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PAPER -1

PHYSICAL & ARCHAEOLOGICAL ANTHROPOLOGY

1. Modern humans, Neanderthals share a tangled genetic history, study affirms.



New research adds to growing evidence that our ancestors interbred with Neanderthals at multiple times in history. In recent years, scientists have uncovered evidence that modern humans and Neanderthals share a tangled past. In the course of human history, these two species of hominins interbred not just once, but at multiple times, the thinking goes.

A new study supports this notion, finding that people in Eurasia today have genetic material linked to Neanderthals from the Altai mountains in modern-day Siberia. This is noteworthy because past research has shown that Neanderthals connected to a different, distant location -- the Vindija Cave in modern-day Croatia -- have also contributed DNA to modern-day Eurasian populations. The results reinforce the concept that Neanderthal DNA has been woven into the modern human genome on multiple occasions as our ancestors met Neanderthals time and again in different parts of the world.

"It's not a single introgression of genetic material from Neanderthals," says Omer Gokcumen. "It's just this spider web of interactions that happen over and over again, where different ancient hominins are interacting with each other, and our paper is adding to this picture. This project will now add to an emerging chorus -- we've been looking into this phenomenon for a couple of years, and there are a couple of papers that came out recently that deal with similar concepts."

"The picture in my mind now is we have all these archaic hominin populations in Europe, in Asia, in Siberia, in Africa. For one reason or another, the ancestors of modern humans in Africa start expanding in population, and as they expand their range, they meet with these other hominins and absorb their DNA, if you will," Gokcumen says. "We probably met different Neanderthal populations at different times in our expansion into other parts of the globe."

To complete the project, scientists analyzed the DNA of hundreds of people of Eurasian ancestry. The goal was to hunt for fragments of genetic material that may have been inherited from Neanderthals. This research found that the Eurasian populations studied could trace some genetic material back to two different Neanderthal lineages: one represented by a Neanderthal whose remains were discovered in the Vindija cave in Croatia, and another represented by a Neanderthal whose remains were discovered in the Altai mountains in Russia.

Scientists also discovered that the modern-day populations they studied also share genetic deletions - areas of DNA that are missing -- with both the Vindija and Altai Neanderthal lineages. The DNA of the Vindija and Altai Neanderthals, along with the modern human populations studied, were previously sequenced by different research teams.

"It seems like the story of human evolution is not so much like a tree with branches that just grow in different directions. It turns out that the branches have all these connections between them," Gokcumen says. "We are figuring out these connections, which is really exciting. The story is not as neat as it was before. Every single ancient genome that is sequenced seems to create a completely new perspective in our understanding of human evolution, and every new genome that's sequenced in the future may completely change the story again."

2. Researcher adds to timeline of human evolution by studying an island fox

Nearly two decades ago, a small-bodied "human-like" fossil, *Homo floresiensis*, was discovered on an island in Indonesia. Some scientists have credited the find, now nicknamed "Hobbit," as representative of a human ancestor who developed dwarfed features after living on the island, while others suggest it represents a modern human suffering from some type of disease because of its distinct human-like face and small brain.

Colleen B. Young, a graduate student in the Department of Anthropology at the University of Missouri, has always been naturally curious about the nature of the human "footprint," or how humans impact their environments and vice versa. She believes the Hobbit adjusted from a longer-legged version of itself to meet the demands of an isolated, island environment.

"Homo erectus, considered our recent ancestor, likely developed its long legs over time in order to increase its ability to walk long distances as its environment expanded," Young said. "So, when humans arrived on that island in Indonesia and became isolated, their bodies – once built for efficiency over long distances – were probably no longer beneficial for their new environment. Instead, a smaller body size probably improved their lifestyle."

Young, who is working on her doctorate in biological anthropology in the College of Arts and Science, tested several popular assumptions about the characteristics of *Homo floresiensis* by comparing an island fox from California's Channel Islands with its mainland U.S. relative, the gray fox. Young said upon arrival, the island fox underwent a 30% reduction in body size and developed smaller body features that are different than the mainland gray fox. She believes this change in body size was likely due to adjustments the island fox made to survive in its new, isolated environment.

"The gray fox is a migratory, omnivorous animal, similar to our recent ancestors," Young said. "This study indicates that animals living on islands that become smaller in size may also have distinct limbs and body features just because of their new island environment. Therefore, the distinctive body features on the small-

bodied *Homo floresiensis* are probably products of evolving in an island environment, and not resulting from suffering from diseases."

Young said this animal model, which includes taking into account the surrounding ecosystem, can help scientists better understand the body size and limbs of *Homo floresiensis*, and how they relate to human ancestors. She thinks this model can also help open new doors in the field of anthropology.

"The popular idea that every little difference in a fossil means the discovery of a new species is probably not as accurate as we once thought," Young said. "There was probably a lot more variation going on throughout human evolution than we first thought, and these findings exemplify that variation can occur just by migrating to and living on an island. We're just starting to scratch the surface."

"Static allometry of a small-bodied omnivore: body size and limb scaling of an island fox and inferences for *Homo floresiensis*" was published in the *Journal of Human Evolution*.

3. Fossil skulls rewrite the stories of two ancient human ancestors



Found in a hilltop cave, the oldest known *Homo erectus* and *Paranthropus robustus* fossils shed light on a critical period of hominin evolution. In the winter of 2015, Jesse Martin and Angeline Leece were extracting what they thought were

baboon remains from a piece of rock. The two students at La Trobe University in Australia were part of an expedition to collect and study fossils from the Drimolen quarry northwest of Johannesburg, South Africa. As they cleaned the skull fragments and pieced them back together, however, they realized the fossils did not come from a baboon, but instead comprised the braincase of a young *Homo erectus*, a species never before identified in South Africa.

“I don’t think our supervisors believed us until they came over to have a look,” Martin recalls. The braincase was described in the journal *Science* today, together with the skullcap of another ancient hominin, *Paranthropus robustus*, found at the same site. A suite of different dating techniques all hinted that the two species’ braincases were more or less the same age – about two million years old. This would make them the earliest fossils ever found for their respective species, according to the new study coauthored by Martin and Leece. “I think they have made a strong case for the oldest *Homo erectus* in Africa, and in fact, in the world,” Lee Berger, a paleoanthropologist at the University of Witwatersrand said.

The enigmatic origins of *Homo erectus* The age of the fossils was particularly surprising for the *Homo erectus* skull. Most paleoanthropologists believe that this human ancestor arose in East Africa, where several younger *Homo erectus* fossils – as well as the likely remains of older *Homo* species – have been found. Some have even hypothesized that *Homo erectus* originated outside of Africa, because the oldest known fossils from the species – before this new find – were discovered at the site of Dmanisi in Georgia. An Asian origin for *H. erectus* now seems exceedingly unlikely, Martin says. “The first problem for that idea is that the earliest evidence for *Homo erectus* is now from South Africa. But the bigger problem is that there is no candidate ancestor for *Homo erectus* in Asia. If you dig any deeper at sites where *Homo erectus* remains have been found, there are no hominins there.”

The discovery of the new braincase in South Africa, however, does not necessarily mean that *Homo erectus* originated there either. “Based on the current evidence, my guess is it emerged somewhere in Africa we haven’t looked yet,” Martin says. “This was really the first human experiment with globalization,” Martin says. Three hominins in southern Africa Two million years ago, *Homo erectus* wasn’t exactly abundant. “They appear to have been outnumbered 10 to 1 by *Paranthropus robustus*,” Leece says. As its name indicates, *Paranthropus robustus* – one of the “robust australopithecines” – had a very stout skull, particularly large teeth, and an impressive crest on top of the braincase where its massive chewing muscles were attached. “The leading theory is that they were

eating tough foods – not necessarily things that needed crunching, but foods that were fibrous and require a lot of chewing, like certain tubers or grasses,” Leece says. The even older species *Australopithecus sediba* was also still roaming the region. The fossil record suggests this is about when *Australopithecus* started to be replaced by *Paranthropus* and *Homo*, a critical time in the evolution of our predecessor species.

