive was started with an amount of Rs 2,000. It was hiked to Rs 10,000 in 2020-21 and doubled to Rs 20,000 in 2021-22. As many as 143 girls in 2020-21 and 180 in 2021-22 have received the incentive from the state government.

According to the National Family Health Survey-5, child marriage incidence is more among the tribal communities. Social practices, education status, traditional norms like getting married at an early age and lack of awareness were some of the reasons behind child marriage among PVTGs, official sources said. Odisha has 62 tribal groups (22.85% of the state's population). Of them, 13 are recognized as PVTGs living in 20 blocks of 12 districts. They are Bonda, Dongaria Kondh, Didayi, Lanjia Soura, Kutia Kandha, Chuktia Bhunjia, Paudi Bhuyan, Soura, Juanga, Lodha, Hill Kharia, Mankidia and Bihor.

The state government found that child marriage is one of the main reasons for higher maternal and infant mortality rates among the groups. It is also leading to school dropout and discontinuation of the education of girls, the sources said.

Keeping these reasons in mind, the government included the late marriage incentive component in the Odisha PVTG Empowerment and Livelihoods Improvement Programme (OPELIP) in 2018-19 to bring down child marriage prevalence in these communities. Agencies like Action Aid and Unicef are also facilitating the process for tribal girls to get the incentive.

“After receiving the late marriage incentive, I started a small grocery shop in my village in March this year. It helped me meet the daily expenses of our family. Girls should continue their studies and get new skills to become self-reliant,” said Sundari Dehuri of Palgoda village under Jashipur block in Mayurbhanj district.

“PVTG girls getting married after the age of 18 will be identified by the village development committees. After verification, the OPELIP will transfer money to the bank account of the beneficiary,” said an official of the SC & ST development department.

### **11. This organisation works tirelessly to bring clean energy in hilly terrains of Ladakh**

**The NGO, Vishwadeep Trust has a vision for empowering women farmers and tribal communities to fully take ownership of everything that has been given to them especially in the time of pandemic**

With my experience having worked in hilly regions of Ladakh, I have often witnessed that last mile distribution of any kind of technology or even field testing and training when it is done free of cost, is seldom utilized fully by the communities because they start perceiving it as a token or a charitable initiative.

A non governmental organisation- Vishwadeep Trust has a vision of empowering women farmers and tribal communities to fully take ownership of everything that has been given to them especially in the time of pandemic. Time and again, Ladakh faces flash floods and several other crises that are often not talked about in the media. It is important that these aspects, specially regarding community engagement via contribution, via learning, via development of self help groups are also highlighted.

In 2017, The Vishwadeep Trust initiative received a global environment facility small grant programme under UNDP OP5 cycle. Although it was a small grant of USD 50,000, the Trust impacted each and every household in Takmachik.

- There were two major technologies to be given to women farmers- Portable low cost indigenous solar cookers and solar dryers because that would greatly reduce indoor air pollution and reduce drudgery of women farmers in mountain region. The solar cooker boxes were distributed among women completely free of cost to reduce their drudgery and economic load.
- Upon monitoring in 2018, it was found that only 30 to 40% of population was making the judicious use of solar cookers. And that made us think twice. It was not an easy task to distribute 70 solar cook boxes in remote region of Sham valley that is Takmachik and then to collect family members of all the houses and train them about the uses and benefits of the solar cookers in both Ladakhi language and Hindi.
- The trust made a constant and consistent effort to instill a sense of ownership without charging them any money. It was a pleasant surprise to find out that out of the 40% of the people who were using solar cooker, 22% turned it into a mini local enterprise and started providing solar cooked organic bread and biscuits to nearby cafes and resorts. However, in some households it was found that the solar cookers were used like a little suitcase or they started putting different items in the cook boxes.

It was then decided that there will be a small fee or a community contribution attached to any purchase that crosses above 1000 rupees to any household.

This made a huge change in the outlook of the people.

Not only the solar dryers were a big hit in the region but there were repeat orders of solar dryers in the coming years not only from the same village but also from the adjacent villages.

Global Environment Facility (GEF) always stresses on projects sustainability and ownership amongst community hence they really instill and focus on co-financing. And the experience with Vishwadeep Trust also reaffirms that community contribution is definitely a boon.

There is always some negative stereotyping that NGOs make money or That the woman who runs this organisation is an outsider, but the local community always showed trust in the organisation and therefore they repeatedly order dryers, cookers and other things.

