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## PAPER -1

### PHYSICAL & ARCHAEOLOGICAL ANTHROPOLOGY

#### 1. Genetics Steps In to Help Tell the Story of Human Origins Africa's sparse fossil record alone cannot reveal our species' evolutionary history.



It's not unusual for geochronologist Rainer Grün to bring human bones back with him when he returns home to Australia from excursions in Europe or Asia. Jawbones from extinct hominins in Indonesia, Neanderthal teeth from Israel, and ancient human finger bones unearthed in Saudi Arabia have all at one point spent time in his lab at Australian National University before being returned home. Grün specializes in developing methods to discern the age of such specimens. In 2016, he carried with him a particularly precious piece of cargo: a tiny sliver of fossilized bone covered in bubble wrap inside a box.

The bone fragment had come from a skull – still stored at the Natural History Museum in London – with a heavy brow ridge and a large face. It looked so

primitive that the miner who had discovered it in 1921 at a lead mine in the Zambian town of Kabwe, then in the British territory of Rhodesia, first thought it had belonged to a gorilla. But later that year, museum paleontologist Arthur Smith Woodward noticed what he interpreted as typically human features, such as the skull's thin and relatively large braincase, that motivated him to designate the specimen as its own hominin species.

In the 1980s, however, museum paleoanthropologist Chris Stringer took another look at the skull and classified it as belonging to the species *Homo heidelbergensis*, an ancient hominin thought to be a human ancestor. Based on its primitiveness, Stringer says, most researchers guessed it was an early individual who lived around half a million years ago, some 200,000 years before the earliest *Homo sapiens* were starting to emerge. But nobody knew exactly how old the skull was. For decades, no dating method existed that could identify the fossil's age without the destructive process of grinding up bits of bone for analysis. But Grün was determined to find a solution. Grün is one of very few geochronologists proficient in a laser technique that extracts and reduces a barely visible grain of bone – smaller than the bone's natural pores – to atoms, he says. The laser is coupled with a mass spectrometer, which measures the concentrations of uranium isotopes that undergo radioactive decay at a specific rate over time. Having returned from his trip to procure the *Homo heidelbergensis* sample, Grün watched as the laser poked two tiny holes into the bone fragment and the particles disappeared into the mass spectrometer.

Upon evaluating the mass spec data, he could tell that the fragment was much younger than previously believed. As he, Stringer, and others reported in *Nature* this past April, their best estimate was 299,000 years, give or take 25,000. That meant that the Kabwe individual had lived not before, but around the same time as the first *Homo sapiens*-like people dwelled in North Africa. Along with other archaeological evidence, the findings suggest that perhaps *Homo heidelbergensis* was not our ancestor, but a neighbor. Together with yet another hominin, *Homo naledi*, known to have existed in southern Africa at that time, Africa may have been a crowded place. "Ten years ago, I think most of us would've thought, well, Africa in the last 300,000 years is just going to show you the evolution of *Homo sapiens*, and that's really all – the other species would have disappeared, gone extinct," notes Stringer.

"Now we know that there were probably at least three different kinds of

hominins around.” That’s akin to the situation that unfolded in Eurasia, where Neanderthals and Denisovans thrived for hundreds of thousands of years before *Homo sapiens* migrated out of Africa and at times even interbred with the other hominin groups. The story in Africa remains murky, however, as researchers have not been able to reconstruct human history in vivid detail, in part because hominin fossils informative about our species’ emergence and coexistence with other species are rare in Africa. As a result, finds such as the Kabwe skull continue to raise more questions than answers. If *Homo heidelbergensis* wasn’t one of our recent ancestors, then who was? If our species really did overlap in time with *Homo heidelbergensis*, what role did they play in our evolutionary history? In recent years, a field that has traditionally relied on fossil discoveries has acquired helpful new tools: genomics and ancient DNA techniques.

Armed with this combination of approaches, researchers have begun to excavate our species’ early evolution, hinting at a far more complex past than was previously appreciated – one rich in diversity, migration, and possibly even interbreeding with other hominin species in Africa. “To piece together that story, we need information from multiple different fields of study,” remarks Eleanor Scerri, an archaeologist at the Max Planck Institute for the Science of Human History in Jena, Germany. “No single one is really going to have all the answers – not genetics, not archaeology, not the fossils, because all of these areas have challenges and limitations.” A sparse fossil record. Bones easily disintegrate in many parts of Africa, in acidic forest soils or dry, sun-exposed areas. Moreover, the continent is largely unexplored by archaeologists. While northwestern Africa and former British territories in eastern and southern

Africa have a long tradition of professional archaeological research, few researchers have looked for fossils anywhere else, notes archaeologist Khady Niang of Cheikh Anta Diop University in Senegal. That’s especially the case for the western and central parts of the continent, where preservation conditions are also poor and excavations difficult at times due to political instability. “We might be missing some really, really important parts of the story,” adds Yale University anthropologist Jessica Thompson. What African hominin fossils do make clear is the depth of humanity’s roots on that continent. Researchers have found some of the most abundant fossils in sediments between 3.5 million and 3.2 million years old. That appeared to be the heyday of the australopiths (including the genus *Australopithecus*), apes that walked upright and are believed to have used stone tools, but still climbed trees and had relatively small brains. It’s thought that somehow our own genus, *Homo*, emerged from transitional ape species some 2.8

million years ago as a clan of hominins with distinctive teeth, probably adapted to an eclectic diet that allowed them to thrive in a wide range of habitats. But there are few sediments, let alone fossils, left behind from that time, making the birth of our genus one of the most poorly understood periods in our evolution, Thompson notes.

The fossil record yields more secrets about the time shortly after the emergence of Homo, revealing a diversity of different Homo species in Africa, of which Homo erectus seems to persist the longest. Homo erectus crops up in Africa's limited fossil record around 2 million years ago and hangs around on the continent until roughly a million years ago. It was the first hominin that shows evidence of having lived in human-like social groupings and used fire, and it is thought to be a human ancestor. When and how Homo sapiens emerged isn't at all clear, but what is apparent is that we weren't alone; fossils suggest that several other hominin species, such as that represented by the Kabwe skull, inhabited the continent at the time our species appeared.

Another relatively small-brained hominin, Homo naledi, is also thought to have lived in southern Africa around 300,000 years ago. And inside a Moroccan cave called Jebel Irhoud, 300,000-year-old skeletons were found that carry very early features of Homo sapiens. It's not yet known how long those different hominin species existed, however, or whether they physically overlapped and perhaps even shared genes with one another, Stringer notes, or whether there were others. By around 160,000 years ago, the constellation of physical features that defines us today – such as a globular braincase and a pointed chin – had begun to emerge in ancient hominin groups represented by fossils found across Africa. Later, some of these anatomically modern humans crossed the thin spit of land that connects Africa to Eurasia, probably on several occasions.

On that new continent, they eventually met Neanderthals and Denisovans, which, like two hobbit-size Homo species found on southeast Asian islands, are thought to be the evolutionary products of earlier hominin migrations out of the continent. "Africa was this sort of leaky faucet, and hominins were just dribbling out of it all the time," Thompson says. Fossil finds over the years have steadily bolstered a long-held idea that anatomically modern humans first emerged in Africa. This "Out of Africa" model, proposed by anthropologists in the late 20th century, posited that all humans of Eurasian ancestry descended from a single ancestral African population, which then spread throughout the world and



displaced all other hominins.

The opposing “multi-regionalism” model, by contrast, conceived that multiple human subpopulations – which stemmed from regional lineages of an ancestral species such as *Homo erectus* – existed across Europe, Asia, and Africa, and through continuous mixing evolved together to form the present human population. While fossils supported the former theory, it was the advent of genetic research that showed unequivocally that populations outside of Africa descended from a single population in Africa. But the story had a twist: in two groundbreaking studies published in 2014, researchers compared ancient DNA extracted from Neanderthal bones and compared it with modern-day people, and found that 2 percent of the average European genome is Neanderthal in origin. Our species originated in Africa, but interbred with hominins outside of it.

These findings, and many since, have highlighted the power of genetics in resolving questions about human ancestry that fossils alone cannot. Investigations of the genomes of living Africans are now underway to help fill in the gaps of Africa’s fossil record. “[Such studies] are really providing important insights into our population history and African origins,” says Yale University evolutionary biologist Serena Tucci. “We are getting to know and understand processes that happened very early on in our evolutionary history.”

## **2. Anthropologists compare composite measure of physiological dysregulation to understand how we age**

It is well understood that mortality rates increase with age. Whether you live in Tokyo, rural Tennessee or the forests of Papua, New Guinea, the older you are, the more likely you are to succumb to any number of different ailments. But how, exactly, do our bodies weather with age, and to what extent do people around the world experience physiological aging differently? In a paper published in a special issue of the journal *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society B*, a team of anthropologists that includes Michael Gurven, a professor of anthropology

at UC Santa Barbara and chair of the campus's Integrative Anthropological Sciences Unit, and Thomas Kraft, a postdoctoral researcher in the same department, construct and compare a composite measure of "physiological dysregulation" among human populations and other species. The themed issue explores the evolution of aging among primates. Physiological dysregulation refers to the wearing down of the body's ability to bounce back from stress, damage or other adversity.

Examples include how one's body might gradually become less able to properly regulate blood sugar, or it might more likely mount an inappropriate immune response that doesn't dissipate when the threat is gone (thereby damaging the body's own cells). This decline in resilience is often considered fundamental to aging. "We're only now able to start piecing together what physiological aging looks like holistically in subsistence populations of foragers and farmers," said Kraft, the paper's lead author. "We first built a comprehensive metric of physiological dysregulation in humans, then compared it to other primates. It's not just the case that adult mortality rates are lower in humans; rates of physiological dysregulation are much slower in humans, too." For nearly two decades, the Tsimane Health and Life History Project has been collecting a large number of measures of health and aging (referred to as biomarkers) among the Tsimane, an indigenous population of forager-horticulturists in the Bolivian Amazon.

These range from the typical measures that might be taken during a regular physical exam – blood pressure, cholesterol and blood glucose level – to indicators such as grip strength, various immune markers for inflammation and bone mineral density. Overall, the current study includes 40 biomarkers among 5,658 adults spread across 22,115 observations. "This makes it one of the only comprehensive longitudinal studies of health in a population living a vastly different lifestyle than the urban, industrialized countries, where most studies occur," said Kraft. "While any single biomarker gives a snapshot of just one small part of health, what we did was to combine information from many biomarkers simultaneously – both the levels of these markers and the extent to which they are linked together – into a single metric," he continued. "This summary metric gives a holistic portrait of one's 'biological age,' by

measuring how 'strange' one's combined biomarkers are relative to a healthy subset of the population." Noted Gurven, co-director of the Tsimane Health and Life History Project, "In the U.S. and many other countries today, we're more likely to die of heart disease, cancer, diabetes and other 'chronic diseases of aging.' But among the Tsimane and other populations living similar lifestyles, these chronic diseases are rare. Does physiological dysregulation occur at the same rate in this very different context?"

To answer this question, the team compared Tsimane with other human populations. "Where adult mortality rates are high, we might expect that aging of our bodies occurs more quickly, tracking closely the higher increase in mortality with age," Gurven explained. "Another possibility – and a goal for many of us – is to maintain healthy bodies for as long as we can, and then have everything fall apart close to the eventual timing of our demise." The researchers found that despite a lifestyle vastly different from that of urban, post-industrialized populations such as those in the United States and Italy, and despite higher mortality rates throughout adulthood, Tsimane adults show only marginally higher rates of increase in physiological dysregulation among the Tsimane. "Our first glimpse suggests a broad species-typical pattern of physical aging across environments and cultures," said Gurven. "That's a little surprising because the Tsimane have very low levels of late-age chronic diseases.

But the Tsimane are exposed to harsher conditions, including strenuous labor tending fields, tropical diseases and minimal access to health care." Added Kraft, "We also found similarities in physiological dysregulation among Tsimane women and men, despite evidence in many populations showing that men typically age faster and are more likely to die than women at most ages." As Gurven noted, it's impossible to understand dysregulation and aging without knowing how different parts of the body function over time. "And to date, we have had little understanding of what that looked like in a population like the Tsimane," he said. "Yet the conditions we find ourselves in today, where over half of the global population lives in cities, is just a minor blip in the long history of our species.

Groups like the Tsimane offer some of the best insight for our understanding of aging prior to industrialization and urbanization." All that being said, the researchers are quick to acknowledge that their index is still just a statistical composite. "It's not a complex network model showing how everything is related to everything else," Gurven said. What's amazing, he added, is that our global estimates of physiological dysregulation don't change much once the information from roughly 15 biomarkers are integrated. "Additional biomarkers tell you little, and it may not even matter which biomarkers you look at once you hit about 20. That seems to suggest that we're capturing something about the whole system," he explained. "And any single biomarker is only weakly correlated with our global index. But we'll learn much more about what it means and how important it might be once we can link dysregulation to useful outcomes, like functional performance, disease states and the likelihood of dying."

### 3. How Neanderthals adjusted to climate change



Climate change occurring shortly before their disappearance triggered a complex change in the behavior of late Neanderthals in Europe: they developed more complex tools. This is the conclusion reached by a group of researchers from Friedrich-Alexander-Universität Erlangen-Nürnberg (FAU) and Università degli Studi di Ferrara (UNIFE) on the basis of finds in the Sesselfelsgrotte cave in Lower Bavaria. Neanderthals lived approximately 400,000 to 40,000 years ago in large areas of Europe and the Middle East, even as far as the outer edges of Siberia. They produced tools using wood and glass like rock material, which they also sometimes combined, for example to make a spear with a sharp and hard point made of stone.