For most of the year, *Homo*, *Paranthropus*, and *Australopithecus* species had plenty of available resources, and all three were likely eating more or less the same things. But winters can be harsh in this area, Martin says. “In the morning, it’s freezing, and according to estimates, it would’ve been even colder then. So this was quite a tough climate for a hominin.” Under those challenging circumstances, *Paranthropus robustus*’s powerful jaws and ability to eat tough, fibrous foods probably provided it with a significant advantage. One theory holds that *Australopithecus sediba* may have been a direct ancestor to the genus *Homo*, including the species *Homo erectus*.

The authors of the new study question this theory, however, as the newfound *Homo erectus* skull is older than *Australopithecus sediba* remains found at the nearby site of Malapa. Berger, who was part of the team that found the *Australopithecus sediba* fossils at Malapa in 2010, believes that even though the *Homo erectus* skull is older, *Australopithecus sediba* still could have been an ancestor to the species. “Mother species can easily exist at the same time and place as their descendant species do,” he says. Regardless of which of these species emerged first, one thing is clear: Over a million years later, only *Homo erectus* still walked the Earth. *Homo erectus* conquers the world While the hyperspecialized skull of *Paranthropus robustus* may have served it well in certain environments, the trait may have ultimately become its downfall, Leece says. When the environment changes, extreme adaptations can become a handicap. Comparing the two newly analyzed braincases, it becomes clear that *Homo erectus*, while initially outcompeted by *Paranthropus robustus*, was working on a revolutionary adaptation of its own. *H. erectus*’s characteristic tear-shaped braincase suggests the early member of the *Homo* genus was expanding and reorganizing its brain.

The *Homo erectus* skull Martin and Leece wrested out of the rock did not belong to an adult. Judging by the extent to which the bones of the skull had already fused, the braincase came from a child between two and six years old. At this tender age, its brain would already have been larger than that of most *Australopithecus* and *Paranthropus* adults. And impressions on the fossils show that the child’s brain

was still growing, pushing the skull bones outward. “We can even see blood vessels,” Martin says. Whereas *Paranthropus robustus* evolved a kind of “portable grinding stone,” *Homo erectus* “adapted to be adaptable” and to solve all kinds of problems that it would have encountered along its journey from Africa to Asia and parts of southern Europe, Martin says. The species’ increasingly nimble brain allowed it to outsmart other animals by fashioning tools, collaborating with others, and perhaps even pondering the future. *Homo erectus* survived for nearly two million years, making it the most successful species of *Homo* ever known.

4. The rise of scientific racism in palaeoanthropology

A forensic anthropologist unmasks insidious interpretations of fossil finds.



In 1913, the skull dubbed Boskop Man was discovered in South Africa. Many leading palaeoanthropologists quickly came to regard this large-brained, anatomically modern human fossil from the Middle Stone Age (280,000–30,000 years ago) as an early version of the ‘Bushman’ (a term for the San-speaking

peoples of southern Africa). They described it as “a degenerate form of human”, intellectually inferior to contemporary Europeans.

A decade later, Raymond Dart – who first described the *Australopithecus africanus* fossil known as the Taung Child – encountered evidence of past African cultures such as the Nyanga terrace complex in Zimbabwe, thought to have been used in agriculture from 1300 to 1900, along with traces of ancient precolonial gold mining in the mountains of Nyanga. He asserted that ancient African peoples must have had contact with European and Asian empires – denying their capabilities to produce evidence of civilization independently.

In *Bones and Bodies*, forensic anthropologist Alan Morris takes us on a journey to the past, revealing such nefarious, racist interpretations of historically important fossils and artefacts related to the origin of humanity. The tour is fascinating, demoralizing and insightful. Combing through more than 100 years of scholarship, Morris lays bare how anthropologists built a ‘scientific’ justification for the low status they afforded peoples of African descent, particularly in South Africa, and how this justification became part of a systematic effort to ensure African peoples’ disenfranchisement.

Long shadow

Dart, an Australian, was just one of the luminaries who put southern Africa on the palaeoanthropological map. Others included Thomas Dreyer who, in 1932, discovered a 259,000-year-old skull from *Homo heidelbergensis* in South Africa; Matthew Drennan, a Scot who migrated to South Africa in 1913 to become a lecturer in anatomy at the precursor of today’s University of Cape Town; and Robert Broom who, in 1936, began collecting hundreds of australopithecine specimens including the first adult *A. africanus*, found at Sterkfontein in South Africa.

Despite their brilliance, hard work and good fortune, these men did studies marred by racist assumptions and interpretations. They contributed to the ‘scientific’ groundwork for the legally mandated apartheid system that institutionally deprived Indigenous Black southern African peoples of equitable treatment economically, educationally, residentially and in health care. The applications of racist paradigms informed both the official government-sanctioned apartheid system and the casual, informal apartheid that regulated interpersonal interactions in southern Africa.



A site known as the Cradle of Humankind, South Africa, has yielded many fossils. Credit: Patrick Landmann/Science Photo Library

Morris walks through the historical sequence of key palaeoanthropology findings in South Africa, setting each in an international context. The importance of these discoveries cannot be underestimated. Without them, we would have continued to have a Eurasian-centric, and thus faulty, view of early human evolution. Morris reveals where racial bias and skewed interpretations entered the scientific process. It was, for instance, inconceivable to these early palaeoanthropologists that the original black inhabitants of southern Africa, who occupied Wonderwerk Cave in South Africa two million years ago, gave rise to people who created cryptic stone cities and ancient civilizations (such as the Great Zimbabwe stone houses that date back 900 years), and conceived and occupied the Bakoni Ruins of Machadodorp, South Africa, within the past 4,000 years. These researchers found it impossible to acknowledge that the creativity and intellectual merit of ancient black southern African peoples are linked directly to the contemporary residents of the region, given these people's presumed inferiority.

Deeply embedded notions of white supremacy and privilege in palaeoanthropology did not cause South Africa's racist apartheid system, but they strengthened it. The work of anatomists, anthropologists and archaeologists routinely posited the inferiority of African people.

Challenging racism

After decades of slow social progress in southern Africa and spurred by local and external agitation, the apartheid environment began to yield under the pressure to become a setting in which the tenets of the prejudicial system could be challenged. Southern Rhodesia ultimately became the independent Republic of Zimbabwe in 1980. South West Africa was under South African control until it attained independence as Namibia in 1990. Apartheid South Africa finally freed itself to become the majority-controlled nation of South Africa in 1994.

This spurred local South African scientists to challenge the racist interpretations of the past centuries. Noteworthy among these researchers was Phillip Tobias, a palaeoanthropologist at the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg. In addition to his central role in the discoveries at the Sterkfontein caves in the 1940s and 1950s, he called for the eradication of apartheid in numerous academic speeches and papers in the 1970s and 1980s. Tobias also facilitated the repatriation to post-apartheid South Africa of the remains of Saartjie Baartman, a southern African Khoekhoe woman disparagingly exhibited in Europe in the nineteenth century as the 'Hottentot Venus'. Another important figure was Ronald Singer, a South African transplant to the University of Chicago in Illinois, who led the 1953 expedition that resulted in the discovery of the Saldanha skull, a key specimen of early *H. heidelbergensis*. These scholars expanded palaeoanthropology: by championing more-inclusive methodologies, they provided an opening for less racist interpretations of their own and earlier fossil finds.

Bones and Bodies showcases the contradictions inherent in interpreting profound fossils and artefacts while being constrained by a restrictive world view. Such clashes can lead scholars to develop circuitous and self-serving explanations for otherwise important, straightforward finds. A salient message here is that we must all be on guard for deeply held but incorrect (and ultimately debilitating) biases. Stephen Jay Gould's 1981 book *The Mismeasure of Man* showed how easily the US physician Samuel Morton intentionally misclassified human skulls in the early nineteenth century. He claimed, in his book *Crania Americana* (1839), that Europeans had the biggest brains, Native Americans had intermediate brain sizes and Black Africans had the smallest brains and, thus, the lowest intelligence. This was an attempt to give scientific justification to the lie of African inferiority and suitability for enslavement and servitude.