The community contribution towards technology specially for post harvest management guarantees project sustenance and guarantees a sense of ownership within the community and overall upliftment of women farmers and tribals. But there should be no added pressure on the organisation or community. Vishwadeep Turst had conducted a small pilot for the dryers and they were a success in the region, with repeat orders, the Trust also reiterated that contribution is a must.

The community was happy to contribute as the innovation has positively impacted their agriculture related practices.

Recently, the Trust noticed how women in Ladakh were burdened with physical drudgery due to the extra burden after COVID-19 pandemic and lockdowns. They were relieved when they received the relief kits in the month of June for COVID-19.

Civil society actually faces many unspoken struggles even while implementing government projects. The NGOs continued to look for alternatives like conducting virtual trainings during the Covid pandemic but they are not as impactful as physical trainings. Nevertheless, the trust which local communities put in the NGOs and the way they gradually are moving towards environmentally sustainable and healthy means of living make the hard-work and all the efforts worthwhile.



## 12. Bumchu Festival of Sikkim



Recently, the Bumchu festival was held in the western part of Sikkim.

### About Bumchu Festival:

- It is celebrated on the **15th day of the first month of the Lunar calendar** corresponding to the month of **February/March**.
- It is celebrated annually at **Tashiding Monastery**.
- It commemorates a **supernatural occurrence** that took place in the 18th century under **Chogyal Chakdor Namgyal**.
- Bumchu means “**pot of sacred water**” in Tibetan. The vase is opened during the event, and the water inside is shared among the worshippers. The water is thought to have **healing qualities** and to grant luck and riches to those who drink it.
- Pilgrims travel to Tashiding from all around India as well as from close by nations like **Bhutan, Nepal, and Sri Lanka**.

### About Tashiding Monastery:

- It is one of the **most sacred Buddhist pilgrimage sites**, located on a hilltop overlooking the **Rangteet River in Sikkim**.
- A Nyingma teacher named **Ngadak Sempa Chempo Phunshok Rigzing** later founded the monastery in the **17th century**.

- **Guru Padmasambhava**, better known as **Guru Rinpoche**, the great Buddhist guru who brought **Buddhism to Tibet**, blessed the location of the monastery.

### **Bumchu Festival Rituals**

- Bumchu festival rituals involve a vase in the Tashiding monastery which is considered sacred and there is a legend behind its origin.
- Bumchu means a pot of sacred water in the Tibetan language and each year the vase is opened to share its water with worshippers. The water is said to have **healing properties** and is believed to grant luck to those who drink it.
- The water level in the vase is a **sign of fortunes for the upcoming year**. Higher or lower levels of water indicate drought, disease and natural calamities.
- Bumchu festival is one of the famous festivals of Sikkim and pilgrims from inside the country and also from **neighbouring countries like Bhutan, Nepal, and Sri Lanka visit Sikkim**.
- The festival involves complex rituals, dance, traditional music and colourful processions.
- The rituals are **carried out by monks and nuns** and also offer gifts to gods.
- The Bumchu festival is representative of Sikkim's unique cultural heritage and a reminder of its spiritual origins.

### 13. Clashes in Manipur over wildlife sanctuaries 'encroaching' on tribal lands



**Violent clashes broke out in Manipur when police tried to stop locals who organised a protest rally, alleging encroachment of tribal lands by reserved forests and wildlife sanctuaries**

Violent clashes broke out in Manipur's Kangpokpi district when police tried to stop locals who organised a protest rally, alleging encroachment of tribal lands by reserved forests and wildlife sanctuaries.

Defying prohibitory orders, people gathered in large numbers near Thomas in Kangpokpi town on Friday for the protest rally called by different bodies, including the Indigenous Tribal Leaders' Forum (ITLF), police said.

However, an altercation broke out as police tried to disperse the protesters, subsequently leading to violent clashes.

At least five protestors were wounded as teargas shells were lobbed, while a few police personnel also sustained injuries after being hit by stones, officials said.

The situation was later brought under control, they said.

Chief Minister N Biren Singh said the protestors were challenging the constitutional provisions.

"They were challenging the constitutional provisions... the people there were encroaching reserved forests, protected forests and wildlife sanctuaries for poppy plantation and drugs business. That's the reason why the rally was organised," he said.

The protestors later submitted a memorandum to Governor Anusuiya Uikey through Kangpokpi deputy commissioner Kengoo Zuringla.