From approximately 100,000 years ago, their universal cutting and scraping tool was a knife made of stone, the handle consisting of a blunt edge on the tool itself. These Keilmesser (backed, asymmetrical bifacially-shaped knives) were available in various shapes, leading researchers to wonder why the Neanderthals created such a variety of knives? Did they use different knives for different tasks or did the knives come from different sub-groups of Neanderthals? This was what the international research project hoped to find out. Keilmesser are the answer "Keilmesser are a reaction to the highly mobile lifestyle during the first half of the last ice age. As they could be sharpened again as and when necessary, they were able to be used for a long time – almost like a Swiss army knife today," says Prof. Dr. Thorsten Uthmeier from the Institute of Prehistory and Early History at FAU. "However, people often forget that bi-facially worked knives were not the only tools Neanderthals had.

Backed knives from the Neanderthal period are surprisingly varied," adds his Italian colleague Dr. Davide Delpiano from Sezione di Scienze Preistoriche e Antropologiche at UNIFE. "Our research uses the possibilities offered by digital analysis of 3-D models to discover similarities and differences between the various types of knives using statistical methods." The two researchers investigated artifacts from one of the most important Neanderthal sites in Central Europe, the Sesselfelsgrotte cave in Lower Bavaria. During excavations in the cave

conducted by the Institute of Prehistory and Early History at FAU, more than 100,000 artifacts and innumerable hunting remains left behind by the Neanderthals have been found, even including evidence of a Neanderthal burial.

The researchers have now analyzed the most significant knife-like tools using 3-D scans produced in collaboration with Prof. Dr. Marc Stamminger and Dr. Frank Bauer from the Chair of Visual Computing at the Department of Computer Science at FAU. They allow the form and properties of the tool to be recorded extremely precisely. "The technical repertoire used to create Keilmesser is not only direct proof of the advanced planning skills of our extinct relatives, but also a strategical reaction to the restrictions imposed upon them by adverse natural conditions," says Uthmeier, FAU professor for Early Prehistory and Archaeology of Prehistoric Hunters and Gatherers. Other climate, other tools What Uthmeier refers to as 'adverse natural conditions' are climate changes after the end of the last interglacial more than 100,000 years ago.

Particularly severe cold phases during the following Weichsel glacial period began more than 60,000 years ago and led to a shortage of natural resources. In order to survive, the Neanderthals had to become more mobile than before, and adjust their tools accordingly. The Neanderthals probably copied the functionality of unifacial backed knives, which are only shaped on one side, and used these as the starting point to develop bi-facially formed Keilmesser shaped on both sides. "This is indicated in particular by similarities in the cutting edge, which consists in both instances of a flat bottom and a convex top, which was predominantly suited for cutting lengthwise, meaning that it is quite right to refer to the tool as a knife," says Davide Delpiano from UNIFE. Both types of knife – the simpler older version and the newer, significantly more complex version – obviously have the same function.

The most important difference between the two tools investigated in this instance is the longer lifespan of bi-facial tools. Keilmesser

therefore represent a high-tech concept for a long-life, multi-functional tool, which could be used without any additional accessories such as a wooden handle. "Studies from other research groups seem to support our interpretation," says Uthmeier. "Unlike some people have claimed, the disappearance of the Neanderthals cannot have been a result of a lack of innovation or methodical thinking."

#### 4. Forensic Anthropology: The Identification of human remains to solve a crime



Forensic Anthropology is the aspect of forensics that deals with the examination of human skeletal remains to help ascertain the identity of the victim (sex, age, race, stature), interpret any trauma to the remain (gunshot wound, stab wound, health condition, etc) and to give an estimated time of death for criminal proceedings or identification of missing persons. A forensic anthropologist would usually present their evidence about the identity and any trauma or injury found on a skeleton in the court.

Their evidence can also help the court understand the circumstances of

death. The first and most important step in the examination of the skeleton in a criminal case is to ascertain if the remains are human or a non-human animal. Because all mammals share a generalized skeletal composition and have bones located in similar positions, it could lead to questions. The structure of the bones and their relationship in the skeletal frame differs between animals. The anthropologist can address this by examining the shape, structure, and size of the bone to determine if it is human.

A defendant that is accused of ritual killing because some bones were found in his/her house can be exonerated if an anthropologist can carry out this analysis and determine if the bone found is human or not. It is also important that the anthropologist determines how many victims are present if they find bones at a crime scene, this will help determine if it will be a single or multiple homicide charges. This can be determined by carefully analyzing the bones for duplicate or multiple body parts of the same structure, for example, if two right femora (thigh bones) are found in a scene, that explains that the crime involved more than one victim.

In the identification of the skeleton, there are some common markers that aid identification. In identifying the sex of a skeleton, there are some specific features that differentiate a male from a female. The most prominent difference between a male and female skeleton is that the pelvic bone in a female is wider than that of a male because women are created and adapted for pregnancy. The pelvic bone in women is also lower than the pelvic of a male skeleton. To determine the age at death of the deceased, anthropologists look at changes in the degree and location of bone growth and dental formation and eruption in young people.

As human progress in age, soft cartilages are replaced by hard bones at different centers of growth at known rates, anthropologists use the pattern of growth to estimate the age of an individual. To determine the size of the deceased, anthropologists measure the arm and leg bones and use a formula that checks variation by sex and ancestry group to



help determine the height range. This is particularly useful in missing person cases when the remains are discovered. Anthropologists use different methods to analyze skeletons and record their observations, through CT scanning, photograph, microscopic examination, and x-raying the bones to aid identification. This is also useful in cases of missing persons as a skull could be superimposed onto a picture of a missing person to check for matches between the bone structures and fleshed form.

In the case of an unknown victim, a face can be reconstructed using the underlying bone structure of the skeleton and known standards of the thickness of known facial tissues. These reconstructions are usually almost precise and have helped a lot of families in other countries identify their missing loved ones and finally get the closure they deserve. Just like every forensic technique and their usefulness in the criminal justice system, forensic anthropology offers answers to cases beyond a reasonable doubt.

## 5. Ancient Tibetans' Secret Weapon for Thriving on the Roof of the World

**Topic : Adaptation to high altitude**



**Ancient protein evidence shows milk consumption was a powerful cultural adaptation that stimulated human expansion onto the highland Tibetan Plateau.**

The Tibetan Plateau, known as the “third pole,” or “roof of the world,” is one of the most inhospitable environments on Earth. While positive natural selection at several genomic loci enabled early Tibetans to better adapt to high elevations, obtaining sufficient food from the resource-poor highlands would have remained a challenge.

Now, a new study in the journal *Science Advances* reveals that dairy was a key component of early human diets on the Tibetan Plateau. The study reports ancient proteins from the dental calculus of 40 human individuals from 15 sites across the interior plateau.

“We tried to include all the excavated individuals with sufficient calculus preservation from the study region,” states Li Tang, lead author of the study. “Our protein evidence shows that dairying was introduced onto the hinterland plateau by at least 3500 years ago,” states Prof. Hongliang Lu, corresponding author of this study.

Ancient protein evidence indicates that dairy products were consumed by diverse populations, including females and males, adults and children, as well as individuals from both elite and non-elite burial contexts. Additionally, prehistoric Tibetan highlanders made use of the dairy products of goats, sheep, and possibly cattle and yak. Early pastoralists in western Tibet seem to have had a preference for goat milk.

“The adoption of dairy pastoralism helped to revolutionize people’s ability to occupy much of the plateau, particularly the vast areas too extreme for crop cultivation,” says Prof. Nicole Boivin, senior author of the study.

Tracing dairying in the deep past has long been a challenge for researchers. Traditionally, archaeologists analyzed the remains of animals and the interiors of food containers for evidence of dairying, however, the ability of these sources to provide direct evidence of milk consumption is often limited.

Palaeoproteomics is a new and powerful tool that allowed us to investigate Tibetan diets in unprecedented detail,” says coauthor Dr. Shevan Wilkin. “The analysis of proteins in ancient human dental calculus not only offers direct evidence of dietary intake, but also allows us to identify which species the milk came from.” “We were excited to observe an incredibly clear pattern,” says Li Tang. “All our milk peptides came from ancient individuals in the western and northern steppes, where growing crops is extremely difficult. However, we did not detect any milk proteins from the southern-central and south-eastern valleys, where more farmable land is available.”

Surprisingly, all the individuals with evidence for milk consumption were recovered from sites higher than 3700 meters above sea level (masl); almost half were above 4000 masl, with the highest at the extreme altitude of 4654 masl. “It is clear that dairying was crucial in supporting early pastoralist occupation of the highlands,” notes Prof. Shargan Wangdue. Li Tang concludes: “Ruminant animals could convert the energy locked in alpine pastures into nutritional milk and meat, and this fueled the expansion of human populations into some of the world’s most extreme environments.”

## **SOCIO – CULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY**

### **1. Reflections On The Anthropology Of Religion – Analysis**

With the advent of the human sciences, traditional philosophical figures cracked and the markers of meaning shifted. The anthropological field replaced the metaphysical instance to define the new space of human reflection. Philosophical work developed in relation to the human person : value systems are built, cultural messages are developed, ethical and political solidarity is woven. Religious anthropology teaches us that man is not man as homo religiosus, the one in whom religion and culture have the same matrix to spring forth from. Is it necessary to confuse the sacred with religion ? In other words, what is the field of

religious anthropology on the one hand and, on the other, what is the nature of the sacred? What is the anthropology of religion? From its foundation in the 19th century to its current redeployment in contemporary societies and in the context of globalization, anthropology has always had a particular interest in religion, its origins, its forms and its variations.

The anthropology of religions is that branch of social and cultural anthropology which has developed from the study of particular religions (magic, witchcraft, animism, totemism, shamanism...) and empirical objects (myths, rites, beliefs, representations, social organizations...), by mobilizing theories and employing methods that give it a singular identity in the constellation of religious sciences. This field of anthropological knowledge, which was once considered a "science of primitive religions", is still relevant today to grasping religions, modern or not, in mutation and movement. When it comes to restoring the anthropology of religions to its history and developments, two different versions can be written: Either it blends the contributions of philosophers, sociologists, historians or mythologists with those of ethnologists without distinction : this is the way Brian Morris (1987), for example, paints the historical portrait of the "anthropological studies of religion" from Hegel to Lévi-Strauss, including the sociologists Max Weber, Karl Marx and Emile Durkheim, and the psychologists Sigmund Freud and Carl Gustav Jung. Or, in a completely different perspective, the field of the anthropology of religions is more restrictive and is linked to a very particular academic tradition, that of the comparative study of non-Western societies and their belief systems. Between the inclusive and integrative version and the restrictive and exclusive version, it is all a matter of perspective.

And it is the latter that is retained here, for reasons that are easily explained : there is no anthropology of religions that is not first and foremost an anthropology (i.e. a comparative ethnography). Specifying the identity of the field of study selected here presupposes a prior clarification of what is meant by "anthropology". The term is currently enjoying considerable popularity : there are a number of fields in which "anthropology" is encountered, which appears in this usage as a generic category in which it is possible to include oneself without further ado, as long as the discourse evokes Man (in general), culture, and claims a semblance of

universality. Anthropology and the concept of belief Anthropology has not only produced theories about particular religions: certain properties initially attributed to religion in general have been elevated to the status of particular

objects of study, which have generated autonomous fields of knowledge. Beliefs, symbols, rites, myths and powers are, in one sense, “sacred” or “religious” and in this sense they are related to the anthropology of religions, even if, on the other hand, they go beyond the sphere of religion in the strict sense.

Anthropology confers two statuses on the concept of belief : in the plural, it is embodied in objects that can be ethnographed by virtue of their materiality ; in the singular, it appears as a mental phenomenon, long considered to be a matter of psychology. Based on the study of its presumed or observed forms in the societies studied by ethnologists, the first category (“beliefs”) is of the order of descriptive language (“the x believe...”) and reveals the singularity of the objects of belief in a given group (“but they believe something else”). It is precisely on this last point that the debate on the comparative scope of the concept of belief as a mental state, particular to religion or not, has been based. Beyond belief, it is another question, that of “faith” (of non-Western populations) that arises. Religious anthropology differs from ethnology, history and sociology of religions in that it tries to understand, beyond the chaos of religious facts, the man who creates and manipulates a whole symbolism, that of the “supernatural” or the “sacred”. Naturally, the first task of religious anthropology is to define what distinguishes symbols of the sacred from other kinds of symbolism. There is no other way out, if one does not want to fall into the traps of ethnocentrism, than to start each time from the indigenous definitions and their classifications of things in a binary system: sacred and profane.

### **Dimensions of the anthropology of religion**

Religious anthropology was born in the second half of the nineteenth century ; unfortunately, at the beginning it posed a series of false problems : those of the origin, evolution or essence of religion ; hence the discredit from which it fell and from which it is only now recovering, through a change of perspective. Today, it appears either as a chapter of social anthropology (locating religious institutions in social structures and searching for the latent functions that these institutions fulfil in society as a whole) or – which is the viewpoint supported here – as an independent science. Detail of Holy Family with an Angel, c. 1540, by Polidoro da Lanciano In this case, religion is studied in two dimensions: synchronic, as a coherent set or system of thoughts, affects and gestures; and diachronic, as a set that changes and modifies itself. In the first case, the anthropologist proposes models ; in the other, he looks for, if not laws, at least general processes, such as those of rebalancing the religious in relation to the rest of social life – whenever the gap is too great – or those of religious transfer from one field to another

entirely different.