The delays in recognizing how racism damages and paralyzes science remind us how much stamina is required to become anti-racist. White privilege and presumed

superiority in all matters of importance have been the norm for so long that it has become a fundamental construct of Western societies. To counter this deeply embedded narrative, as Morris does, requires courage, especially when you have been a beneficiary of these prejudicial practices. To recognize, expose and call out the racism in science is not easy, particularly in the hallowed halls of academia.

In confronting the racial typology of my discipline, the book does a great service to palaeoanthropology and biological anthropology. In a white-dominated society, people of colour often feel obliged to minimize racism and comfort the defensiveness of white people, including scholars. This imbalance in sensitivities makes Morris's insights that much more profound. His recognition of the scientific racism of the past is invaluable, both for correcting the record and for providing cautionary guidelines for present and future researchers.

SOCIO – CULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY

5. Regular climbing behaviour in a human ancestor

A new study led by the University of Kent has found evidence that human ancestors as recent as two million years ago may have regularly climbed trees. Walking on two legs has long been a defining feature to differentiate modern humans, as well as extinct species on our lineage (aka hominins), from our closest living ape relatives: chimpanzees, gorillas and orangutans.

This new research, based on analysis of fossil leg bones, provides evidence that a hominin species (believed to be either *Paranthropus robustus* or early *Homo*) regularly adopted highly flexed hip joints; a posture that in other non-human apes is associated with climbing trees. These findings came from analysing and comparing the internal bone structures of two fossil leg bones from South Africa, discovered over 60 years ago and believed to have lived between 1 and 3 million years ago.

For both fossils, the external shape of the bones were very similar showing a more human-like than ape-like hip joint, suggesting they were both walking on two legs. The researchers examined the internal bone structure because it remodels during life based on how individuals use their limbs. Unexpectedly, when the

team analysed the inside of the spherical head of the femur, it showed that they were loading their hip joints in different ways.

The research project was led by Dr Leoni Georgiou, Dr Matthew Skinner and Professor Tracy Kivell at the University of Kent's School of Anthropology and Conservation, and included a large international team of biomechanical engineers and palaeontologists.

These results demonstrate that novel information about human evolution can be hidden within fossil bones that can alter our understanding of when, where and how we became the humans we are today. Dr Georgiou said: 'It is very exciting to be able to reconstruct the actual behaviour of these individuals who lived millions of years ago and every time we CT scan a new fossil it is a chance to learn something new about our evolutionary history.'

Dr Skinner said: 'It has been challenging to resolve debates regarding the degree to which climbing remained an important behaviour in our past. Evidence has been sparse, controversial and not widely accepted, and as we have shown in this study the external shape of bones can be misleading. Further analysis of the internal structure of other bones of the skeleton may reveal exciting findings about the evolution of other key human behaviours such as stone tool making and tool use. Our research team is now expanding our work to look at hands, feet, knees, shoulders and the spine.'

6. Discover Neanderthal footprints at Iran's Do-Ashkaft Cave

There are relics and fossil evidence from Neanderthals in several parts of the Iranian plateau, including Do-Ashkaft Cave, the subject of this note. A Middle Paleolithic cave site, Do-Ashkaft Cave is situated north of Kermanshah, near Taq-e Bostan, about 1,600 m above sea level. Its entrance faces south of Meywala Mount, overlooking the national park of Kuhestan. The main chamber of the cave is 23 meters deep and 15 meters wide. The floor is covered with debris from modern use as a winter campsite by sheep and goat herders. Next to the mouth of the main cave, there is a small spring with a regular flow even in warm, dry summers, which seems to have played a major role in the geomorphological and archaeological history of the site.

The site was first visited in 1996 by Iranian researchers F. Biglari and S. Heydari-Guran and during the following four years, a series of surface surveys were made at one-month intervals, which resulted in a rich collection of Middle Paleolithic

lithic artifacts. Exposed breccia at the entrance and some patches on the walls indicate lateral percolation of water into the cave sediments. In some places, this breccia is about two meters above the present floor. The presence and position of the breccia suggest that a substantial amount of the cave sediments may have been washed away. The breccia at the entrance is rich in fragmentary animal bones, charcoal, and flint artifacts.

Some Middle Palaeolithic artifacts, including a few side-scrapers and a Mousterian point, have been recovered from this breccia. Animal bones are extremely fragmentary and some are burned, suggesting human involvement in their accumulation during the Mousterian occupation. They include a fragment of the right mandible of an adult specimen and an upper third right molar of a sub-adult ruminant, both allocated to wild Caprine (sheep or goat). Thousands of pieces of flint have been collected from the entrance area and the talus slope.

Since there is no sign of later industries, except a few bladelets and an end-scrapers, the surface collection seems to be unmixed and to represent atypical Zagros Mousterian industry. Primary observations indicate that lithic artifacts were predominantly made from raw material procured near the site, a fine glossy opaque red and green material which seems to be jasper. Survey located outcrops of this material and its two other variants along the southern slope of Maiwaleh Mountain. The lithic assemblage at Do-Ashkaft comprises tools, flakes, trimming flakes, shatters, and cores. An emphasis on heavily retouched pieces characterizes the assemblage.

Such heavy reduction and utilization are typical of the Zagros Mousterian assemblages. Single and convergent scraper (including Mousterian points) constitutes the largest percentage of the tools, followed by other scraper types, retouched pieces, notches/denticulates, burins, and miscellaneous artifacts. To gather information about the distribution of other possible Palaeolithic sites in the vicinity. An area of about seven by one km was surveyed in 1999 and a total of 14 caves and rock-shelters with Upper Palaeolithic and later lithic assemblages were recorded.

The only probable Middle Palaeolithic artifacts found include a convergent scraper from an abandoned limestone quarry and a few artifacts including a Mousterian point in a geological section. This section and another one near Tang-e Kenesht were recorded and sampled by S. Heydari. His study provides a paleoenvironmental sequence for the region with a late Middle Pleistocene to Holocene age.

A study, published in the Journal of Human Evolution in 2019, suggests that Neanderthals were roaming at the Iranian Zagros Mountain sometimes between 40 to 70 thousand years ago, it also refers to a human tooth discovered in 1999 in a cave called Wezmeh near Kermanshah, noting the tooth that previously thought to be modern human belongs to a Neanderthal child. In taxonomy, Homo sapiens is the only extant human species. The name is Latin for “wise man” and was introduced in 1758 by Carl Linnaeus (who is himself also the type specimen). Neanderthals are an extinct species or subspecies of archaic humans in the genus Homo, who lived within Eurasia from circa 400,000 until 40,000 years ago.

PAPER - 2

INDIAN & TRIBAL ANTHROPOLOGY

1. Tribals play hardball on land rights



Dissatisfied with RTI answers on traditional land rights, tribals of Thane file appeals

THE revenue office of Jawhar in Maharashtra's Thane district witnessed an unusual sight on June 18. About 30 tribals from Anantpur village of Jawhar had congregated at the office for the hearing of their first RTI appeals. They are part of a group of 456 tribals who have filed first RTI appeals following unsatisfactory answers to their queries. Under the RTI Act, applicants can file the first appeal if the authorities fail to provide them the required information within 30 days or if they are not satisfied with the information. The hearing, which is being held in batches, is likely to continue for a month.

The tribals from 14 villages in Jawhar and Vikramgad talukas had filed RTI queries related to claims under the Forest Rights Act (FRA) on April 9. FRA recognises traditional rights of the scheduled tribes and forest dwellers on forest land and resources. Some had resorted to RTI to find out the status of approval of their FRA claims. Several tribals had filed RTI queries despite receiving land titles. Their main allegation is that the authorities allotted them lesser land than what they had claimed without taking into account the evidence presented by the forest rights committee (FRC) of the gram sabha. Consider the case of Jana Hadkya Kutade from Hateri village.

He has received land titles for 1.5 hectares (ha) while the Hateri FRC had cleared his claim over 9 ha. Ganpat Janu Pawar, chief of Hateri FRC, says, "The authorities should have approved the claim because our recommendation was based on the survey conducted by the revenue department itself." Kutade had filed RTI queries to know why he was allotted such a small parcel of land. Under the FRA amendment rules of 2012, the authority must disclose why it has partially or entirely rejected the claim of an applicant.