Prohibitory orders under section 144 of the CrPC were imposed in Kangpokpi and Churachandpur districts on Thursday.

Meanwhile, several organisations of the Naga community, including the Maram Union, Mao Union and Rongmei Naga Council Manipur, said that ITLF is a newly-formed body and it does not represent the indigenous people of the state.

#### **14. Illegal timber smuggling or snatching tribal lands: Assam-Meghalaya border killings raise worrisome questions**



**5 villagers from Mukroh village in Meghalaya's West Jaintia Hills have reportedly been killed, while an Assam Forest Guard also lost his life due to the violence.**

Tensions are running high at the border of Assam and Meghalaya following a brutal clash between Assam's forest officials and local villagers from Meghalaya on Tuesday morning. 5 villagers from Mukroh village in Meghalaya's West Jaintia Hills have reportedly been killed, while an Assam Forest Guard also lost his life due to the violence. Reports say that the Assam Forest Guard chased and intercepted a vehicle laden with illegal timber that was travelling to Meghalaya from West Karbi Anglong district.

Citing the incident as inhuman, Meghalaya Chief Minister Conrad Sangma bashed the Assamese forest guards and police for entering Meghalaya and firing at the villagers without provocation. On their part, The Assam Police reiterated that they resorted to firing in self-defense after a mob of villagers surrounded

them. However, Assam has transferred the West Karbi Anglong Superintendent of Police, while suspending the Jirikinding police station officer-in-charge and Forest Protection Officer of Kheroni Forest Range. This raises eyebrows.

Meanwhile, the Meghalaya government has suspended internet services in seven districts – West Jaintia Hills, East Jaintia Hills, East Khasi Hills, Ri-Bhoi, Eastern Khasi Hills, Western Khasi Hills and South West Khasi Hills, citing law and order situation.

It has also closed the border shared with Assam, allowing only vehicles from Meghalaya to enter the state. This only points to the conclusion that the government is trying its best to contain this incident from turning into a full-fledged blood bath.

*PTI* reported that a group of villagers from Meghalaya vandalised and burnt down a forest office in Assam's West Karbi Anglong district, while a car with an Assam number plate was also burnt in the Meghalayan capital Shillong.

People are being asked not to go to the hill state for now, especially from Assam, barring commercial vehicles. "Since yesterday, we have been advising people not to go to Meghalaya till the situation completely normalises. We are only requesting the private and small car owners not to travel as miscreants are targeting such vehicles there," Deputy Commissioner (East) of Guwahati Police Sudhakar Singh told *PTI*.

Some taxi drivers, who returned to Guwahati on Tuesday night and Wednesday morning, said that the Meghalaya Police escorted them to the Assam border, but still, stones were pelted on their vehicles by onlookers while on the move. Cachar Superintendent of Police Numal Mahatta said they asked vehicles from Assam and other states not to travel through Meghalaya as per requests from the hill state.

"The Meghalaya Police had requested us to control vehicles going inside their state following the disturbances. Restrictions have been put in place as a precautionary measure for the safety of the people," he added. The worrisome outcome of this incident is that Mukroh village – the site of the violence – falls in one of the six disputed border areas that both states are laying claim to.

A round of discussions for the remaining six phases was to commence by the end of this month, but this incident has, in all probability, shut down all prospects of a peaceful resolution. Shillong's famed Cherry Blossom Festival, an extravaganza



which brings lots of tourist money, is also part of the collateral damage. Other reports suggest that what Assam officials considered to be illegal timber was actually taken from Meghalayan tribal lands which are disputed.

### 15. Ladakh groups protest in Delhi, demand statehood, sixth schedule status



#### **The Sixth Schedule under Article 244 provides for the formation of autonomous administrative divisions**

Slogans demanding statehood for Ladakh and inclusion under the sixth schedule were raised at the Jantar Mantar on Wednesday as a joint protest was held by the Leh Apex Body and Kargil Democratic Alliance in the national capital.

The Sixth Schedule under Article 244 provides for the formation of autonomous administrative divisions – Autonomous District Councils (ADCs) – that have some legislative, judicial, and administrative autonomy within a state.

The Indian Express explains in its report, "ADCs have up to 30 members with a term of five years, and can make laws, rules and regulations with regard to land, forest, water, agriculture, village councils, health, sanitation, village- and town-level policing, inheritance, marriage and divorce, social customs and mining, etc. The Bodoland Territorial Council in Assam is an exception with more than 40 members and the right to make laws on 39 issues."