**Religion and public life** In the approach of most anthropologists and more broadly of researchers in the humanities, religion is not an autonomous anthropological object. It is considered to be expressive of the social (Durkheim), the political (Balandier), the psychic processes (Freud, Devereux), and the bad tricks that language is likely to play on us (Wittgenstein [1982] or Bataille, who considered that Christianity was basically nothing more than a crystallisation of language [1999]). In other words, for these various authors, religion is always second to what is not religion. It can only be understood as a metaphor: to believe in a deity is to believe in something else and to speak in religious terms is, as Durkheim said, « to say things differently than they are » (1960). The first anthropologists hated religions, at least as historical institutions – Evans Pritchard says so explicitly (1972, 1974) – while questioning religion as one of the strongest affirmations of the social bond. It was, with kinship, through the study of the religious phenomenon that anthropology began to constitute itself as a scientific discipline, and this happened in Australia, or rather in relation to the Australian aborigines. All the world's religions are today affected by the widespread movement of wealth, information and people.

It is indeed extremely rare for a religion to be limited to a single country. Religions follow migration routes and spread through social networks. Most migrants retain their beliefs and ritual practices in migration, disseminate them in the host country and encourage conversions. Irrespective of the movement of people, digital networks make available to everyone the information needed to join a religious movement. But religions are also partly the vector of these movements, since migration sometimes has a religious origin, whether it is international expansion linked to proselytism, transnational religious solidarity networks or religious conflicts. Beliefs, rituals and transnational communities are therefore both effects and causes of globalization.

**Analysis of ritual practices** The anthropology of religion means : a) studying the history of the relationships between the concepts of culture, religion and ideology in anthropology; b) becoming familiar with the different concepts of the anthropology of religions (myths, rituals, cosmology, polytheism, shamanism, etc.); c) questioning the diversity of the religious fact; and d) reflecting on the ideological and religious dimensions of contemporary societies. Anthropology of religions focuses on anthropological analysis of ritual practices that establish a

relationship with imaginary forces and intentional agents (the occult/the divine), represented in bodies of myths and beliefs and deals with the Durkheimian and Weberian approaches. It, also, covers the diversity of theoretical currents in chronological order (functionalist, structuralist, Marxist, interpretative, cognitiveist, postcolonial anthropology, etc.), and attempts to deal with most of the religious phenomena studied in priority by anthropology (shamanism, cults of possession, prophetism, witchcraft, divine royalties, cult of ancestors and spirits of nature, life cycle rituals, initiations, polytheisms and monotheisms).

The anthropology of religion introduces anthropology and ethnography and presents some of the major currents in the anthropology of religion (functionalism, structuralism, etc.) and some of the classical or contemporary authors of the discipline (Evans-Pritchard, Lévi-Strauss, Griaule, Geertz, Augé, etc.). ) through a questioning of the origin and prehistory of religion, the cosmology of traditional societies, their representations of life and death, the relationship between religion, social and political organization, as well as certain contemporary debates concerning both Western and non-Western cultural areas (Africa, South America, Oceania, etc.).

**Origins of religion** At the end of the 19th century, 2 theses appeared on the origin of religion : Müller, Naturism : For this anthropologist, in the Veda (Hindu religious texts) the names of deities are common names for elements of nature. There is therefore a belief in natural deities. This belief comes from language, from the personification of natural phenomena (the sun rises). For a primitive man, the natural phenomena/forces are entities to which it is necessary to devote a worship to be in harmony : divinization of the natural phenomena. It is the first religion that appeared. The notion of soul appeared late. As man cannot resign himself to a definitive death, he divinized the soul by granting the ancestors immortality and he worships them (cult of the ancestors).

Tyler, Animism: For him, the notion of soul comes first. He starts from the dream and the dreamlike experience. This experience plays a decisive role in the formation of religious representations. During a dream, there is a duplication of the subject and the world of real experience. Formation of a dreamlike double when one sleeps and of a universe, without consideration of time and space (ex : flying, meeting an absent person, premonitory dream, etc.) The dreamlike double is at the origin of the idea of the soul, of the dreamlike universe. We created the beyond through our dreams. The soul is like a vital principle. Since death is

comparable to a long slumber, the dead can manifest themselves to the living in dreams. We have imagined a notion of a spiritual soul which leaves a dead body but which can interfere with the living : appearance of funeral rites and ancestor worship. These concepts lead to the belief that everything in nature has a soul : animism. If the soul is at the heart of every living being and moves in nature, it is because everything is alive and has a soul (fire has a soul, plant has a soul, etc.) The cult of death extends to nature to unite the mysterious powers that condition the destiny of humanity. Animism was man's first religion, polytheism succeeded it.

These are speculative theories based on incomplete, erroneous data. Muller and Tyler's starting point has not been empirically proven. Only in Indo-European languages and mythologies are the names/powers of deities associated with natural phenomena. As for the soul, it is attested to some societies and not others. In everyday life, there are all kinds of beliefs. Most of the conflicts arise from beliefs and not from real defeats. People, the world, institutions, are irrational, because they are based on beliefs (belief in Christian charity, etc.) Muller and Tyler's theories have common points : they start from the evolutionary presupposition. People who practice this presupposition and have religious beliefs are like children trying to understand the world in a clumsy way. The social dimension of religion in these theories is absent : intelligence is the ability to adapt to the environment, not the accumulation of knowledge.

Jerusalem at dusk. The modern man is as intelligent as the primary man, and children give anthropomorphic status to their toys. This seems absurd in Durkheim, because even an animal can distinguish an inert object from a living being. Just a child knows it's a game when he talks to a toy. For Durkheim, Religion is neither a dream, systematized or lived, nor a huge metaphor without objective value like the naturist theory. It cannot be a misinterpretation of the real world because its purpose is not the control of the forces of nature. Religion is an existential dimension, an ethic of life, with no immediate but deferred effect (access to the beyond), it does not solve everyday problems but regulates the everyday (like a clock).



## 2. Proving" the language/culture connection



Several anthropologist called attention to the research report produced by Princeton University ([link to full report here](#)). The headline touts the research with the claim that “Machine Learning reveals role of culture in shaping the meaning of words”. My response, and that of many others, was immediately snarky – we didn’t particularly need computers to tell us something that has been amply demonstrated by the entire field of linguistic anthropology for the better part of a century, and by plenty of people paying attention for even longer. There was a bit of pushback on these comments, which ultimately all share a certain thematic element – that even if we already knew this, we, as linguistic anthropologists, should welcome this work, and the attention being paid to it, as a new methodology that supports what we know and do. The problem with this claim is...it doesn’t do that at all.

And here, I have to own up to the fact that my own initial flippant response absolutely does suggest that it does, as I noted “the machines have caught up to my opening lecture in intro to linguistic anthropology”. It is, of course, true that culture shapes meaning within languages, and that we teach that as a central principle of the discipline. The problem is, what the authors of this study mean by that and what we mean by that are fundamentally different things, as becomes apparent when you read beyond the headline. At a certain point, I hoped that reading the paper itself would mitigate some of the concerns I had,

but alas, while obviously written in a somewhat less hyperbolic way, the conceptual foundation, methodological application, and interpretation involved in this paper is, to my mind, a frustratingly flawed contribution to the study of the intersection of language and culture, for reasons outlined below.

The crucial issue for me is how the authors define ‘culture’ and establish a quantified version of ‘cultural similarity’. In order to make this machine-based analysis work, culture has to be reduced to a checklist of features. To do so, the authors did in fact draw on anthropology – specifically, the *Ethnographic Atlas* available at D-PLACE, which is based on the work of GP Murdock and his students. There’s an interesting anthropological rabbit hole to go down in examining the disagreements between Murdock and Edward Sapir, and critically considering Murdock’s emphatically ‘scientific’ and mathematical approach to studying human social differences.

What I would ask the authors in this case, though, is whether they have chosen this approach to studying culture after a careful consideration of historical and contemporary thinking about the concept, or mainly because it is the one that allows them to fit the question of culture into the computational mold they wish to explore. Even the assumption that “languages” map neatly onto “cultures”, as opposed to containing multiple ways of speaking, or ‘languages’ being spoken by diverse groups of people, or to having culture defined by multilingual and multivocal practices, doesn’t hold within contemporary linguistic anthropology. Further, and relatedly, while the Princeton report about the study touts it as covering a remarkable number of languages, 41 is in fact an absolutely tiny drop in the bucket of global linguistic diversity – a point that becomes even more apparent when you look at the actual list of languages, which include 25 from the Indo-European family, 4 Turkic languages, 3 Uralic, and 1 each from the AfroAsiatic (Arabic), Sino-Tibetan (Chinese), Dravidian (Tamil), Kartvelian (Georgian), Japonic (Japanese), and Koreanic (Korean) families, as well as Basque.

While I was pleasantly surprised at a few of these inclusions (Georgian and Basque wouldn’t fall in to the ‘usual suspects’ list), most of the list is extremely predictably narrow. Further, one might ask whether these labels even hold up all that well – which Englishes are represented here, or which versions of Spanish, Chinese, or any other “language”? This narrowness is made even worse as the analysis selects further and further for focus on Indo-European languages, because those are the ones about which the kind of diachronic language change

information being used to classify degrees of linguistic/historical similarity is most available. The authors don't justify this choice beyond the convenience level - or really, at all. Even to find the list of languages, one has to follow the links to get to the 300 pages of supplementary material that they provide. This indicates to me that they don't think their choice of languages used to make conclusions about 'universal' meanings and patterns of language culture relationships requires explanation.

A broader consideration of language at a global level would require attuning to the complexity of the concept of 'words', to the ways in which meaning is established in practice, or to the implications of things like polysynthesis in how these forms of 'universality' emerge. To illustrate what I mean, consider how the study talks about kinship terms and alignment. For the authors, the machine analysis demonstrates that this category of terms (at least the most 'common' ones - the examples they give are 'daughter', 'son', and 'aunt') tend to translate into other languages with a high degree of shared meaning. But ethnographic analyses of kinship practices would suggest that even if the terms 'translate', they are used in extremely diverse ways. In many parts of Latin America, the Spanish/Portuguese terms 'tia' and 'tio', which translate as 'aunt' and 'uncle' are used to refer to almost any adult engaging with children, so during fieldwork in Brazil, I would often be introduced to kids by adults saying something like "Essa tia vem do Canadá" ("This auntie comes from Canada"). Sticking with languages represented on the list here, Susan Blum's work on "Naming Practices and the Power of Words in China" is one that I have assigned to introductory ling anth classes to talk about how many cultural beliefs we take for granted, such as the role of names and kinship terms, are in fact demonstrably diverse.

Blum's work is a good example that illustrates how "meaning" is not reducible to semantic "content" or "translatability", but rather has to be understood in terms of social practice. In other words, even asking the question of "what does this kinship term mean?" requires us to understand how a given culture approaches such "meaning". This starts to get at what I mean when I say that what this work 'proves' does not, in fact, align (pun intended, #sorrynotsorry) with what linguistic anthropologists talk about when they study how meaning is different across cultural contexts. There are major assumptions in the computational work that contradict the understandings of language and culture that most of us work within, and in particular, ignore the ways in which we examine language as a dynamic social practice. The ethnological Atlas material is, of course, not the only criterion the study uses for identifying cultural proximity, but digging in to other aspects of the analysis reveals similar assumptions.

As my friend Lavanya Murali noted to me, the treatment of geographic proximity and shared linguistic history, for example, doesn't really contend with the dynamics of how people interact across linguistic boundaries such that similarities can be produced through interaction, rather than as an inherent property of language – with both these elements, in turn, abstracted from an idea of “culture”. All of this, for me, calls the conceptual framework that this research relies upon into question, and at the very least, demonstrates that this work doesn't support linguistic anthropologists' claims about language and culture. As such, this is not a matter of saying the same thing with different methodological evidence, but rather saying something completely different based on an entirely distinct set of assumptions about language and culture – ones that, in fact, I work really hard to teach students to examine as ideological claims rather than fundamental truths.

This even presents something of a meta-commentary, as it's worth noting that meaning doesn't even align within languages, and that the meaning of 'meaning' isn't always clear and translatable – I could go on, but you get the point. In addition to all this, I want to ask – why this research? Why ask these questions? This has been a central piece of the critique I have brought to my less-sarcastic Twitter comments, and that still holds after reading the study itself. The researcher interviewed makes the claim that this is the first “data driven” approach to the question, and further explains that the motivation comes from a desire to improve upon the time-consuming need to do things like “conduct long, careful interviews with bilingual speakers who evaluate the quality of translations”. The first comment is illustrative of a widespread belief that ethnography is not data, and that valorizes the quantitative and mathematical as “proof”.

As many people noted, one of the reasons this raises our hackles is that we have been “proving” the interrelationships between language and culture in any number of ways for years, and this work actually doesn't engage with any of that material, preferring instead to jump back several decades and use a dataset that conforms to pre existing assumptions. The second point is more nuanced, but equally worth addressing – what's wrong with long, careful interviews? In fact, one of the reasons that the list of languages used here is so limited is because those are the ones for which a sufficient amount of long, careful interviews, recorded material, and myriad other forms of data are available.

It's not clear to me, then, that this kind of work in any way does away with the need to develop that material in the first place, raising the question of what it

accomplishes. As I noted in tweets, the decisions about what questions to ask are ones that deserve scrutiny, because resources are spent investigating these questions, which means those resources aren't available for other questions. And if resources are being consumed doing research that ignores and dismisses work on apparently related topics, it does have a negative impact on that work - so, speaking for myself, as a linguistic anthropologist, it's disappointing and frustrating to see not only the promotional elements of this work, but to see how the project itself represents the questions that we even need to understand regarding language and culture.

### **3. Inter-caste marriage isn't the problem, marrying a Dalit man is**

An Indian Hindu male cannot bring himself to accept the fact that an adult woman has the liberty to love and marry as per her free will. Another Dalit youth was murdered this week. The 'crime' of 25-year-old Haresh Kumar Solanki was that he had dared to fall in love with and marry a woman from the 'upper caste'. Eight family members of his wife Urmila, who is two-months pregnant, hacked him to death while a women's helpline team was trying to negotiate with the father, Dasrath Singh Jhala, to send his daughter back to her husband's home.