While people had specific queries about their claims, the authority's response was same for all

Kutade and other applicants started receiving answers to their RTI queries in the last week of April. But the answer was the same for all: "Sub-divisional and district-level committees have cleared all land claims made. Appeals against the decision are filed with the district-level committee. However, your application for an (FRA) appeal was not found in our records."

While people had specific queries about their claims, the authority's response was same for all Milind Thatte, founder of Vayam, a non-profit working with the tribals, says the authority's response is ambiguous. "People had specific queries about information regarding pending claims or incompletely processed claims.

What is the point of saying that no appeal under FRA is found when an FRA appeal has never been made for a single claim?" Datta Bhadakawad, additional resident collector (revenue) of Jawhar, who is hearing the first RTI appeals at the taluka level, told Down To Earth that "some people feel their claims have not been cleared adequately. So, we are hearing them out."

The tribals are, however, not happy with the way the hearing is being conducted. They allege that Bhadakawad refused to provide minutes of the hearing and intimidated the unlettered applicants by asking them to choose between land titles and information under RTI. They plan to make a second RTI appeal – the third step under the RTI Act to get the information requested – with the state information commission. In their appeal, which will be submitted in the first week of July, they have also sought penal action against Bhadakawad.

Shailesh Gandhi, former chief information commissioner and prominent RTI activist, who was present at one of the hearings says, "I have seen people filing 100 RTIs about the same query, but never come across a campaign of such a magnitude. I feel proud to see the most disempowered people assert their rights." Gandhi says the tribals will find a positive feedback from the state commission.

2. Kutia Kondh Tribe



Birendra Majhi (28) and Haramani Jani (22) from the Kutia Kondh community, a Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group (PVTG) in Odisha, have been selected as special guests for the Republic Day parade.

- The **Union Ministry of Tribal Affairs** for the **Republic Day celebrations** invites the **tribal representatives annually**.

Kutia Kondh Tribe:

- The Kutia Kondh community is one of the **Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs) in Odisha**.
- The Kutia Kondha is a subgroup of the **Kondha tribe**, and they are considered one of the **primitive sections of the Kondha community**.
 - The Kondha tribe is further divided into **Kutia Kondha, Dongria Kondha, and Desia Kondh** based on their geographical locations and lifestyles.
- The Kondha people are indigenous to the hilly regions of Odisha, India.

Habitat:

- Kutia Kondhas primarily **inhabit hilltops and valleys**, distinguishing them from other sub-groups like Dongria Kondha and Desia Kondh who reside in highlands and plain areas, respectively.

Economic Activities:

- The livelihood of Kutia Kondh is predominantly **dependent on shifting cultivation**, cultivating minor agricultural products, and the collection of **Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFP)**.
- Settlements are characterized by **two rows of houses** facing each other, each with a single roof.
- **Economic activities are closely tied to the forest**, including shifting cultivation and gathering food during lean periods.

Social Structure:

- Social organization among Kutia Kondh is robust and unified, with **nuclear and patriarchal family structures**.
- **Women** play a significant role in the family economy.

- The community is known for its **social unity and cooperation**.

Religion and Practices:

- Kutia Kondhs are primarily **nature worshippers**.
- **Jani** serves as the full-time magico-religious specialist in the village.
- Historically, **human sacrifice was practiced**, but it has been substituted with **buffalo and sheep sacrifices**.
 - Traditional rituals and practices are still observed.

Cultural Aspects:

- Cultural practices include the use of **musical instruments** like **Dhap** and **Salap Baja**.
- **Youth dormitories**, although gradually losing significance, are still present in some Kutia Kondh villages.

Transition and Development:

- In recent decades, Kutia Kondhs have undergone transition and development, influenced by government interventions.
- **Changes are observed in social life, education, and infrastructure**, indicating a gradual transformation within the community.

3. How central Indian tribes cope with climate change impacts

Topic in Syllabus : 6.1 Tribal situation in India



- Faced with erratic rainfall and extreme weather, tribal farmers of Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh turn to *bewar* and *penda* forms of cultivation, but government agencies are bent on rooting out these farm practices
- *Hariaro Bai* is referring to a form of shift cultivation that has been outlawed under the Indian Forest Act of 1927, but continues to play an important role in providing food security to the Baiga tribals living in the Mandla and Dindori districts of Madhya Pradesh.
- A similar form of cultivation called *penda* is practised by the primitive Madia tribe in the hills of Bhamragadh in Gadchiroli district of Maharashtra.
- Despite their illegal status, *bewar* and *penda* cultivation practices continue to thrive among these tribes because they involve no cost or loan, are less laborious, give an assured crop from land considered inferior, and yield more nutritious and varied food than conventional cultivation. *Bewar*

cultivation is also practised by a significant proportion of the tribal population in Chhattisgarh.

- In recent years, tribal farmers who had converted to conventional agriculture are returning to *bewar* and *penda* cultivation in the face of increasingly erratic rainfall patterns and crop losses as climate change makes its presence felt.
- This cultivation is much more resilient to environmental stress, and gives an assured yield in both low and excess rainfall conditions. Activists working with tribal communities say that government agencies are mostly either ignorant about these practices or are against them without any proper scientific evidence to support such censure.
- The situation is the same in village Bhangadi in the Bhamragadh hills in Maharashtra. Mangru Karme Pungati, a Madia tribe farmer who grows both paddy and *penda* crops, informs that about half the village's paddy crop was lost because of erratic rains. "It is our *kohla* (Madia term for *kutki*) that will keep us alive this year," he says.
- Tribals feel that *bewar* is vital for their survival. Says Rama Chaitu Durwa of Binagunda village in the Bhamragadh hills where paddy cultivation was started only about four years back, "We are still only learning how to cultivate paddy. It will be years before we develop the skills. Also, we cannot eat paddy all year. We need our *penda* grain, which we like."

Climate change, revival, innovation

Another important government-sponsored myth about shifting cultivation is that most tribals have given it up long ago as outdated. Farmers disagree. Not only are *bewar* and *penda* cultivation practice thriving in the hilly parts of Central India, there is an active process of innovation on to adapt to changing circumstances.

Insecure rights

Bewar and *penda* cultivation is carried out entirely in forests, and so the land do not have status of agricultural land. To complicate matters, no government department in either state has tried to get any estimate of the area of land involved or population dependent on it.

- Tribals have also faced persecution for practising *bewar*. In Talaidabra, people were beaten up and arrested for *bewar* cultivation in 2005, and live in fear ever since. In Chapwar, Lamtibai and her family have lived in fear the whole

of this crop season. “Forest officials were threatening to destroy our crop,” says she.

- As the world reels under the impact of climate change and increased food security concerns, cultivation practices like *bewar* and *penda* could very well hold the key to food security for the forest-dwelling poor of central India. Activists say it is time government agencies starts studying and supporting them instead of driving them to extinction.

4. Odisha launches LABHA (‘Laghu Bana Jatya Drabya Kraya’) Yojana for minor forest produce



The Odisha government has recently launched the LABHA (‘Laghu Bana Jatya Drabya Kraya’) Yojana.

- Also, the establishment of a **Commission for the Preservation and Promotion of Tribal Languages** of the Scheduled Tribes of Odisha has been approved.

About the LABHA:

- The LABHA aims to benefit the state's large **tribal** population, constituting **23%** of Odisha's total population.

- It is a **100% State-funded** minimum support price (**MSP**) scheme for **minor forest produce (MFP)**.
- The **MSP for MFP** will be determined **annually** by the State government.
- The State government has initially allocated **₹100 crore** for the scheme, with **2% commission** for SHGs (**Self Help Groups**) or other designated agencies involved in procurement.
- The State government will set up a **tamarind processing plant** in one of its districts to add value to tamarind procured through **LABHA Yojana** and eliminate distress sales of produce to middlemen, ensuring **fair returns** for tribal communities.

How the scheme will be implemented?