"Our traditions, ethnic identity, resources and security are at stake today. Our demand is very simple, we want democracy to be restored in Ladakh by giving it

statehood, and to be brought under the sixth schedule of Constitution," said Thupstan Chhewang, a former BJP MP who resigned in 2018 accusing the party of not fulfilling promises made to the people of Ladakh.

He said Ladakh is an ecologically sensitive area and development activities without consulting locals will be harmful.

"A big solar power project has been planned, but the area earmarked is the area of nomadic people who are known for producing Pashmina. It will displace them because their rich pastures will go. In addition, it will also impact the environment in the area," he said.

"If the people of Ladakh have a say in the decision making, we will decide what kind of industries should be set up," he said.

Environmental activist and educator Sonam Wangchuk accused the BJP of reneging on its promise of including Ladakh under the sixth schedule.

"In 2020, when Hill Council elections were held, the BJP had promised sixth schedule status. We are very thankful to the BJP as they gave Union Territory status to Ladakh... Was it a promise or not? Does the election manifesto mean anything or not," he said.

"We made them win the Hill Council, they deserved it because they gave us a Union Territory. It was a promise, then they went silent on it, and now it is a crime to even talk about it. If youth in Ladakh speak of the sixth schedule, they are detained," he said.



## 16. Scope for Strengthening Tribal Livelihoods through TRIFED Assistance



Most of the tribes living in or around forests depend to a large extent on the NTFPs, called Van Dhan for their livelihood. These are major raw materials for corporate in the food, pharmaceuticals and FMCG industries. “Tribal Cooperative Marketing Development Federation of India Limited (TRIFED) is a Multi-State cooperative society under the administrative control of the Ministry of Tribal Affairs (Ministry) TRIFED with State partners is setting up Van DhanVikas Kendra as a Common Facility Centre in strategically located villages for processing and value-addition of NTFP under the Van DhanVikas Kendra Yojana (VDVKY)”.

TRIFED has been found very helpful in tribal livelihoods through tribal entrepreneurship development, branding and marketing of the NTFP products. However, the Systemic Approaches to convergence on interdependent sectors will help in creating awareness and training centres and help in setting up more MFP procurement, value addition and marketing centres. Since most of the NTFP and seasonal products are perishable a quick pick up facility will help the tribes in getting money for NTFP if sold in time. Another important role of

TRIFED is to encourage more conservation and multiplication and training for non-destructive and sustainable harvest of NTFP to continue the flow of production of NTFP.

### **Leveraging Tribal Traditional Art and Handicrafts as Pride For Prosperity:**

The tribal traditional art based-handicrafts are specialized skills and are inherited as an important source of livelihood by artisan families. It is a kind of unorganised sector that needs policy support, and guidance and has to make it popular, marketable and remunerative. The Artisans have difficulties in both-difficulties in procurement of raw materials and selling of marketing. It also requires facilitation centres for imparting training, marketing, special funds; credit and upgrading the technology and production of techniques.

Therefore, indigenous art and crafts which are languishing but have a lot of market potential need to be promoted so that they provide a sustainable livelihood option. As a result of which the indigenous culture survives and gives livelihood to a large number of tribal families. This must be supported by a well-defined and thought about policy with an improved version of the present TRIFED Scheme.

### **About TRIFED**

Given below are a few important details about the Tribal Cooperative Marketing Development Federation of India (TRIFED):

- It is a statutory body and was established in August 1987
- It has been registered as a National level Cooperative body by the Government of the country
- Focus is on institutionalising the trade of Minor Forest Produce (MFP) & Surplus Agricultural Produce (SAP) collected/ cultivated by them
- TRIFED helps tribal people manufacture products for national and international markets on a sustainable basis
- It also supports the formation of Self Help Groups and imparting training to them

## Objectives of TRIFED

Discussed below are the major aims and objectives of the Tribal Cooperative Marketing Development Federation of India:

- Major part of the income of tribal people is dependent on the manufacturing and production of tribal products. The main objective of TRIFED is to promote marketing development for the tribal people
- It performs the role of both, a market developer and a service provider
- They support the tribal people with tools and training which can help them boost their market and production
- TRIFED helps in discovering a systematic and scientific approach for their development
- The ultimate aim is to help the different tribes of the country grow socially and economically. These people are entirely dependent on their handicrafts for a sustainable livelihood