The brutal killing in Varmor village in Gujarat's Ahmedabad district comes six months after Haresh and Urmila got married against her family's wishes. To ensure her Dalit husband doesn't meet the same fate as Haresh Solanki, Sakshi Mishra from Uttar Pradesh, the daughter of BJP's Bithari Chainpur MLA Rajesh Mishra alias Pappu Bhartaul, put out a video asking the police for protection from her father and "his dogs (henchmen)", who have allegedly threatened to kill her husband Ajitesh and his family. In September last year, Pranay, a Dalit man in Telangana's Hyderabad, was murdered by a goon allegedly sent by his father-in-law Maruthi Rao. His wife Amrutha was then five-months pregnant.

Have you ever heard or read any news where a Brahmin man has been murdered for marrying a Dalit woman or a woman from a 'lower caste'? At least, I have never come across an incident of such nature. Why is it that any

non-Brahmin woman marrying a Brahmin man doesn't infuriate either family to the extent of killing the Brahmin groom? It is quite apparent that the problem does not lie in an inter-caste marriage, and two things help explain this: 1. It is usually the woman's family that would act on its discomfort over an inter-caste marriage in a violent way. In almost all cases of killing in the name of 'honour', it's the woman's family that is usually accused of murder. Moreover, a woman's family harbours dislike for an inter-caste marriage only when the groom belongs to a 'lower caste'.

The dislike is greater if he happens to be a Dalit. 2. The Hindu society dislikes inter-caste marriages but not all inter-caste marriages. Otherwise, there would have been an instance of a Brahmin youth being killed in the name of 'honour' for marrying outside his caste. **Hindu tradition is against woman's liberty** An Indian Hindu male just cannot bring himself to accept the fact that an adult woman has the liberty to love and marry as per her own free will. It does not matter that India's Constitution gives the right to every adult, irrespective of gender, to choose his/her partner. Manusmriti (the laws of Manu), the Hindu society's guide book on caste and other such matters, describes this mindset thus:

It says: A woman, at no stage in her life, is fit to be independent – the father should guard her until she is married, the husband during her adult life, and the son in her old age. Even the most revered Hindu epic, Ramcharitmanas, has the author Tulsidas saying that a woman is 'spoilt' the moment she is given freedom.

#### 4. Seattle City resolution seeking ban on caste discrimination sparks heated debates among Indian-Americans



**The resolution proposing an ordinance to add caste to Seattle's anti-discrimination laws has divided the small but influential South Asian community**

A resolution moved by an upper-caste Hindu official in the Seattle City Council to bring in an ordinance banning caste-based discrimination in the city has generated intense debates among members of the Indian-American community. The Seattle City Council is scheduled to vote on the resolution moved by Council member Kshama Sawant at its meeting on Tuesday. If voted, Seattle would become the first American city to specifically outlaw caste discrimination.

The resolution proposing an ordinance to add caste to Seattle's anti-discrimination laws has divided the small but influential South Asian community. Proponents of the move, which is the first of its kind in a US city council, have hailed it as an important step towards promoting social justice and equality. On the other hand, an equally large number of people have alleged that this is a move to target the larger South Asian Diaspora, particularly Indian Americans.

"We have to be clear, while the cost of discrimination against oppression does not show up in the United States, in every form that it shows up in South Asia, the discrimination is very real out here," said Sawant, who is an upper-caste Hindu. Many Indian-Americans fear that codifying caste in public policy will further fuel instances of Hinduphobia in the US.

Over the last three years, ten Hindu temples and five statues, including those of Mahatma Gandhi and Maratha emperor Shivaji, have been vandalised across the US as an intimidation tactic against the Hindu community. Indian-Americans are the second-largest immigrant group in the US. According to data from the 2018 American Community Survey (ACS), which is conducted by the US Census Bureau, there are 4.2 million people of Indian origin residing in the United States.

The Seattle city ordinance is similar to the resolution that was attempted by Equality Labs in the Santa Clara Human Rights Commission in 2021. The resolution failed after hearing objections from the Indian-American diaspora in the Bay Area. The Seattle city ordinance uses the Equality Lab's caste survey which associates the social ill to be "established in Hinduism". While the ordinance itself does not mention the word Hindu, the connection with the caste survey has become a point of contention.

Ambedkar Phule Network of American Dalits and Bahujans, in a statement, said that the inclusion of "caste" as a specific protected category would unfairly single out and target all people of South Asian descent and origin and that included Dalits and Bahujan Samaj. "If passed, this law will make Seattle employers less likely to hire South Asians as a whole, which will have unintended consequences of reducing employment/opportunities of all South Asians including us Dalits/Bahujans," it said.

Equality Lab, which is leading the campaign, on Monday urged the City Council members to vote 'Yes' on the resolution. "We have known for a long time that caste discrimination takes place in US schools and workplaces across the country, despite being a largely hidden issue," it said. "Despite sounding benign, it advances bigotry against the South Asian community by using racist, colonial tropes of 'caste'. It is horrific to see the blatant singling out of a minority community based on nothing but unsubstantiated claims based on faulty data from hate groups," said Pushpita Prasad, Coalition of Hindus of North America (CoHNA), which has been leading a nationwide campaign against such a resolution.



"The proposed ordinance will violate the civil rights of minority community (South Asians) because it (1) singles them out, (2) assumes South Asians have more discrimination or hierarchy than all other human groups and (3) makes these assumptions on the basis of flawed data from hate groups," she alleged. For and against campaigns have now spilled out in the public. Proponents of the resolution have been writing columns and op-eds in various US newspapers.

Organised by CoHNA, thousands of emails have been sent to the city councillors and dozens of South Asians have been called into city meetings to protest and point out the many reasons this is a bad idea. This includes a broad variety of individuals and organisations from all backgrounds. A diverse coalition of nearly 100 organisations and businesses wrote to the Seattle City Council this week, urging it to vote 'No' on the proposed caste ordinance, which they argued is based on faulty data from hate groups and will violate the civil rights of the South Asian community.

"In effect, the proposed ordinance assumes that an entire community - primarily Hindu Americans - are guilty of caste'-based discrimination unless they are somehow proven innocent," remarked Nikunj Trivedi, president of CoHNA. "This is un-American and wrong. It also smacks of McCarthyism, targeting people for their suspected beliefs," he said.

Meanwhile, Council member Sawant intensified her campaign ahead of the vote. She wrote a letter to two Indian-American lawmakers Congressman Ro Khanna and Congresswoman Pramila Jayapal and asked for their support. "As Congressmember and Chair of the Congressional Progressive Caucus, I hope that your office will stand with our movement against the right wing," Sawant wrote in the letter to Jayapal. India banned caste discrimination in 1948 and enshrined that policy in the Constitution in 1950.

## PAPER - 2

### INDIAN & TRIBAL ANTHROPOLOGY

#### 1. Art of Living to empower tribal youth to become change agents

Art of Living to empower tribal youth to become change agents The Art of Living, in collaboration with the Ministry of Tribal Affairs, launched two Centers of Excellence (CoE), aimed at empowering tribal youth to become change agents, take charge of community development, strengthen grassroots democracy, promote natural farming among tribal farmers, introduce them to marketing opportunities and make them self-sufficient

Gurudev also spoke about The Art of Living tribal school being run in Ghatsila, where children are taught about their tribal culture and tradition while also giving them modern education and vocational skills that would ensure they do not remain unemployed. More than 700 such schools are being run all over the country in rural and tribal areas. Gurudev feels that emphasizing the need for reaching out with tools of yoga and meditation to every tribal village to take care of people's mental health along with hygiene and development. He also noted that there are some tasks of development that are cut out for the government like building roads, planning among others and there are some that only NGOs can take up, like motivating and encouraging people to be part of the development process, given the innate trust people have.

Under the first CoE, the organization will train 900 youths belonging to Scheduled Tribe communities as change agents. The project will run in 30 gram panchayats, in six different blocks and five districts of Jharkhand. "This program launched today is important for the farming community and the holistic development of Panchayati Raj," said Mr Arjun Munda, Minister of Tribal Affairs. "We are positive about starting the project in Gurudev's presence to bring harmony between constitutional rights, development and their social structure so that their natural system is retained. This will set an example of empowerment of rural and tribal areas. Development of the tribal communities, who are known for their sweetness, is important from societal development point of view. Environment sustainability is ensured by them by their dedication

to preserve it."

While there are a lot of schemes and legal protections available for the tribal communities, they may not always have all the information. The trained youths will be further sensitizing their own community about the legal protections and schemes available to them. Specific gram panchayats will also be sensitized about the rights available under SC/ST Act. Along with the tribal community, SHGs will also be educated on the same.

Traditional forest dwellers will be more aware about their rights and can avail the benefits of various schemes of the State and Central governments. "I am very happy that, with the support of The Art of Living, our ministry will work towards uplift of the scheduled tribes to make them self-dependent, bring them dignity, and strengthen Panchayati Raj institutions," said Renuka Singh, Minister of State in the Ministry of Tribal Affairs.

"This primarily will be achieved through capacity building in the tribal community, by creating a team of trained and dynamic young leaders who would lead the change required within the community, by inculcating a sense of ownership and responsibility for their community and motivating them to achieve the change they seek," said Prasana Prabhu, Chairman of Vyakti Vikas Kendra India. Art of Living will be implementing its widely successful community empowerment modules by training the youths for personality improvement and leadership skills and encouraging them to engage in community service; the initiatives taken thus will be self-sustaining with the help of trained youths to create a long lasting impact in these villages.

According to the reports, the second CoE will focus on training 10,000 tribal farmers in Aurangabad district of Maharashtra on sustainable natural farming. Sri Sri Institute of Agricultural Sciences and Technology (SSIAST) works with 22 lakh farmers promoting natural farming across India. SSIAST has now undertaken the project "Making Atma Nirbhar Tribal Farmers" with the Ministry of Tribal Affairs, in Aurangabad district of Maharashtra. Agro-chemicals have slowly started to penetrate tribal belts that have for centuries adopted sustainable organic or natural farming techniques. This is leading to serious erosion of crop biodiversity and degradation of soils.

**It is also leading to the loss of the traditional ecological knowledge of the tribal communities in sustainable agriculture. In this present three-year**

project, SSIAST seeks to adopt 10 tribal villages and train 10,000 farmers in sustainable natural farming techniques, based on Gou-Aadharith technology. This model is based on training 10 mentors amongst the local youth, who will handhold the farmers during this period. SSIAST will ensure that the farmers will receive PGS organic certification and marketing opportunities will be made available to them. SSIAST will also establish dynamic Desi Seed Banks for preserving local biodiversity and empowering farmers to be seed keepers. "This project will focus on creating self-reliance among tribal farmers. It seeks to preserve and revive the Traditional Ecological Knowledge of tribal communities and protect them for the negative effect of chemical agriculture", said Dr Prabhakar Rao, Trustee, SSIAST.

## 2. Have 'Rights' been finally granted to tribes and 'Traditional Forest Dwellers'?



**The Govt informed Parliament in December that forest rights have been granted to 2 million forest dwellers in accordance to Forest Rights Act of 2006. But after conducting surveys, NGOs express doubts**

A decade and a half after the Forest Rights Act (FRA) was passed by Parliament in 2006, a majority of the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (OTFDs) of the country are yet to receive entitlement under the historic legislation.

Bhubaneswar based NGO Vasundhara claimed after a study that not even 10% of forest dwelling STs (FDSTs) or OTFDs have been given entitlements under the Act in 1.72 lakh forest villages in the country.

The Act was meant to recognise and vest rights over forest land to FDST and OTFDs residing in forests for generations. The Parliament had conceded that rights on ancestral land and their habitat were not adequately recognised in the consolidation of state forests resulting in historical injustice to dwellers.

In 2019, however, it was revealed in the Supreme Court that over two million claims made by tribals over forest land had been rejected, and virtually all state governments conceded in court that the claims were rejected without due process of law.

Sasmit Patra, a Biju Janata Dal Rajya Sabha MP asked (unstarred question No. 2057) about the total land pattas/rights provided under FRA, 2006 to forest dwellers over the past three years, seeking state-wise and year-wise details.

From the list furnished by the Ministry of Tribals Affairs, it was found that Odisha, the best performing state, had distributed 4.5 lakh titles, 4,43,686 people conferred Individual Forest Rights (IFR) and 6,649 Community Forest Rights Claims (CFR). IFR is the title for forest land under cultivation for several decades. For STs the time limit is a minimum of 15 years and for OTFDs the time limit is that these individuals should be living in the area for the last 75 years or three generations.

Under CFR, forest land can be used for construction of playground, school, dispensary. This also includes rights over non-timber forest produce (NTFP). The Gram Sabha's recommendations to this effect are screened at district and sub division levels. The district level committee (DLC) headed by the District Magistrate makes the final decision and land thus recognised under FRA cannot be sold or transferred.

Bihar, Uttarakhand and Himachal Pradesh are apparently the worst performing states. Bihar had given only 121 IFR titles between March 2019 and March 2021. In Uttarakhand only 157 IFR claims were finalised from

March 31, 2019 to August 31, 2021. Himachal Pradesh finalised only 164 Individual claims and 65 Community claims.

In February 2019, the Supreme Court directed eviction of more than one million ST and other traditional forest dwellers from forest lands in 16 Indian states for “wildlife protection”.

The order was criticized by forest rights activists, forest dwellers and above all by the UN Special Rapporteurs for Human Rights. The Centre finally admitted before the Supreme Court that rejection of claims by state governments were illegal and requested the court to stay its eviction order. On 1st March 2019, the Supreme Court stayed its own order to evict forest dwellers.