- **Primary collectors**, mostly tribal individuals, will be able to sell MFP at the MSP through procurement centers managed by the **Tribal Development Cooperative Corporation Limited of Odisha (TDCCOL)**.
 - **E-tendering, value addition, and processing units** by TDCCOL are planned for further sales.
- The scheme integrates with **Mission Shakti's Women SHGs** to ensure the involvement of **women**, who constitute the majority of primary collectors.
 - **Mission Shakti** is Union Government's **umbrella** scheme for safety, security and empowerment of women.
- **Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT)** will be used to transfer the amount to the beneficiaries' accounts.
- The **automated procurement systems**, used in this scheme, aligns with the '**Vision 5T**' framework of the state government, which helps ensure transparency through technology.
 - Automated procurement systems are a type of **software** that **synchronizes** all the **collaborators, components, and sides** of the supply chain.

About the Minor Forest Produce (MFP):

- The MFP is all **non-timber forest produce** of plant origin and includes bamboo, brushwood, stumps, canes, Tusser, cocoon, honey, waxes, Lac, tendu/kendu leaves, medicinal plants etc.
- The Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006 vests individual forest-dwellers rights to live in and get involved in Minor Forest Produce (MFP).
 - The act, enacted in 2007, defines the MFP.

- The Panchayat Extension to Scheduled Areas (**PESA**) **Act, 1996**, empowers the forest-dwellers right to claim over forest produce.
- The “**Minimum Support Price for Minor Forest Produce**” is a scheme of Union government that is designed as a social safety net for improvement of livelihood of MFP gatherers by providing them fair price for the MFPs they collect.
 - Tribal Co-operative Marketing Federation of India (TRIFED) is the is the nodal agency for the implementation of the scheme.
- The “**PM Van Dhan Yojana**,” is an initiative of the Ministry of Tribal Affairs and TRIFED, that seeks to improve **tribal incomes** through value addition of tribal products.

Tribal Language Preservation Commission:

- Odisha is home to **21 tribal languages**, and the commission aims to preserve, promote, and develop these languages.
- It will encourage **multilingual education, document** and preserve **tribal languages, promote** their use, and protect **linguistic** rights.
- The commission will advocate for the inclusion of **tribal languages** like **Ho, Mundari, Kui, and Saora** in the **8th Schedule** of the **Indian Constitution**.
 - The **8th Schedule** deals with the official languages in India, which presently includes **22 languages**.

5. Rajya Sabha passes Bills to include Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups of Odisha, A.P. in ST lists

Topic in Syllabus : 9.1 The concept of PTGs (Primitive Tribal Groups), their distribution, special programmes for their development. Role of N.G.O.s in tribal development.



- Rajya Sabha passed the Constitution (STs) Order Amendment Bill 2024 and the Constitution (SCs and STs) Order Amendment Bill 2024, presented by the Ministry of Tribal Affairs.
- This cleared the way for the addition of several new communities to the STs list of Odisha and the inclusion of synonyms and phonetic variations of existing tribes in the ST lists of both Andhra Pradesh and Odisha.

About the Bills:

- Among the additions were notably **seven** Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs) (a subset of STs) - four in Odisha and three in Andhra Pradesh.
 - The independent names of these PVTGs had been **specifically added as synonyms or sub-tribes of communities** already on the ST lists of these States.
- **In Odisha**, the PVTG communities added are -
 - Pauri Bhuyan and Paudi Bhuyan as synonyms of the Bhuyan tribe;
 - The Chuktia Bhunjia as a synonym of the Bhunjia tribe;
 - The Bondo as a sub-tribe of the Bondo Poraja tribe; and
 - The Mankidia as a synonym for the Mankirdia tribe.

- **In Andhra Pradesh**, the PVTG communities included are Bondo Porja and Khond Porja as synonyms of the Porja tribe and the Konda Savaras as a synonym for the Savaras tribe.
- These groups belong to PVTGs and have been included in the scheduled list after 75 years of independence.

Other Additions and Changes:

- In addition to this, the Bill to amend Odisha's ST list also shifted two entries - Tamadia and Tamudia - **from the Scheduled Castes list to the Scheduled Tribes list**.
- The Bill also added synonyms, phonetic variations and sub-tribes of at least eight existing communities in the State's ST list.
- Further, **Odisha's ST list was expanded** by adding two communities to it as new entries.

These are -

- The Muka Dora community (and synonyms) in undivided Koraput District which includes Koraput, Nowrangapur, Rayagada and Malkangiri districts; and
- The Konda Reddy (and synonyms) community.

Who are the PVTGs?

- According to the Ministry of Tribal Affairs (MoTA), **India has 75 PVTGs**, who are characterized by -
 - Pre-agriculture level of technology,
 - Stagnant or declining population,
 - Extremely low literacy, and
 - Subsistence level of economy.
- PVTGs were recognised as a separate category based on the findings of the **1961 Dhebar Commission**.
- In 1975, there were 52 PVTGs and the list had been expanded to **75** across 18 states and Union Territories.
- Data from the MoTA and the 2011 Census shows that **Odisha** has the largest population of PVTGs at 8.66 lakh, followed by **MP** at 6.09 lakh and **Andhra Pradesh** (including Telangana) at 5.39 lakh.
- **The total PVTG population is more than 40 lakh** and the largest PVTG is **Odisha's Saura** community, numbering 5.35 lakh.

Recent Government Efforts for the Welfare of the PVTGs:

- The Union Budget 2023-24 announced the launch of the **PM PVTG Development Mission**.
 - This will saturate PVTG households and habitations with **basic facilities** such as safe housing, clean drinking water and sanitation, improved access to education, health and nutrition, etc.
 - An amount of Rs.15,000 crore will be made available to implement the Mission in the next three years under the Development Action Plan for the Scheduled Tribes (**DAPST**).
- The **PM-JANMAN** (Pradhan Mantri Janjati Adivasi Nyaya Maha Abhiyan) has been launched to enhance the socio-economic conditions of PVTGs.
 - The Union Cabinet during November 2023 approved PM JANMAN with total outlay of Rs.24,104 crore (Central Share: Rs.15,336 crore and State Share: Rs.8,768 crore) to be implemented during FY 2023-24 to 2025-26.
 - The PM-JANMAN (comprising Central Sector and Centrally Sponsored Schemes) to focus on **11 critical interventions through 9 Ministries**.
- The government has been consistently following up with respective State governments over the declining populations of several PVTG communities across the country.

6. We need to create a bond of affection with the tribals -Nehru's word

Topics in Syllabus : 6.2 Problems of the tribal Communities

"We had political integration of the states. But that is not enough. We must have something more intimate than political integration"

More than three months have passed since Manipur erupted in violence that involves unchecked use of sophisticated weapons. The neighbouring Mizoram is also affected and there is grave danger of the crisis spreading to other areas in a very sensitive border zone. Jawaharlal Nehru had warned many years ago that the North-East in general, and the tribal groups in particular, require very delicate handling with due respect to their culture and traditions. This is the second part of a speech PM Nehru made at the opening session of the Conference on Scheduled Tribes and Scheduled Areas held in New Delhi on 7 June 1952 in which he set out the approach to be followed.

When I look at the progress of what is called modern civilisation in India, I see many good things. [But] I also see lack of many good things, and some of the things it lacks here, I find in the tribal folk – this spirit of song and dance and an appreciation of life, of enjoying life. I want, therefore, if you or I or others go there and meet these people, it is necessary for us to go there to learn and to imbibe something of the spirit pervading those places and not go there with long faces and black gowns and try to kill that spirit among those people.

We have had, for half a century or more, a movement, a struggle for freedom in this country culminating in our achieving Independence. The struggle itself, apart from the result of it, has a liberating tendency... We must remember that this experience, which millions of Indian people had, did not extend to the tribal areas.

It may – and it did – affect somewhat the tribes in the central parts of India undoubtedly, not so intimately perhaps, but somewhat they saw it. But if you go to the frontier areas, say, of Assam, it did not affect it at all...

We were not allowed to go in those old days by the old British authorities, so that our freedom movement did not reach those people. Rumours of it reached them and sometimes they reacted rightly or wrongly for the moment. About 21 years ago, there was that incident in the tribal areas of Assam, of a lady, Rani Gaidilieu, who, hearing stories of that great movement in 1930, here in India and of Gandhiji's name, became some kind of a leader...

Anyhow, the essence of the struggle for freedom, which meant raising some kind of a liberating force in India, did not reach those areas, chiefly the frontier areas, which are the most important tribal areas. The result was that while we had been psychologically prepared during the last 30, 40, 50 years for various changes in India, those frontier areas did not get so prepared...

I am pointing these out to you to show how in tackling this problem we have to consider very important factors. It is not a question of so many schools and so many dispensaries and hospitals. Of course, they want schools and hospitals and dispensaries and roads and all that. But that is rather a mundane way of looking at things.

What we ought to be after is not merely to put up a building here and a building there, but to develop the sense of oneness with these people, that sense of unity, the understanding that would even deter me from referring to our relationship with the tribal people as 'we' and 'they' as that itself is wrong. It shows a feeling of separateness existing between us.

And there comes the psychological approach. You may talk in this conference day after day about the development programmes regarding schools and other matters, but you will fail completely if you do not touch the core of the problem, that is, how to understand these people and make them understand you and to create a bond of affection and understanding with them.

Sometimes people talk of integration and consolidation of these people. I think the basic problem of India today, taken as a whole, is one of integration and consolidation. We had political integration of the states. But that is not enough.

We have to have something much more intimate than political integration and that process takes time. It is not a matter of law, it grows. You cannot force that thing to grow as you cannot force a plant or a flower to grow. You can only nurture it and produce conditions when it grows.

So, the greatest problem today of India is a psychological integration and consolidation – the building up of a unity which will do away with provincialism and communalism and various other isms which disrupt and separate. Having said that, I should like to say that this talk of integration and consolidation of the tribal people is very largely wrong. It is a wrong approach. It is a wrong approach both practically and psychologically.

If your approach is to win them by your affection, to go to them as a liberating force, to go to them as friends so that they may feel you have not come to take away something from them but to give them something, that is the right integration.

But if they feel that you have come to impose yourself, to interfere, to come in their way, to try to change their methods of living, to take away their land, to push some

of your businessmen there who will exploit them, then it is all wrong, completely wrong.

Therefore, the less talk we have of this type of integration and consolidation of the tribal areas, the better. That integration will come when the tribal people come to you, wanting you, not by your going to them and bringing them in by the scruff of the neck.

We have to be doubly careful in appointing officers in tribal areas, because the officer in the tribal area is not merely a man who has passed an examination or who has gained some experience of routine work, but he must be a man or a woman whose mind understands, whose mind, and even more so whose heart understands this problem, who is an enthusiast in this business, who does not go there to just sit in an office for a few hours a day and for the rest curse his luck at being sent to an out of the way place...

This is important because the man who goes there as an officer must be prepared to share his life with the people of the tribe, the tribal folk. He must be prepared to enter their huts, talk to them, eat with them and smoke with them, if necessary, whatever it is – to live their life, not to consider himself as something superior or apart, and thereby gain their confidence in this way and then advise them...[Hence] our approach should be a psychological approach which always seeks to win their affection, and you can only win any person's affection or any people's by giving affection.

7. From hypertension to cancers, alarm bells ringing in India's tribal belts



Tribal people are facing triple burden of diseases

Diabetes, hypertension, heart disease and cancers are often dubbed lifestyle diseases and seen largely as problems of city folks. A new investigation into tribal health has revealed that such non-communicable diseases now constitute major health burden across tribal communities as well. In addition, these communities are reporting mental illness too.

This means tribal people or scheduled tribes, who constitute 8.6 per cent of India's total population, are actually facing triple burden of diseases: communicable diseases (malaria, tuberculosis, leprosy etc.), non-communicable diseases (diabetes, cardiovascular and cancers) and mental health problems like stress, substance abuse and so on. Other indicators like maternal and child health, malnutrition and stunting have improved, but are still a major health burden.

This scenario has emerged in the report of an expert group set up by the ministries of health and tribal affairs in 2013. The group, headed by Magsaysay awardee and

rural health expert Dr Abhay Bang, recently submitted its report to the government. The report, said to be the first such comprehensive effort since the independence, notes that availability of data about tribal health is patchy. So it relied on data from National Family Health Survey, National Sample Survey Organisation, studies done by civil society, and a study by the National Institute of Research in Tribal Health (NIRTH) done at the committee's behest.

Among communicable diseases, malaria continues to be a major health burden in tribal areas. Though tribal communities are just 8 percent of the population, they account for 30 percent of all malaria cases and 60 percent of *p falciparum* cases and 50 percent of total malaria mortality. "The goal of malaria elimination by 2030 can't be met unless tribal health is prioritized as majority of malaria cases and fatalities are from tribal areas," the report notes.

"Historically it has been believed that tribal populations do not suffer from non-communicable diseases like cancer, diabetes, hypertension and cardiovascular ailments, primarily due to their proximity to nature, healthy food habits and lack of stress. However, there is evidence of early epidemiologic transition in tribal areas and associated increase in the incidence of non-communicable diseases," the report said.

The prevalence of cardiovascular diseases in tribal people is almost same as non-tribal people in seven out of ten states with significant tribal population, and higher than the general population in Maharashtra and Andaman and Nicobar islands, according to data collected under the District Level Household Survey (DLHS-4). A survey by the National Nutrition Monitoring Bureau (NNMB) in 2009 had found that one out of every four tribal adults suffered from hypertension, which is at par with the national prevalence rate. A survey by NIRTH in Madhya Pradesh revealed that prevalence of hypertension among Baiga tribe was 10.5 percent in Mandla, 20.2 percent in Dindori and 11.2 percent in Balaghat. It was 21.5 percent in Bharia tribe of Patakot valley in Chindwara district.

"Given the high prevalence of hypertension, stroke rates also will be higher. Although not mentioned in the report I speculate that these will be largely hemorrhagic stroke with catastrophic outcomes," noted Dr D Prabhakaran, Director, Centre for Chronic Disease Control. "The prediabetes mentioned is lower because of the higher non-standard diagnostic threshold. If we use the standard threshold of less than 126 mg/dl it will be even higher. There is no correlation of obesity and diabetes and it is true for all Indians. Given the level of undernutrition

and its link to metabolic disorders as adults we can expect diabetes to become a major problem among tribals," he told *India Science Wire*.

Mental stress is also visible among tribal communities. One of the reasons for this is the fact that most of them live in conflict zones. Forty of the 106 districts affected by left-wing extremism have more than 25 percent tribal population each. Many insurgent groups operate in the Northeast primarily inhabited by tribal communities. "Displacement and migration due to environmental disasters, mining, land acquisition and loss of livelihood are also taking a toll on mental health of tribal people," the report has pointed out.

While the disease burden among tribal populations is high, health infrastructure in tribal areas is inadequate. This, the panel says, is worrying because scheduled tribe populations heavily rely on public health system despite barriers of access. Tribals are now seeking more of modern health care, and the influence of traditional healers is on a decline. Therefore, it is necessary to strengthen the public health system in these areas.

At the same, the traditional healing practices should be studied to distinguish between harmful and beneficial practices. The committee has recommended that tribal medical system should be integrated with modern system to provide the best possible care to tribal communities. A compendium of tribal herbal medicines should be prepared with rigorous testing, and help from CSIR and DBT.

An analysis done by the National Health Systems Resource Centre showed that Jharkhand has the highest percentage shortfall of tribal Primary Health Centres (PHCs), followed by Madhya Pradesh (53%), Rajasthan (52%), Jammu and Kashmir (31%) and Maharashtra (30%). The shortfall of tribal Community Health Centres (CHCs) in Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan is 40% and above. In ten major states with tribal populations, the overall deficit of 20% sub-centres, 30% PHCs and 22% CHCs.

The situation is no good when it comes to manpower. In 2017, there was 82% shortfall in specialist doctors, 33% of lab technicians and 28% of staff nurses in tribal areas. The panel has observed that there is powerful evidence that health worker ASHA is "a very appropriate, feasible and effective way" of bridging the health gap in tribal areas but there was lack of appreciation about it in State Health Missions.