Non-BJP states better performers: As per data provided in Parliament, non-BJP ruled states had performed better. Chhattisgarh ranked second in FRA implementation after BJD-ruled Odisha. The Bhupesh Baghel led Congress Govt had issued 4.23 lakh IFR and 21,967 CFR claims till August 31, 2021.

Maharashtra had settled 1.72 lakh IFR and 7,084 CFR claims. Madhya Pradesh issued the highest number of 27,976 CFR till August 2021. However, all the 27,976 community claims were settled by the previous Government headed by Kamal Nath that lasted for 15 months. Since then, between March 2020 and August 2021, the BJP Government in MP has settled only 7 or 8 CFR claims.

BJP ruled Tripura settled 1.27 lakh IFR and 55 CFR claims. West Bengal settled titles of 45,130 individuals and 686 community claims. In PM Modi's home state Gujarat, only 95,363 individuals were conferred the rights and 3887 CFR claims were settled.

The community rights conferred on two dozen non-villages in Nayagrah, Odisha, for the first time includes joint titles to collect and use firewood. The villagers also have the right to collect, process, use and sell minor forest produce such as bamboo, kendu leaves (for making beedi) etc.

### 3. Involving indigenous people in environmental governance – the Sixth Schedule way



Customary practices of the North East's tribal population are harmonious with nature. Extensive recognition and conferment of rights over the forest are belated legislative actions. In most indigenous societies, people believe humans and nature are deeply connected and inter-dependent, almost like kin to one another. Indigenous people across the world have often been regarded as exemplars of environmentally sustainable living. The impact of their subsistence livelihoods was apparently kept in check by customary laws to ensure they lived by the laws of nature. Solutions to a lot of current environmental problems lie in these traditions.

These marginalised groups are gaining recognition as vital stewards of our environment and are gaining a role in environmental governance due to their unique traditions and laws, amid depleting resources. This UN proclamation recognised the role of indigenous people in environmental management and governance at an international level. A part of the Constitution of India also recognised this bond between indigenous people, their land and customary rights. The Sixth Schedule of the Constitution is unique because it confers autonomy and right to self governance to indigenous people living in parts of north-eastern India.

The Sixth Schedule Provisions over the administration of tribal areas in Assam,



Meghalaya, Mizoram and Tripura are contained in the Sixth Schedule. It provides for the establishment of autonomous district and regional councils. Each of these states have a couple of such councils, except Tripura which has one. These autonomous district and regional councils have their members elected from the local tribal population of their respective regions. In addition to the elected members, a few are nominated by the governors. The history of autonomous district councils goes back to the time of gaining independence. The Interim Government of India appointed the North-East frontier (Assam) Tribal and excluded areas committee to the Constituent Assembly, under the chairmanship of Gopinath Bordoloi, the first Chief Minister of Assam. The committee recommended the setting up of autonomous district councils to provide autonomy and self-governance at the local level to the tribal population. The recommendation was later incorporated into the Sixth Schedule, Article 244 (2) and Article 275(1) of the Constitution of India.

The district and regional councils almost function as autonomous states with significant executive, legislative and judicial powers. The councils have powers to legislate over several matters including land use, management of forests (except reserved forests and sanctuaries), inheritance, tribal customs, marriages, personal laws, appointment and succession of headmen, etc. The councils have their own laws and regulations over the management of forests. Many of these laws derive from customary laws and often appreciate the close age-old relationship shared between indigenous people and the environment. A few such legislations include: 1. The Mizoram Forest Act, 1955 2.

The Karbi Anglong Forests Act, 1957 3. The United Khasi-Jaintia Hills Autonomous District (Management and Control of Forests) Act, 1958 and its subsequent rules of 1960 District council forest laws – the enabling factor? An analysis of laws like the United Khasi-Jaintia Hills Autonomous District (Management and Control of Forests) Act, 1958 show how the involvement of indigenous people in environmental governance was enabled. This was done by placing them at the focal point of forest management. The primary objective of the aforementioned law is the control and management of forests in the autonomous district council areas of Meghalaya's Khasi and Jaintia Hills. Deriving from local customary laws, this legislation classifies forests under the autonomous district council into eight different categories. These categories include private forests, sacred forests, green blocks, village forests, district council reserved forests and so on.

The management of these forests exclusively lies in the hands of the local



communities, apart from the categorisation. Section 3 (ii) of the act, for example, describes sacred forests. This, in turn, has benefitted both people and nature. A good illustration of this is the successful Reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation (REDD+) initiative in Meghalaya's Mawphlang region, where 3,500 households from 62 villages managed to conserve and restore over 27,000 hectares of sub-tropical hill forests. This has not only led to the restoration of biodiversity and water sources like streams, but also increased the livelihood and income of local tribal people.

Despite several positive aspects, the Sixth Schedule is not free from shortcomings. Over the years, there were several instances of corruption in the autonomous councils. The village heads or community leaders often reap most of the benefits, with barely any development trickling down to the actual beneficiaries. Laws over the control and management of forests in all the areas under the Sixth Schedule are not uniform as well. In Assam's Karbi Anglong district, the Karbi Anglong Forests Act, 1957 does not confer rights to communities over control and management of forests, unlike Meghalaya. Rights over forests lie exclusively in the hands of the district council. Apart from this, certain district councils do not have laws over the management and control of forests. They are, instead, under the jurisdiction of a state law.

The road ahead The success story of Mawphlang necessitates replication and serves as an apt model for showing the benefits accrued from involving indigenous people in environmental governance through incentivised programmes. Active community engagement in forest management, however, is still missing from certain district council legislations. These laws need amendments to increase participation of indigenous populations and legislations need to be adopted immediately in areas where they are missing. The ambit of the Sixth Schedule is not as inclusive as one would expect. Several tribes – particularly in Assam – are still outside its realm.

There lies a vast scope within the existing framework itself to include tribes such as the Mising, Tiwa, Rabha, etc who have long demanded inclusion. The customary practices of the North East's tribal population are harmonious with nature. Extensive recognition and conferment of rights over the forest are, thus, belated legislative actions. Despite its few shortcomings, the Sixth Schedule holds the potential to redefine community engagement and restore forest management to a co-dependent existence once stolen from these tribes by foreign powers. The future lies in restoring the past.

## 4. Why the indigenous Idu Mishmis are protesting a proposed tiger reserve in Arunachal Pradesh



Idu Mishmis have recently protested the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) announcement to notify the **Dibang Wildlife Sanctuary** in **Arunachal Pradesh** as a **tiger reserve**.

### About the Idu Mishmis:

- They are the **sub-tribe** of the larger **Mishmi** group in Arunachal Pradesh and neighbouring Tibet.
  - The other two Mishmi groups are **Digaru** and **Miju**.
- They are known for their **weaving** and **craftsmanship** skills.
- They primarily live in **Mishmi Hills**, bordering **Tibet**.
- Their language- **Idu Mishmi** is considered **endangered** by **UNESCO**.
- They consider **tigers** are their “**elder brothers**”.
- The tribe’s apex body is the Idu Mishmi Cultural and Literary Society (**IMCLS**).

### About the Dibang Wildlife Sanctuary:

- It is a **biodiversity hotspot** notified in 1998 consisting of rare Mishmi takin, musk deer, goral, clouded leopards, snow leopards and tigers.

#### **Upgradation of wildlife sanctuary to a tiger reserve:**

- **Feature:** stricter security measures like a '**Special Tiger Protection Force**', will guard the area at all times.

#### **Key facts:**

- Due procedure to declare a site as a **Wildlife Sanctuary** is mentioned in the provisions of **the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972** and **the Land Acquisition Act, 1894**.

#### **Why are the Idu Mishmis resisting the move?**

- The community's access to the Dibang forests has not been impacted as a wildlife sanctuary, but many believe a tiger reserve would increasingly restrict access.
- The upgrade to a tiger reserve would feature stricter security measures, such as a '**Special Tiger Protection Force**,' which would hinder the community's access to their forest lands.
- The community has declared part of its forest land as a '**Community Conserved Area**,' governed entirely by local populations, where they ban hunting, felling trees, and implement other conservation measures.
- The community alleges that the Dibang WLS was created without their consent or knowledge.

## 5. Local to Global: Promotion of Tribal Products



- As per the Census 2011, the tribal population constitutes about 8.9% of the total population in India. They are spread across the country and reside in the forest and hilly regions of the country. The tribal economy is mainly concentrated around the collection and processing of Minor Forest Products and cultivation largely for the purpose of domestic consumption. They usually struggle to meet their economic needs with a bare minimum income (cash).
- This is due to a substantial number of tribals being cut off from the civilized world, who are unable to adapt to modernization. The tribal economies lack organized markets as well as financial institutions to promote the tribal products. There is a huge demand for tribal artifacts, textiles, ornaments, paintings, potteries, cane and bamboo products and organic and natural food products, but the supply side of this economy is way below the demand side and thus the community fails to profit from its produce. Thus, efficient production and effective promotion become imperative for the economic development of this community.
- Mainstreaming Tribes is a Constitutional Mandate and also a national priority for the Government. Measures or interventions to cater to the

promotion of tribal products are of utmost importance, given the penurious conditions prevailing. Tribes procure most of their raw materials from the forests and produce a variety of products that have significant symbolism in their culture. These products have a huge demand across the world, especially in the South Asian and Southeast Asian countries as well as in the domestic markets. But the supply of these products is extremely low.

- The tribes are often, unaware of the consumer preferences and the consumers do not have information about the products that are produced by indigenous groups. This is one of the consequences of inadequate marketing strategies and as a result, the community is unable to profit from the products that it produces. The community is isolated from modern civilization and lacks knowledge about modern techniques and designs which is extremely disadvantageous to them.
- The Government of India established TRIFED, in August 1987 under the Multi-State Co-operative Societies Act, 1984. It is a national-level cooperative body; its main objective is to ensure the socio-economic development of the Indian Tribal community by institutionalizing the trade of Minor Forest Produce and Surplus Agricultural Produce cultivated by them. TRIFED has launched a chain of retail outlet stores called 'TRIBES INDIA', through which TRIFED procures and markets tribal arts and crafts items.
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- There are now 130 retail outlets across India and they cater to both domestic as well as international markets. The Ministry of Tribal Affairs has introduced a mechanism for marketing Minor Forest Produce through Minimum Support Price and development of value chain for social safety of this forest produce gatherers in 2013. The Van Dhan Yojana was spearheaded by TRIFED, was introduced on 14th April 2018, and has been implemented in 27 states and 307 districts.
- Even though such schemes have given a boost to the production and promotion of tribal produce, the effects have not been significant. The tribal communities are largely isolated from the rest of the civilization and due to this limited exposure, they lack awareness about such schemes and fail to benefit from them. It becomes imperative that the government promotes such schemes and encourages the tribal community to avail the benefits of such schemes. Additionally, these communities must be motivated to adapt to modernization so that they can obtain complete market information and can no longer be manipulated by the middlemen.

- Production and promotion of tribal products is the need of the hour and is critical to ensure improvement of the economic condition of Tribes in India. Production of such products may result in large-scale employment generation of the tribal community. In absence of a sufficient supply of such products, marketing strategies fail to benefit the target community. Hence, measures must be introduced to increase the production of tribal products.

### Way forward

- Need to encourage Corporate Social Responsibility funds towards upscaling tribal youth, →
- Need to promote innovation in products and marketing facilities → for tribal products by engaging franchises in small and medium towns and also in Metropolitan Cities,
- Convergence needs to be built with schemes of the Ministry of → Commerce and Ministry of Textiles to promote the export of tribal products globally,
- Necessary investments must be made so as to make the raw materials easily available, accessible and affordable, →
- Marketing strategies need to be promoted to further encourage the sales of tribal products, →
- Domestic private companies should be empanelled for promoting skills and production process of tribal, →
- 
- Efficient marketing strategies must be deployed so that proper → information transfer takes place between the producers and the consumers,
- Improvements in these areas are of utmost importance for the → socio-economic development of the Indian Tribal communities, which goes hand-in-hand with efficient production and effective promotion of Indian Tribal products.



## 6. Research explores the impacts of mobile phones for Maasai women



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- Mobile phones have the power to change the lives of women living in remote communities by reducing barriers to information and increasing access to local economies. However, the introduction of new technologies can hamper efforts to empower women by increasing disparities in power dynamics. Associate Professor Timothy Baird of the College of Natural Resources and Environment and Kelly Summers, who earned a master's degree in geography from Virginia Tech in 2019, led a National Science Foundation-funded study examining the impact that mobile phones are having in Maasai communities in Tanzania. Their findings, published in the *Journal of Rural Studies*, reveal crucial insights into the ways that technology impacts social dynamics in a distinct community in Africa.
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- A nomadic people adapt to a changing world The Maasai are an ethnic group of approximately 2 million people, living primarily in Kenya and Tanzania. As one of a number of indigenous groups in Africa to practice pastoralism, which involves the rearing of livestock, the Maasai have traditionally been nomadic, traversing the continent's Great Rift Valley to find grazing land for their animals. This way of life, which has sustained

Maasai for centuries, is evolving rapidly with the widespread expansion of western society and the ideas and technologies that come with it. "Maasai are moving into a world some might call 'modern,'" noted Baird, a faculty member in the Department of Geography who has been researching Maasai communities since 2005. "Already there are aspects of our own 'western' lives that are evident in their lives. For example, several developments in Maasai society, from the growth of formal education to the spread of organized religion, have led to changes in the traditional structures that shape Maasai lives.