8. Medaram Jatara: Asia's Largest Tribal Festival



Medaram Jatara, also known as the Sammakka Sarakka Jatara, is Asia's largest tribal festival, celebrated biennially in the tiny hamlet of Medaram in Telangana's Mulugu district. This four-day festival commemorates the valor and sacrifice of tribal goddesses Sammakka and her daughter Sarakka, who rebelled against the oppressive taxes imposed by the Kakatiya rulers in the 13th century.

History of Medaram Jatara Festival

According to tribal folklore, Medaraju found an orphan named Sammakka in the forest in the 13th century. She grew up to marry the chieftain of Medaram, Pagididda Raju, under the Kakatiya reign. When Pratapa Rudra insisted on collecting taxes from Medaram despite drought conditions, Sammakka and Raju challenged his authority. This sparked a battle where Sammakka fought fiercely alongside her husband, daughter Sarakka, and son Jampanna, losing all of them before vanishing into the Chilakalagutta hills.

The local tribes came to revere Sammakka and Sarakka as goddesses. Over centuries, their commemoration transformed from a small Koya gathering into a mega-festival uniting millions across communities.

Cultural Significance of Medaram Jatara Festival

Medaram Jatara holds special cultural meaning for Telangana's tribal groups, becoming an emblem of their identity. The Koyas view it as honoring their autonomy and struggle against historical oppression. The lack of rigid rituals or Brahmanic traditions also underlines its character as an organic tribal event. For non-tribals too, it promotes the preservation of vanishing indigenous artforms amidst rapid modernization.

Main Rituals and Practices

The Jatara begins with the arrival of Sarakka's pot of vermilion from Kannepalli village, representing the goddess' spirit. The next day, people bring Sammakka's icon from Chilakalagutta hilltop. On the peak third day, devotees bathe in Jampanna stream and offer jaggery, coconuts, animals, money, and even liquor to the goddesses.

Unlike conventional Hindu idols, the tribal deities are embodied in vermilion pots, turmeric powder, and other natural elements. The Koya priests chant invocations under the massive 'Medaram Gaddhe' tree, which is the epicenter of rituals using neem branches, wild flowers, and bamboo poles.

Festival Activities

The four festive days feature a range of cultural programs like folk dances Perini Shivatandavam, Gussadi, Kolatam, and the Koya's Perma Kok dance. The colorfully decked up rural bazaar bustles with handicraft sellers and eateries.

Impact on the Community

The Jatara generates handsome annual revenues, greatly benefiting Medaram and surrounding villages. Tribal households earn handsomely by selling commodities, leasing out accommodation, and providing transportation. For local artisans, it is an unparalleled platform to boost sales and cultural preservation.

More crucially, the festival helps cement ties among Telangana's tribes like Gonds, Lambadas, Yerukulas, and Chenchus, besides the dominant Koyas. It propagates awareness about diminishing indigenous groups.

Challenges and Modern Influences

Rising participation has increased pressure on the ecology and traditional ethos due to commercialization. The forest areas face immense litter and over 700 temporary liquor shops sprout up. Traffic management with limited rural infrastructure poses administrative headaches.

Nonetheless, the Telangana government works to elevate the Jatara's cultural heritage. Steps like online jaggery offerings, helicopter services, health camps, and sanitation drives help retain the core spiritual ambiance while also positioning it as a national attraction.

Conclusion

Medaram Hatara festival comes alive every two years to celebrate the valiant Sammakka-Sarakka legacy. The Jatara bears testimony to Telangana's tribal histories and cultural wealth. Driven by the passion of devotees and organizers, this vibrant festival serves as a unifier of communities while keeping endangered traditions of song, dance, food, and craftsmanship thriving even in modern times.

9. Manipur High Court deletes 2023 order para recommending ST status for Meiteis that led to ethnic clashes

**Topic covered in syllabus : 7.1 Problems of exploitation and deprivation of Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Other Backward Classes.
Constitutional safeguards for Scheduled Tribes and Scheduled Castes.**

Manipur has been roiled by ethnic violence since May 3 last year

The Manipur High Court on Thursday modified its 2023 order in which it recommended the Scheduled Tribe (ST) status for the Meiteis community. The ruling led to widespread protests in Manipur and sparked ethnic clashes, which killed more than 200 people since May 3 last year. The High Court has now deleted the paragraph from its March 27 judgment and said that the ruling was passed in "misconception of law."

"Accordingly, the direction given at Para No. 17(iii) needs to be deleted and is ordered accordingly for deletion," a bench of Justice Golmei Gaiphulshillu said in an order as per Bar and Bench.

The now-deleted paragraph of the March 27 order stated, "The first respondent shall consider the case of the petitioners for inclusion of the Meetei/Meitei community in the Scheduled Tribe list, expeditiously, preferably within a period of four weeks from the date of receipt of a copy of this order in terms of the averments set out in the writ petition and in the line of the order passed in W.P.(C) No. 4281 of 2002 dated 26.05.2003 by the Gauhati High Court."

The judgment was passed by then-acting Chief Justice of Manipur High Court MV Muralidaran. The Supreme Court took suo motu cognisance of the issue and Justice MV Muralidaran was subsequently transferred to Calcutta High Court.

'Against SC's observations': Manipur High Court

On Thursday, the Manipur High Court held that the above paragraph was against the observations made in the constitution bench of the Supreme Court in a case concerning Scheduled Tribe classifications.

"...I am satisfied and of the view that the direction given at Para no. 17(iii) of the single judge dated March 27, 2023...which is impugned herein needs to be reviewed, as the direction given at Para no. 17(iii) of the single judge is against the observation made in the constitution bench of the Supreme Court," the high court said in its 19-page verdict.

In its November 2000 verdict, the Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court said, "Courts cannot and should not expand jurisdiction to deal with the question as to whether a particular caste, sub-caste; a group or part of tribe or sub-tribe is included in any one of the Entries mentioned in the Presidential Orders issued under Article 341 and 342 particularly so when in Clause (2) of the said Article, it is expressly stated that said orders cannot be amended or varied except by law made by Parliament".

Approximately 53% of the population in Manipur consists of the Meiteis, primarily residing in the Imphal Valley. The remaining 40%, comprising various tribal groups such as Nagas and Kukis, predominantly inhabit the hill districts.

10. With no Census data to depend on, government scrambling to assess population of vulnerable tribes

With the 2021 Census indefinitely delayed, the government's attempt at using the PM Gati Shakti portal

- It is aimed to estimate the total population of Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTG) across the country hitting one wall after another.

Key Highlights

- The information on population is crucial to the implementation of the government's ₹24,000 crore PM-JANMAN package for PVTGs.
- When the package was launched in November 2023 to ensure that PVTG villages had all basic facilities and infrastructure
 - The government said there were around 28 lakh PVTG people in the country.
- The government said its goal was to plug infrastructural gaps in the around 22,500 habitations they occupy.
- But by the time the operational guidelines were released in January 2024, the Tribal Affairs Ministry claimed the total population of PVTGs stood at 36.75 lakh.
- By the end of January, the government had further revised the total population tally – pegging it at 44.64 lakh as of January 31, 2024.
- Neither of these estimates had included data from Bihar and Manipur, with officials saying that population of some habitations are yet to be fed into the portal for the rest of the States as well.
- some districts are using population data from ration distribution charts, others are using data from as far back as the 2011 Census or surveys conducted in 2015 by government institutes;
- Some infrastructure projects like building connecting roads and anganwadis under the JANMAN package require a population criteria to be met before being sanctioned.
- The Tribal Affairs ministry has told all Ministries working on PM-JANMAN that the population data on the portal is not meant to be static and that it is subject to revision
- The latest available government data from January shows that there are at least 12.70 lakh PVTG households across the country.

11. Green promise: Silver cockscomb isn't a troublesome weed for Karnataka's Soliga tribe



For the Soligas, known for their traditional knowledge of ecology, silver cockscomb is a nutritious leafy green vegetable that grows well even on fallow land and in drought-like conditions

Silver cockscomb is a beautiful but troublesome weed. If left unchecked, it can spread quickly and suppress the growth of other crops, affecting their yield. It also attracts insects, caterpillars, worms and moths that can harm crops.