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- From my vantage, mobile phones have been a kind of steroid for accelerating those changes." For a population that herds livestock across wide stretches of wild savanna, mobile phones are a boon to their economy and life. But few studies have investigated how this new technology is impacting the lives of women in Maasai communities, which are traditionally patriarchal. In family units where men exert significant control, often over multiple wives, it is important to understand how phones have impacted gender dynamics. "As a man, it's difficult -- and really not appropriate -- for me to have meetings with individual women or groups of women," Baird explained. "Maasai men may be quite uncomfortable with such a setup, and Maasai women may have no experience engaging with a man who is not a relative. So I needed help."
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- Enter Kelly Summers, who received bachelor's degrees in natural resources conservation and in forestry from Virginia Tech in 2014. "While I was serving as an agriculture Extension agent with the Peace Corps in Tanzania, I read an article about Tim's research and reached out to him about doing graduate work in Tanzania," said Summers, who is currently working as an environmental protection specialist for the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. "Because I had experience interacting with women while living in and traveling to remote communities in Tanzania, it was a good fit." Summers, working with collaborators, including Maria Elisa Christie, director of women and gender in international development for Virginia Tech's Center for International Research, Education, and Development, was able to conduct interviews with Maasai women, trying to puzzle out the difficult question of what women's empowerment might look like in a cultural context bounded by traditions but also stimulated by an expanding world. "I don't want to paint a monolithic picture of a whole group of people," Summers said.
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- "All of the women I spoke with had multiple identities within their communities: some women owned businesses, and some took on the work of tending to livestock. They were mothers and wives. Some were teachers and some were active in churches. There are a range of identities, and phones impact those identities for better or worse, or both."

**Understanding the contexts of empowerment** To understand how a new technology like mobile phones could potentially support women's empowerment, it was important for researchers to understand what empowerment would look like within the specific contexts of Maasai life. "To unpack this idea of empowerment, we had to characterize our terms and then look for examples of those characterizations," Baird said.

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- "We had to ask: what are the aspects of your social world, what are the physical materials, and what are your own personal assets that allow you to make decisions and then act on those decisions. From that, we could develop more targeted questions about issues that embody empowerment and the factors that promote or obstruct it." For Maasai women, the barriers to using mobile phones to gain empowerment vary: from access to reliable electricity to technological fluency and literacy, to having the financial resources to pay for data, their ability to use phones is shaped by a broad array of issues that are themselves in a state of radical flux. The study results show that some concerns are unique to Maasai communities, while others seem universal.
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- "One observation we made was that Maasai women are very much addicted to their phones," Summers explained. "If they can't get a charge or they can't purchase minutes, the feeling they have is very similar to our own anxiety when our phones lose power. We all want to communicate, we all want to be in a community, and phones are becoming a major tool to do that among Maasai women. Those who don't have access to a phone very much feel that they're missing out." To work around some of the challenges pertaining to access, Maasai women have found cooperative solutions. Baird and Summers cite the important role that informal village community banks play in allowing women to develop business relationships with other women outside their family units, increasing the women's economic autonomy. While mobile phones are a positive motivator in seeking these burgeoning opportunities, the authors stressed that mobile phones can also reinforce inequalities.
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- For Maasai women, who typically have multiple roles within family and

community structures, mobile phones can simultaneously empower an individual in one role while disempowering her in another. "The same power dynamics that already existed are now playing out with phones," Baird said. "We found that men, the traditional gatekeepers in this society, are the ones who often control women's phones. They can use them as a reward or a punishment, a carrot or a stick." Summers added that one of their findings is that Maasai men and women used phones differently: "Men will use their phones to talk to people outside their immediate social circle, but women will primarily talk to people they already know: mothers and sisters and other people in their family unit. They are rarely using their phones to reach out to new people.

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- " While mobile phones can be used in ways that empower women, the researchers stress that it is more realistic to view this technology as a new arena where tensions between traditional cultural norms and the growing aspirations to engage in a broadly interconnected world continue to play out. Future efforts aimed at using mobile technologies to advance women's empowerment need to better understand what empowerment would look like within the specific contexts of a distinct culture, and what consequences -- positive and negative -- are risked when new technologies take root.

## 7. Chenchus lured with promise of a 'good life', forest open to plunder



Going by their sociocultural transformation, being driven by the influence of the so-called mainstream forces, indications are that an assisted collapse of their traditional lifestyle, is now imminent

Have Chenchus living inside the Nallamala forest reached a point where there is no going back to their roots?

Going by their sociocultural transformation, being driven by the influence of the so-called mainstream forces, indications are that an assisted collapse of their traditional lifestyle, is now imminent.

The fear of being forced to migrate exists as an undercurrent among the Chenchus, who had strongly resisted several attempts to relocate them for decades, whether it was the Telugu Ganga Project in the 80s, exploration for diamond deposits (an agreement made with De Beers) in the early 2010s, or the most recent attempts by the Atomic Minerals Directorate (AMD) to explore

mining of uranium in the Amrabad Tiger Reserve and the Nagarjunasagar Tiger Reserve since 2018.

Activists point out that though no excavation has taken place yet, officials from the Geological Survey of India (GSI) and AMD have been visiting the forest areas where markings were made for uranium exploration, despite a resolution passed in Telangana Assembly in 2019 against it.

“Petalchenu (near Udimilla)-Maddimadugu-Padara and Rayalagandi-Padara-Prathaparudruni Kota are the areas where surveys are actively being conducted. The last time GSI and forest officials started conducting surveys, we managed to prevent them from doing so. But there are mud roads being laid deep inside the forest and markings being made. Last month, Niranjana Kumar, a scientist from AMD, was also here. When the local media asked him, he said that it was routine survey, but we are sceptical about it,” says Nasaraiah, an activist.

People’s suspicion grew with the recent attempts by the forest department to relocate Chenchus and other forest dwellers from Kollampenta in Amrabad mandal, Geesugondi in Padara mandal, Kommenapenta and Sarlapalli habitations in Amrabad mandal.

The forest officials are not forcing them to relocate, but are offering them Rs 15 lakh per household as compensation, promising them land at an alternative location. However, local leaders say that there is no land left to be assigned to oustees. Chenchus from a few habitations who were relocated in the past had in fact returned to their earlier locations.

As per sources, 1,004 acres have been transferred from the Revenue department to the Forest department in Tirumalapuram, Laxmapur, Vonguronipally and Rayalagandi villages in Padara mandal. Rumours are doing rounds about possible exploration for diamonds there. There have been regular attempts to hunt for treasure at Prathaparudruni Kota and other temples in the forest area.

Chenchus living in the core forest area of Lingal mandal have been undergoing a sociocultural transformation in recent times, mostly due to the outsiders’ influence on them. Annual festivities like Bourapur jatara and Saileshwaram jatara have witnessed an adverse impact on the indigenous lifestyle of Chenchus.

Prevalence of alcoholism, religious conversions with money as an allurements have left Chenchus divided politically and have contributed to a change in their lifestyle and mentality.

“For decades now, Chenchus have been reduced to people who depend on alms from the government. Real development still eludes Chenchus who want to go for agroforestry if supported. Honeybees are rapidly going extinct because of chemical fertilisers and pesticides outside the forest, but here, they still have a safe habitat, though their population is on the decline.

There are Central schemes to empower farmers to go for beekeeping but they don't realise that Chenchus can be a great resource for that,” said Thokala Guruvaiah, General Secretary, Chenchu Lokam. He added: “We have been representing to the political and administrative establishment for years, requesting them to construct check-dams inside the forest, so that water could be conserved for agriculture and wildlife to flourish. But nobody cares.”

#### **Community leader are not committed: Insiders**

For years, Chenchus, who have exclusive right to fish in the backwaters of the Krishna River, have not been able to claim it. Migrant fishermen working under a powerful ring of smugglers from AP continue to exploit the fish wealth of the Nallamala. Hope is bleak, as insiders feel that the leaders of the movements are themselves not committed and Chenchus presently lack the drive to either fight back or resist the attempts to dispossess them of their natural habitat which they have been protecting since time immemorial.

#### **NGOs encourage them to join mainstream**

NGOs working with them have been successful in grooming Chenchus to consider joining the mainstream - a scenario that puts them in direct competition with the socioeconomically empowered masses while leaving the forest open for exploitation of natural and hidden resources.

## 8. Adani Group: Chhattisgarh tribes' year-long protest against tycoon's coal mine



Deep in the jungles of central India, forest-dwelling tribes are marking the one-year anniversary of a continuous agitation against a new coal mine to be developed by the Adani Group. In recent months, they've received a show of support from high-profile politicians and celebrity activists. But in this David vs Goliath battle, a victory for the tribes will be hard won.

The village of Hariharpur in the state of Chhattisgarh stands on the precipice of two discordant worlds. To its east, the myriad greys of the decade-old Parsa East Kete Basan (PEKB) open cast coal mine, operated by the Adani Group, stretch as far as the eye can see. To the other side of this hamlet of a few scattered homes, lies the sprawling expanse of the Hasdeo forest, under which billions of tons of power grade coal still rests unexplored.

These woods are said to be the largest contiguous stretch of dense forestland in central India, spanning 170,000 hectares or 170 sq km (656.3 sq miles) and often

called the "lungs of Chhattisgarh". They are also home to the proposed Lemru Elephant Reserve.

Tribal villagers here have strenuously opposed the proposed opening of the new coal mine for over a decade. But despite staunch resistance and warnings from the government's own forest research agency of a negative impact on the local habitat and forest ecology, final clearances for the mine were granted last year, triggering an indefinite agitation that's gone on every day since 2 March 2022.

Interestingly, it is the Congress-led Chhattisgarh government, which has time and again taken on Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) for favouring the Adani group, which has given this project the go-ahead.

### **Mounting resistance**

A thatched tent off the driveway that leads to Hariharpur has been the epicentre of the continuing tribal protests for the past year. Every day, villagers from the three nearby hamlets of Fatehpur, Ghatbarra and Salhi hold peaceful sit-in demonstrations here.

Once a week, hundreds mobilise to chant slogans, imploring Adani to "go back".

"The authorities acquired our land illegally by submitting forged documents of the village council meeting. We had never consented to land acquisition," Muneshwar Singh Porte, member of the Hasdeo Arand Bachao Sangharsh Samiti resistance group told the BBC.

The Chhattisgarh government didn't respond to the BBC's query. But the Adani Group refuted these allegations, saying it had always conducted its operations "in total compliance within the laws of the land".

It said the Rajasthan Rajya Vidyut Utpadan Nigam (RRVUNL), which owns both the existing and proposed mines (along with the Adani group as the mine developer and operator and majority shareholder with a 74% share), handles land acquisition, rehabilitation and resettlement of people within "stringent legal and regulatory frameworks" and had "duly conducted and recorded the process" of getting villagers' consent.

But across the villages we travelled to, the protesting tribes alleged that the views of the village councils or gram sabhas - mandatory for consideration by law in

remote, tribal areas like the Hasdeo Arand region - were either repeatedly violated or sidestepped.

People from at least three villages have petitioned the district administration, seeking an investigation into these violations. The papers, which the BBC has been able to obtain, are also part of an appeal being heard in the Supreme Court against land and environmental clearances granted to the project.

"These forests are where our deities live; we don't worship idols. Mining will destroy our ancient traditions and way of life," Ramlal Karyam, a protester said. He and several others had walked 300km to the state capital, Raipur, to demand a halt in mining activity in 2021.

### **Growing differences**

Getting these testimonies on camera isn't easy. As the protests here reach a tipping point, the forest has become a surveillance zone.

Throughout our two days in these jungles, we were followed around by people on bikes and SUVs. Some threaten to break our vehicle as we try to enter one of the villages - Ghatbarra - to speak to its headman. These are young men from within the community, fiercely in favour of mining development, and while still in a minority, their voices appear to have become increasingly louder.

"For there to be progress, there will have to be some destruction," said Keshav Singh Porte, a resident of Fatehpur village, who along with two other men circled our car on a narrow road leading to Ghatbarra.

"We have bigger aspirations than foraging for forest produce," he added, saying there was a need to "balance the narrative" around the protests.

On our way to another village, Chandra Kumar and his brother try to stop our car.

Mr Kumar admitted that he works as a technician at the existing mine Adani Group mine and said the company had brought several positive developments to the villages, including a school, water and healthcare facilities.

The Adani Group told the BBC they had undertaken a slew of initiatives for the empowerment of the locals which included setting up a school for nearly 800 students, training over 4,000 youth in vocational activities and managing local



mobile clinics among other things. It also said the PEKB mine, which has been producing coal since 2013 to meet RRVUNL's fuel requirements, has alone generated "over 15,000 direct and indirect employment opportunities in the district" and this "could not have been possible without the strong support from locals".

Several villagers and activists, however, allege that positively engaging with the community was a way for Adani to persuade them to drop their protest. They claimed the company had recruited young men in every hamlet across the forest to keep a watch on their activities and prevent the resistance from spiralling out of control.

### **Turning tide**

For a short while last year, it appeared like the tribes were getting their voices heard.

One of India's most prominent politicians Rahul Gandhi openly expressed disagreement with his own party's decision in the state to allow mining in the region.

Just last month, the most visible face of India's farmers protests, Rakesh Tikait, declared that protests would intensify if a single tree was felled. Chhattisgarh "lacks the political will" to act quickly because there's pressure from the Rajasthan government, another-Congress ruled state whose electricity generation company will eventually receive coal from Parsa, he adds. Elections are also round the corner in Chhattisgarh, which complicates the political environment. And a long, hot summer, with the spectre of blackouts will heighten politicians' focus on energy security.

The Supreme Court has refused to stay the project, saying that the pending petitions challenging land acquisition cannot be treated as any kind of restriction against mining, and that the rights of the tribes will be determined separately but "not at the cost of development".