In Karnataka's Chamarajanagara district, where silver cockscomb is referred to as anne soppu, farmers of the Soliga tribe say controlling the weed can cost up to Rs 2,000 per acre (0.4 hectare) per year. Yet they do not consider silver cockscomb a weed.

For the Soligas, known for their traditional knowledge of ecology, silver cockscomb is a nutritious leafy green vegetable that grows well even on fallow land and in drought-like conditions.

Also known as lagos spinach, the weed belongs to the Amaranthaceae family, which includes economically important plants like spinach (*Spinacia oleracea*),

beetroot and quinoa. The plant is known as *Celosia argentea* in scientific lexicon, *kurdu* in Marathi and *pannai keerai* in Tamil.

Silver cockscomb is a short-lived 50-60 cm-tall plant that bears simple, spirally arranged leaves around the stem with pinkish or silky white flowers. Since it grows widely on farmlands across the country, most farmers use the plant as fodder. But like the Soliga tribe, some communities also consume it as a leafy vegetable.

Healthy add-on

The women of the Soliga tribe collect edible leaves and young shoots of silver cockscomb to prepare a mash called *massanne*, which is eaten just before the monsoon (April to June) to help lower the body's heat and reduce stomach burn, which often stems from indigestion.

Basamma, a 58-year-old Soliga tribal woman from Annehola village in Male Mahadeshwara Hills of Chamarajanagara, prefers to consume the green during the rainy season from July to December, when the plant is available in abundance.

She uses silver cockscomb to prepare *ullsoppu sambar*, which her family relishes with roti or rice and ragi balls. The Soliga community also uses the leaves and young shoots of the plant for preparing a side dish called *palya*, cooked with either field beans, chickpeas, cowpea or pigeon peas (see recipes).

Scientists have, in recent years, found evidence on the benefits of the weed. In 2018, researchers from Vijayanagara Sri Krishna Devaraya University, Ballari, Karnataka studied antibacterial activity of silver cockscomb growing in Koppal district of Karnataka, and found that its stem and root extracts provide protection against microbial pathogens.

This study was published in *Journal of Pharmacognosy and Phytochemistry*. The World Vegetable Center, a Taiwan-based non-profit institute for vegetable research and development, silver cockscomb leaves are high in nutrients such as beta-carotene and folic acids, and have "medium" levels of vitamin E, calcium and iron.

Although it is of the same family as spinach, it does not pose the same risk to kidneys. Spinach leaves are high in calcium, oxalates, vitamin K and potassium, which can impair kidney function and lead to formation of kidney stones.

In comparison, silver cockscomb leaves have lower levels of oxalic acid (0.2 per cent) and phytic acid (0.12 per cent), says the World Vegetable Center.

The plant is frequently used in traditional Chinese and Indian medicine for treating eye diseases and ulcers. Researchers from China reviewed studies available on the plant and found that the seed contains an edible oil that is beneficial for treating conditions such as bloodshot eyes and cataracts. This review was published in the journal *Revista Brasileira de Farmacognosia* in 2016.

Though scientists are discovering the benefits of silver cockscomb now, communities worldwide have long known its usage and benefits. Believed to have originated in tropical Africa, according to the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, UK, silver cockscomb grows abundantly in South and Southeast Asia, Latin America and parts of the US and Australia.

Communities in these regions use it as a wild vegetable, for fodder and in medicine. Exploring and documenting their traditional knowledge may give this weed a makeover of a superfood.

12. 'No toilets, schools, medical shops': Study says nomadic tribes in TN face severe stigma



Conducted between 2021 and 2022 in eight districts, the study report titled ‘Status of Nomadic Tribes in Tamil Nadu’ covered a sample of 1485 households in 15 villages.

A recent study report on the nomadic tribes in Tamil Nadu revealed that they face severe discrimination in their daily lives, restricting access to schools, public infrastructure, government offices, and essential services. The report titled ‘Status of Nomadic Tribes in Tamil Nadu’, and it details how nomadic tribes including Narikuravar, Lambadas, Boom Boom Maatukarar - Aadiyan, and Kattunaykars face persistent stigma.

“We selected fifteen settlements in these eight districts as geographically diverse locations to ensure that the issues of the nomadic tribal communities all over the state are represented”, the report noted. The comprehensive participatory study was carried out by Vanavil Trust, a Nagapattinam-based NGO that works among the Aadiyan community, in collaboration with Praxis, and with the support of the Research Organisation for Social Action (ROSA) and the Empowerment Centre of Nomads & Tribes (TENT).

Conducted between 2021 and 2022 in eight districts, namely Cuddalore, Krishnagiri, Mayiladuthurai, Madurai, Nagapattinam, Tiruvarur, Thanjavur, and Tiruvannamalai, the study covered a sample of 1485 households in 15 villages. Of the 1485 households, 707 families were from the Lambada community, 490 families

from the Boom Boom Mattukkarar community, 206 families from the Narikkuravar community, and 82 families from the Kaatunayakkar community.

The report also gave pointed observations about the various factors affecting the lives of nomadic tribals in Tamil Nadu, and laid down recommendations to address them.

Lack of access to schools

The report revealed that the number of children from these four communities in primary schools is usually higher than the number of them pursuing secondary education. "Almost all the children who dropped out of school mentioned discrimination as one of the major factors," the report noted, adding that many students leave school education in order to help their family by looking for jobs that pay.

The report also listed the lack of community certificates as one of the main restrictions faced by children when it comes to accessing education. The schools they enroll in are usually far away from their settlements, and this exacerbates the discrimination against them on account of caste, occupation, food habits, language, and academic performance. Children are therefore not able to form friendships with students from other communities at school. The stigma attached to Nomadic Tribes (NT) and Denotified Tribal (DNT) communities being painted as criminals in society also makes the situation worse.

Further, the report revealed that 27% of the children in the school-going age bracket were not enrolled in any school. Out of the 73% of the children who were going to the school, 53% of them reported facing caste discrimination by teachers and fellow students.

When it comes to completing school education, data showed that almost all the nomadic hamlets had at least one person who completed high school with a Secondary School Leaving Certificate (SSLC). Of the 15 villages, only two hamlets had no persons who cleared grade 12 exams. Nine villages of 15 had graduates, and while detailing the findings, Vanavil also mentioned that of the total 1485 households, 1118 had no one who completed SSLC. 1275 households did not have anyone who cleared HSC and 1378 households had no graduates.

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



Assam and Arunachal Pradesh have very rich tradition of herbal medicines used in the treatment of various ailments. Tribal communities practice different types of traditional healing practices. Enough documentation is available on the healing practices in other tribal communities except Mishing community of Assam and foot hill of East Siang district of Arunachal Pradesh hence the attempt was made for the same. A survey on folk medicinal plants and folk healers of Mishing tribe was conducted in few places of Lakhimpur and Dhemaji district of Assam and East Siang district of Arunachal Pradesh, where this ethnic group is living since time immemorial. All information was collected based on interview and field studies with local healers within the community. The identification of medicinal plants

collected with help of indigenous healers was done. Such medicines have been shown to have significant healing power, either in their natural state or as the source of new products processed by them. This study is mainly concentrated with plants used to cure diseases and to enquire about different healing systems.

The traditional medical practitioner or traditional healer can be defined as “someone who is recognized by the community in which he lives as competent to provide health care by using vegetable, animal and mineral substances and certain other methods based on the social, cultural and religious backgrounds as well as the prevailing knowledge, attitudes and beliefs regarding physical, mental and social well-being and the causation of disease and disability in the community”. Traditional healers used different medicinal formulas from various natural substances (animal, mineral and vegetable). They have extensive knowledge on the use of plants and herbs for medicinal and nutritional purposes.

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

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

are widely treated by traditional healers and 68 herbs have been recorded treating malaria and about 88 for treating jaundice.

Traditional healing practice of Mishing community

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

Ethno medicinal plants used by Mishing Community

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

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

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

The description of all above mentioned plants are on the basis of ethno medicinal knowledge. Plants are used by Mishing community in different places on the basis of availability of those plants and the proper knowledge about efficacy of those plants against the particular disease. For safe uses of different medicinal plants, we

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

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