But the protesters are confident they will prevail.

"We have faith in the courts," said Umeshwar Singh Armo, a prominent member of the resistance group. "This isn't just a fight for Hasdeo. We are fighting for this country and for the world, which is staring at the dangers of climate change and environmental degradation."

## 9. Nagaland tribal bodies are protesting reservation for women in local bodies



Women's rights activists say that it shows the unwillingness of tribal bodies to share power

Protests erupted in Nagaland after its government refused to revoke the decision to reserve 33 per cent seats for women in upcoming civic body polls. The violence led to two deaths on February 2. Curfew was imposed amid protests and election in 32 municipal bodies would be declared null and void, as per sources. Influential tribal have been demanding the cancellation of women's reservation and warning citizens against participating in urban bodies elections. Ao Sengden, a body of Ao Tribe of Nagaland, issued diktat in local dailies asking people not to participate and warning of appropriate punishment, if they did. Hokiye Sema, president of Central Naga Tribal Council, urged state government for abolishment of reservation provision. Another tribal body, Angami Public Organisation, has also announced boycott of the election, stating that the reservation is against tribal customs. The protestors believe the reservation is against their customary law and violates special rights guaranteed to Nagaland state under Article 371(A) of the Constitution. It states, "Notwithstanding anything in this Constitution, no Act of Parliament in respect of religious or social practices of the Nagas, Naga customary law and procedure, administration of civil and criminal justice involving decisions according to Naga customary

law, ownership and transfer of land and its resources, shall apply to the State of Nagaland unless the Legislative Assembly of Nagaland by a resolution so decides.”

### **History of the case**

Women in Nagaland have been fighting for representation in municipal and town councils taking a legal course of action. Naga Mothers Association (NMA), has been demanding reservation in local bodies for the past three years, but state authorities have been denying it by not holding elections, citing Naga customs and possible violence derailing the ongoing peace process.

The matter has now reached the Supreme Court, after NMA challenged a Gauhati High Court ruling. The apex court ruled in their favour in April 2016.

NMA, an apex body of women in the state, had petitioned to the Gauhati High Court in June 2011, seeking the holding of municipal and district council elections. The term of municipalities and town councils in the state had expired in March 2010. NMA members Rosemary Dzuwchu and Abeiu Meru filed the petition on its behalf.

A single judge of Gauhati High Court of Kohima bench ruled in favour of NMA in October and asked the state to conduct elections. The court had found the state’s reasons for not granting NMA's demand flimsy and baseless. The state had said that it received letters and representations from many groups that opposed reservation of one-third seats for women, saying it is against the Naga custom and that it would lead to large-scale disturbance and violence. But the state failed to furnish evidence of any customary practice of excluding women from contesting or of disturbance.

The state counsel had argued in court that authorities tried to hold elections in one of the 19 councils (Mokokchung Council) on May 7, 2011, which was marred by large-scale violence which forced the state to cancel the election.

### **What do the stakeholders say?**

The special leave petition filed in the apex court claims that the protest was on account of certain changes in the land laws in the Nagaland Municipal Act of 2001 and not due to reservation of seats for women. The petition says the state had not put anything on record (newspapers reports, for instance)

to show violence, any police complaint related to law and order failure or any arrest being made.

The verdict of the single judge bench was challenged and set aside by Kohima division bench of Gauhati High Court, on July 31, 2012. The bench asked the state government to set up a committee to look into the claims of certain groups and directed the municipal elections be suspended till the committee gave its recommendations.

According to reports, NMA's demand was opposed by organisations such as Naga Ho Ho, Eastern Naga People's Organisation (ENPO) and Ao Senden. All these groups are influential in different pockets of the state.

When contacted, president of Naga Ho Ho, Kezile Tuo, said his organisation was not against reservation for women as such. "We are against rotational reservation of seats for women in the municipality and town councils. We want reservation should continue on given seats through proper mechanism," said Tuo.

The NMA protested tabling of a legislation by state minister Shurhozelie Liezietsu to reject 33 per cent reservation in October last year. Tuo's organisation opposed these protests. When asked why, Tuo denied the charge. He said his organisation was against amended provisions of the municipal Act which were not in accordance with Article 371 (A) of the Indian Constitution that protects customary rights of Naga tribes. The Article states that no Act of Parliament in respect of Naga customary law and procedure shall apply to the state of Nagaland unless the Legislative Assembly of the state by a resolution decides to adopt it.

Sangyu Yaden, president of Ao Senden, another tribal group, said he opposed the reservation. "Reservation is against the customary laws and also against the Constitution's provisions of Article 371 (A)," he said. But he did not elaborate on this.

The state chief minister and urban development minister, on the other hand, were in favour of reservation and incorporated it in the Nagaland Municipal Act in 2006. However, they were reluctant to act on it.

NMA's Dzvuchu asserts there is no such customary practice in Naga society which would be harmed by the implementation of reservation of seats for

women. “Even Nagaland government didn’t object when the 74th Constitutional Amendment Act of 1992 was passed where 243 (T) was inserted requiring reservation of one-third seats for women and 243 (U) was inserted which lays down that election to every municipality would be held before the expiry of its duration.”

There is one-fourth reservation for women in the village development boards (VDB) since November, 1989, under section 50 of Nagaland Village and Area Council Act of 1978, she added. “Reservation is not new to the women of Nagaland. It has been adopted in VDBs, then why is it not being adopted in the municipality?” asked Dzuvchu.

“It’s all about huge funds and unwillingness to share power with women,” said Dzuvchu, who teaches literature at Nagaland University. “The Nagaland state cites law and order problem for not holding timely elections with reservation, then how would it be possible to conduct state legislative assembly elections in March?” asked Sanjay Sharma, a health activist, and also Nagaland state coordinator of Human Rights Law Network.

## 10. The disappearing grasslands and the Toda buffalo



### **Pastoralists and their animals have been pushed to the margins**

Until a couple of hundred years ago, the indigenous Toda community and their buffaloes were as uniquely and inextricably linked to the Nilgiris landscape as any of its native flora and fauna. However, since the first colonial expedition up the slopes, the community of pastoralists and their animals have been gradually pushed to the margins, as previously pristine grasslands, an important source of food for the community's cattle and also for the community's cultural ethos, have gradually disappeared from the upper slopes of the Nilgiri hills.

“The Todas’ relationships with their buffaloes began in ancient times when their pre-eminent Goddess ‘*Taihhkirshy*’, did the miraculous act of creating the buffaloes from a pool known as ‘*nerykaihhr*’. The story is that she took a cane and tapped at this pool, creating one buffalo with every tap. She continued to perform this act of creation until this line of buffaloes reached what is now known as Governor’s Shola,” said Tarun Chhabra, an expert in the community and author of *The Toda Landscape*.

The Toda buffalo is one of the 17 known breeds of the water buffalo (*Bubalus bubalis*), believed to have been brought up the Nilgiri hills by the Todas themselves, and through more than 5,000 years of selective breeding, has become highly specialised in thriving in the high-altitude Shola-grassland mosaic of the Nilgiri hills. Each of the Todas’ 15 patrilineal clans has a different order of buffaloes attached to a specific order of a dairy temple. However, the loss of grasslands and waves of disease which hit certain herds of the buffalo have meant that some of the temples have been lost, said Northey Kuttan, president of the Nilgiri Primitive Tribal People’s Federation. According to him, rituals attached to each temple of the community can only be completed with the milk from the buffaloes attached to a specific temple. “For instance, the temple is only opened when the first calf is born, and milk is gathered by the temple priest and made into butter which is used to light the lamps inside the temple. The loss of a group of buffaloes attached to a temple spells the doom for the temple itself,” he explained.

The introduction of alien species, such as pine, wattle and eucalyptus, as well as hydroelectric projects and dams, has led to the destruction of huge swathes of grasslands used by the community to graze their buffaloes.

“The Todas are very well known for their affinity for the buffaloes. I have documented at least 75 different names the community has given to their buffaloes. Even today, children are naturally known to herd and control great, big groups of this semi-wild species of buffalo,” added Mr. Chhabra.

According to estimates by the Department of Animal Husbandry and the community, there are believed to be less than 1,500 Toda buffalo in the Nilgiris.

Todar Samuthayam Munnetra Sangam general secretary A. Sathyaraj said the decline in the population of the buffalo coincided with large-scale changes to the ecosystem. “The community used to depend on the natural forests and grasslands for its survival, which also formed the core of our culture. Large herds of buffalo could be seen across the Nilgiris up until 50 years ago, but the gradual loss of native habitats, coinciding with a boom in construction and changing land-use patterns, has changed the Todas’ culture almost irreversibly,” he pointed out. According to Mr. Sathyaraj, the case in point is the shift from traditional barrel-vaulted houses made of wood and thatched roofs made of grass. “Previously, we could find these traditional building materials, like native swamp grasses, everywhere; but now, they are so scarce that we save them for use only to ensure that our sacred temples are maintained and prevented from falling into ruin,” he said.

### **Conservation efforts**

Efforts are being made by the community as well as experts like Dr. Chhabra to help conserve the Toda buffalo. Dr. Chhabra has purchased 20 buffaloes and employs members of the community to take care of them. Efforts are also being made at the Pagalkod Mund where Mr. Kuttan is launching an initiative with 30 buffaloes. The milk from the animals can be used to make dairy products, of which sales is hoped to assure the community of livelihood.

Regenerating grasslands and ensuring that the community can make a living from the maintenance of the herds is the only viable solution to ensuring the breed’s long-term survival, said R. Anil Kumar, Director of Distance Education, Tamil Nadu Veterinary and Animal Sciences University (TANUVAS). He said traditional grasslands now comprise less than 10% of the Upper Nilgiris, with alien flora taking over most areas. “The lack of grazing areas forces the buffaloes into forests, where they fall prey to predators like tigers and leopards,” he said. Another reason for the decline was the community itself shifting away from



pastoralism.

## 11. Promotion of Tribal Products from North-Eastern Region (PTP-NER) Scheme



Arjun Munda, the Minister of Tribal Affairs, has recently launched the Marketing and Logistics Development for Promotion of Tribal Products from North-Eastern Region (PTP-NER) scheme in Manipur. This ambitious scheme aims to enhance procurement, logistics, and marketing efficiency of tribal products from the North-Eastern Region and strengthen the livelihood opportunities of tribal artisans.

### **PTP-NER Scheme: Enhancing Tribal Products' Procurement, Logistics, and Marketing Efficiency**

The PTP-NER scheme, short for Marketing and Logistics Development for Promotion of Tribal Products from North-Eastern Region, is a flagship initiative launched by the Ministry of Tribal Affairs. The scheme is focused on boosting the tribal economy of the North-Eastern Region by providing support to tribal artisans and promoting their products in the market.

### **Applicability and Coverage**

The PTP-NER scheme will be implemented in 8 states in the North-Eastern Region i.e., Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram,



Nagaland, Tripura, and Sikkim. These states are home to numerous tribal communities with rich traditional craftsmanship and unique products. The scheme aims to provide support and opportunities to these tribal artisans to showcase their skills and products to a wider audience.

### **Tribal Artisan Melas: A Platform for Showcasing Tribal Products**

As part of the PTP-NER scheme, the government plans to organize 68 Tribal Artisan Melas in various districts of the North-Eastern Region. These melas will serve as a platform for tribal artisans to showcase their products and skills. This will not only help in promoting their products but also create a direct link between the tribal artisans and the market, thereby enhancing their marketing efficiency.

### **Aim and Benefits of PTP-NER Scheme**

The scheme's main goal is to strengthen the job opportunities of tribal artisans from the North-Eastern States by promoting their products. By providing support for procurement, logistics, and marketing, the scheme aims to improve the overall efficiency of the tribal products' value chain and create sustainable livelihoods for tribal communities. This will not only uplift the socio-economic status of tribal artisans but also help in preserving and promoting tribal art and culture.

### **Significance of PTP-NER Scheme for Tribal Artisans**

The PTP-NER scheme holds immense significance for tribal artisans as it provides them with a unique opportunity to showcase their products and skills in the market. This will help in creating a wider demand for tribal products, leading to increased income and livelihood opportunities for tribal artisans. The scheme also aims to promote and preserve the rich traditional craftsmanship and cultural heritage of tribal communities, ensuring their socio-economic empowerment.

## 12. Hakki Pikkis caught in Sudan conflict



Members of the **Hakki Pikki tribal community** from Karnataka are stuck in **violence-hit Sudan**.

- **Hakki** in Kannada means '**bird**' and **Pikki** means '**catchers**'.
- They are a **semi-nomadic tribe**, traditionally of **bird catchers and hunters**.
- They are divided into four clans, called **Gujaratia, Panwar, Kaliwala, and Mewaras**.
  - There was a hierarchy among the clans, with the **Gujaratia at the top and the Mewaras at the bottom**.
- They **move in groups** from place to place **in search of livelihood**.

**Where do the Hakki Pikkis live in India?**

- Hakki Pikki people are believed to hail originally from the bordering **districts of Gujarat and Rajasthan**.

- **Reason:** Women used to wear the **ghagra (skirt)** common in Rajasthan, although now they wear saris and other garments.
- They arrived in **Karnataka via Andhra Pradesh**, as they still remember a place called "**Jalapally**" near Hyderabad as their ancestral home, where their forefathers lived for a considerable period.
  - They are now **spread across south India**.
- They are a tribe that lives in several states in the **forest areas of west and south India**.
- Their population in **Karnataka** is **11,892**, and they live majorly in **Davangere, Mysuru, Kolar, Hassan, and Shivmogga districts**.

### What were their traditional jobs?

- Hakki Pikkis lived in **forest areas**, leading a **nomadic life for nine months** a year and coming back to their **permanent camps for three**.
- **Men** of the tribe would **hunt** while **women begged** in villages.

### What jobs do they do now?

- As the **wildlife protection laws became stricter**, they started selling **spices, herbal oils, and plastic flowers** at local temple fairs.
- **The herbal oil business took off**, and now the tribe members go to **many places across the globe** to sell their products.
- They traveled to **Singapore, Thailand, and other places** about **20-25 years ago** to sell some marbles, in the process discovering there was a **huge demand for Ayurvedic products** in the African continent.
  - They started **selling their products in Africa**.
- But the **education levels** among the Hakki Pikkis are **still low**.
  - For example, in the **2,000-strong population of Pakshirajapura**, **only eight people** have completed graduation-level courses and **one person** works as a **police constable**.
    - **Pakshirajapura:** A Hakki Pikki village in the Mysuru district.

### What are their rituals and customs?

- Hakki Pikkis follow **Hindu traditions and celebrate all Hindu festivals.**
- They are **non-vegetarians.**
- The eldest son in a family is **not supposed to cut his hair** so that he can be identified easily.
- They prefer **cross-cousin marriages.**
- The usual age of marriage is **18 for women and 22 for men.**
- The society is **matriarchal**, where the **groom gives a dowry to the bride's family.**
- They follow **Monogamy.**
  - **Monogamy:** it is a form of dyadic relationship in which an individual has only one partner during the length of the relationship.

### 13. Tribals in India: MoTA Revamps Schemes for Comprehensive Development



Ministry of Tribal Affairs have merged many schemes, revamped them, and have widened the scope of many schemes, for the Financial Cycle 2021-26

## Tribal development in India: Context

Recently, Ministry of Tribal Affairs have merged many schemes, revamped them, and have widened the scope of many schemes, for the Financial Cycle 2021-26.

## Schemes for tribals in India

Pre Matric and Post Matric Scholarship Scheme.

Grants Under Article 275(1) of the Constitution

SCA to TSS which has been now revamped as Pradhan Mantri Adi Adarsh Gram Yojna

Grants for Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTG).

Support to TRIs (Tribal Research Institutes).

## **Pre Matric and Post Matric Scholarship Scheme**

The Pre and Post Matric schemes are demand-based schemes and every ST student whose family income is upto Rs 2.5 lakhs is entitled to scholarship for pursuing education from class IX to Post Doctorate across India.

The states have to send the proposal for the estimated expenditure during the financial year and advance upto 50% of Central share is released to the States.

After the State has disbursed the scholarship to the students and has submitted UCs, the balance amount is released to State provided the State has contributed its share

## **Grants under Article 275(1), SCA to TSS and PVTG scheme**

In respect of the above-mentioned schemes, the state is required to submit proposals duly approved by the State level executive committee (SLEC).

Each state has been allocated share in these 3 schemes based on criteria of population of that state and geographical area.

The funds are released to State after taking into account the unspent funds released in previous years, the status of utilization of funds and physical proposal report submitted on Adivasi Grant Management System (ADIGRAMS).

## Support to TRIs

Under this scheme, the funds are given to TRIs based on the proposals received from them for undertaking various activities like research projects, training, cultural exchange, organization of festivals, craft mela, painting and other competitions etc.

## Revamped tribal schemes

The 3 schemes meant for comprehensive development of tribals are as under.  
Pradhan Mantri Adi Adarsh Gram Yojna

The scope of existing scheme of SCA to TSS has been broadened wherein comprehensive development of villages (where tribal population of more than 500 and 50% tribals) will be undertaken to develop these villages as Adarsh Gram, under 'Pradhan Mantri Aadi Adarsh Gram Yojana'.  
For next five years an amount of Rs. 7276 cr. has been approved by the cabinet.

## **Pradhan Mantri Janjatiya Vikas Mission**

The Mission seeks to achieve livelihood driven tribal development in the next five years through formation of Van Dhan groups who have been organized into Vandhan Kendras.

The MFP gathered by tribals will be processed in these kendras and marketed through Van Dhan Producer Enterprises.

New haats bazaar and ware houses will be developed in next 5 years as part of "Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhyan". TRIFED would be the nodal agency for implementing the scheme.

The products produced will be marketed through Tribe India Stores.

## **Venture Capital Fund for STs**

An amount of Rs. 50 cr. has been sanctioned for the new scheme of 'Venture Capital Fund for Scheduled Tribes' (VCF-ST), which is aimed at promoting Entrepreneurship among the STs.

The VCF-ST scheme would be a social sector initiative to promote ST entrepreneurship and to support and incubate the start-up ideas by ST youth.

## 14. Over 740 tribal students died in last 10 years due to malnutrition in Maharashtra: Report



**Activists working in the tribal areas allege that lack of health services and basic amenities provided by the government are the main reasons for their death.**

Over 740 students studying in residential schools across Maharashtra have died due to malnutrition and other health related issues in the last 10 years, according to an internal report of the Maharashtra government's tribal development department. There are a total of 552 residential schools for tribal children in the state run by the department. The tribal population is largely concentrated in regions like Dhule, Nandurbar, Jalgaon, Nashik, Palghar, Raigad, Ahmadnagar, Pune (Sahyadri region) and in the eastern forest districts like Chandrapur, Gadchiroli, Gondia, Nagpur, Amravati, Yavatmal and Nanded (Gondwana region).

"The internal report of the tribal development department has found that on an average, 70-80 students from tribal residential schools die every year and in the last 10 years over 740 has died," an official from the department said.

"The internal report of the tribal development department has found that on an average, 70-80 students from tribal residential schools die every year and in the



last 10 years over 740 has died,” an official from the department said.

Activists working in the tribal areas allege that lack of health services and basic amenities provided by the government are the main reasons for their death.

“Tribals are the most neglected community. Of the 552 government run residential schools, only 50-60 get drinking water from pipeline, which is the basic need. All other schools either get water from a tanker, a borewell or well water to drink,” alleged Kavita Ware, who has done her masters in Philosophy (M Phil) on tribal residential schools and an activist working for tribals.

Apart from providing basic amenities like good food, drinking clean water, the government should fill all vacant posts in the residential schools and funds should get utilised in a proper manner, she said Vijay Jadhav, joint secretary of Shramajeevi Sanghatana, an NGO working for tribal welfare in Palghar district, said students should be screened at least twice a year but the government does not act until an untoward incident takes place.

Radhakrishna Vikhe-Patil, Leader of Opposition in Maharashtra Legislative Assembly had recently demanded resignation of Tribal Development minister Vishnu Savara alleging neglect towards issues of tribals.



## 15. Fighting Malnutrition In Odisha's Angul, A Story That Inspires All



How a remote district became a sterling example that people can overcome their nutritional adversity with will, guts and wisdom

Located in a remote corner of Odisha is a small district of about 6,232 square km, named Angul. A small district, it has got its own story to tell about its efforts in battling malnutrition and showing its people the path towards healthy life.

Angul is bounded by Dhenkanal and Cuttack to the east, Deogarh, Kendujhar and Sundergarh district to the north, Sambalpur and Sonepur to the west, and Boudh and Nayagarh in south. It has a considerable population of scheduled castes, scheduled tribes, and localised population of Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTG)s, who are much more deprived in every way.

### **Endemic malnourishment**

Malnourishment has been a very common part of people's life for long. Most of the women are still undernourished, as a result of which their children are also deprived of the basic needs they require to lead a life of well-being. Though the

district on the whole displays better performance on the basis of indicators such as anaemia, underweight and stunting of children under age five, yet undernutrition continues to be a matter of concern for the villagers.

There are certain reasons that have played a pivotal role in giving rise to malnutrition in Angul. Lack of awareness and literacy among the women have led to inadequate care for children, which has in turn led to excessive prevalence of anaemia and stunting. The mothers in the district are not very aware of the healthcare services that they should avail for themselves, and especially for their children, by getting themselves registered in the anganwadi centres. Moreover, wrong feeding practices and lack of proper care of women during pregnancy and delivery have contributed to widespread undernutrition in Angul district.

### **The movement for nutrition**

Then came Angul Pushti Adhikaar Abhiyaan (APAA), a programme initiated by the people of the district to foster nutrition and promote good health for women and children. The movement aimed at educating the women of the district, to make them realise the importance of nutrition.

A movement that brought over 2,000 people together from different parts of the district—including the sarpanch, anganwadi workers, ward members and various influential people – on one platform to address the issue of malnourishment, AAPA made sure to free Angul district from the clutches of malnutrition. It also aimed at imparting all the major schemes of ICDS, such as Hot-Cooked Meals (HCM), Take Home Ration (THR), and Supplementary Nutrition Programmes (SNP) to the children and to mothers.

### **Key objectives**

The AAPA has five key objectives:

To increase people's awareness of anganwadi centres and raise demand

To monitor ICDS services through three primary committees--Jaanch Committee, Maatru Committee, and committee of Panchayati Raj Institute members – by building their monitoring capabilities.

- To train and support anganwadi workers in reaching out to the section of people who are not able to avail the facilities.

- Create community platforms to discuss issues around nutrition.

- Encourage participation of the sarpanch across villages in discussions, so that they can foster nutrition in their districts.

### **Monitoring change**

“We formed the Jaanch Committee to monitor the overall development of the children,” says Bidyut Mohanty, head of non-profit, SPREAD, who has played a pivotal role in giving the programme momentum, ensuring that it reaches all the people of Angul. The Jaanch committee has a number of responsibilities to fulfil, he explains: to ensure that the children on Angul are leading healthy and quality life, to ensure that they get access to healthy hot cooked meals, and to ensure that they all are registered with the anganwadi centres. “The committee consists of nine members, including anganwadi member, and also people who are the beneficiaries,” Mohanty adds.

The committee members are pivotal in eradicating malnourishment. They have a huge role to play in ensuring that the ICDS services reach the children in a smooth way. “As members of the Jaanch, we conduct meetings to monitor proper development of children. We look into the quality and quantity of food being served,” says. Antaryami Raul, who heads the Jaanch committee.

Anita Sahoo, another active member of the Jaanch committee says, “We ensure that the children get different food items, including sweets, such as laddoos, to eat, but whatever they get should provide them with nutrition.”

### **Strategies adopted**

- Meetings headed by the sarpanch:** AAPA encouraged sarpanch-headed meetings, to bring the issue of malnutrition into the community’s notice and elicit political response. The sarpanch actively organised meetings in their respective gram panchayats with the support of AAPA members. The objective was to create awareness on the services provided by ICDS to poor children, who did not get access earlier.

- Knowing the grievance:** Addressing the grievances of beneficiaries, pertaining to the ICDS service, was a major concern. Therefore, meetings were held for the

members of Jaanch and Maatru committees, as well as Anganwadi workers. Beneficiaries were also invited to express their troubles in getting access to services.

**·Training committee members:** The members of the pivotal committees were imparted proper training, to make them capable of effectively monitoring the ICDS services, and taking adequate actions in response to problems faced by the beneficiaries in availing the ICDS services.

**·Ensuring transparency:** The ICDS guidelines emphasise the need to display names and photographs at anganwadi centres, so that the community members would have information about who to approach. This was not the case earlier. Therefore AAPA decided to introduce transparency in the system by encouraging the policy of putting up of names and photographs of Jaanch committee and

Maatru committee members. Until now, AAPA has been successful in spreading transparency in about 91 centres.

### **Removing the roadblocks**

AAPA has been largely successful in its mission across the district through a number of innovative measures. The Nandpur village of Angul block is one such example, reflecting AAPA's successful intervention in providing the beneficiaries the right amount of eggs under Supplementary Nutrition Program (SNP), one of the six services offered under ICDS. It has ensured that the children, including pregnant mothers in Nandpur, received the required amount of eggs, keeping in view that they get nourishment. The beneficiaries before the intervention used to get only 10 eggs a month, under the Take Home Ration scheme (THR), and three eggs under the Hot Cooked Meal scheme. AAPA's intervention, helped all the 60 beneficiaries of the village in getting access to 12 eggs under THR and HCM schemes respectively.

Odisha is one of the few states to provide eggs to combat under-nutrition, along with Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Jharkhand, Bihar, Tripura and West Bengal. In the Suabasasahi village of Pallahara block in the district, around 20 beneficiaries earlier were not getting access to HCM, as anganwadi centres were located far away. The AAPA team collaborated with the Self -Help Groups (SHGs) in the area to provide HCM to the people.

### **A mission nearly accomplished**

With the collective efforts of the people, the committee members, and the anganwadi workers, Angul has by far achieved its goal in few areas. It, however, is still striving its way to eradicate malnourishment in other areas as well through innovative methods and community inputs. District Collector of Angul, Manoj Kumar Mohanty, has sent a proposal to the Government for more anganwadi centres to operate in other inaccessible areas of the district and is making efforts to come up with better strategies to spread awareness on undernutrition. The point is to encourage people of Angul to participate in collectively removing malnutrition, he explains.

Angul is on its to becoming the nutrition champion of Odisha. A sterling example that with the right kind of interventions and methods each village across the country can become another Angul.

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



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

Thousands of tribal families who are stated to have migrated from the Bastar region (south Chhattisgarh) following the outrage of Maoist terror to the adjoining states, some 15 years ago are now struggling with a new dilemma over

their lost identity and living under duress to return. What added to their plight is the claim of the Chhattisgarh government that "no tribal family shifted from Bastar owing to Maoist menace".

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

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

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

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

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

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

“Now it has been almost 15 years and most of them don’t have any valid document to prove their domicile to Chhattisgarh. It’s a genuine national problem where besides the Centre (home ministry), the judiciary should intervene”, affirmed Chowdhary. Last December, hundreds of displaced tribals have jointly written to the Chief Justice of India sharing their difficult situation.

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

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

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