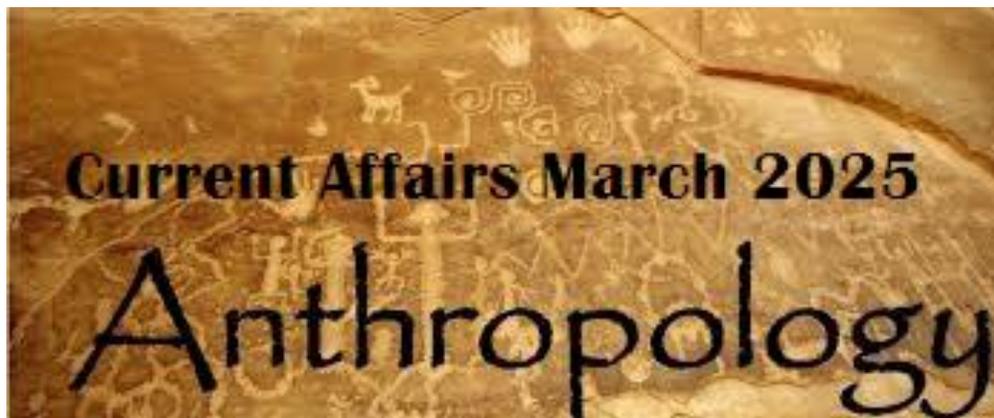**ANTHROPOLOGY CURRENT AFFAIRS MAGAZINE MARCH 2025**

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A MAGAZINE FOR CIVIL SERVICES PREPARATION

Current Affairs March 2025 Anthropology

(Welcome To Vishnu IAS online)

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PAPER - 1

PHYSICAL & ARCHAEOLOGICAL ANTHROPOLOGY

1. The Genetic Implications of Endogamy in India
(Use this content in the topic of syllabus – Unit 2.3 Paper I)

- A recent study led by **CSIR-Centre for Cellular and Molecular Biology (CCMB),** has highlighted the **genetic consequences of endogamy in India.**

About Endogamy:
- **Endogamy, or the practice of marrying within a specific community, has contributed to a high degree of inbreeding in certain Indian populations.**
- Continuous endogamy can lead to a **smaller genetic pool, increasing the risk of inheriting genetic disorders.**

Key Findings of the Study:
- The study analysed **281 high-coverage whole-exome sequences** from four anthropologically distinct populations to assess the extent of inbreeding and the emergence of novel genetic variants.
- These **genetic variations have been linked to population-specific diseases** in India.
- The study found a significant incidence of **ankylosing spondylitis** (a type of arthritis affecting the spine) within the **Reddy community of Andhra Pradesh.**
- The study examined **pharmacogenomic markers**, which are genetic variations that influence how individuals metabolize and respond to medications.
- It discovered **significant genetic differences in drug metabolism across Indian populations**, impacting the effectiveness of common drugs such as:**Tacrolimus** (an immunosuppressive drug used in organ transplant patients)**Warfarin** (an anticoagulant used to prevent blood clots)
- **Pharmacogenomic Markers:** Pharmacogenomic markers are **specific DNA or RNA characteristics** that influence an **individual's response to drugs,** including efficacy and risk of adverse effects.
- **Types:Genetic Variants**: Differences in **genes encoding drug-metabolizing enzymes, transporters, or drug targets.**
- **Gene Expression Levels**: Variations in the **expression of genes** affecting drug response.

- **Applications**: **Personalized Medicine**: Tailoring drug therapies based on an **individual's genetic makeup to enhance efficacy and minimize adverse effects. Drug Development**: Identifying genetic markers that **predict drug response** can guide the creation of more effective medications.

2. Endogamy in India: A Cultural and Social Perspective
(Use this content in the topic of syllabus – Unit 2.3 Paper I)

- Endogamy, or the practice of marrying within a specific social, caste, or religious group, has been a long-standing tradition in India. It is deeply rooted in the country's cultural and social structures, particularly within caste and tribal communities.
- While endogamy has historically been seen as a way to preserve community identity, customs, and social cohesion, modern studies have highlighted its significant implications for genetic health.
- Endogamy has traditionally played a vital role in maintaining **social hierarchy and group identity** in India. Some of the key factors influencing its practice include:
- **Caste System & Social Structure :**The **varna (caste) system** in Hindu society promotes marriage within one's caste and sub-caste to maintain social status and hereditary occupations. Similar trends are observed among **Muslim, Christian, and tribal communities**, where intra-group marriages are encouraged to maintain religious and cultural identity.
- **Economic & Political Influence**
  – Endogamous marriages help preserve **family wealth, political power, and business interests** by preventing external influences from diluting family assets and decision-making.
  – Many **business families in India**, such as those in Gujarat and Rajasthan, prefer marrying within their communities for financial stability.

Genetic Implications of Endogamy
- While endogamy has historically served as a means of cultural preservation, recent genetic research highlights its potential drawbacks.
- **Increased Risk of Genetic Disorders**The CSIR-CCMB study found that **marrying within small communities leads to a higher prevalence of genetic mutations**, which increase the risk of hereditary diseases.**Ankylosing Spondylitis** (a type of arthritis) is more common among the **Reddy community of Andhra Pradesh** due to the presence of a specific genetic variant, **HLA-B27:04 risk allele**.Other **population-specific genetic disorders**

have also been observed, emphasizing the role of **genetic screening and counselling**.

Conclusion

- Endogamy has been a defining feature of India's **social and cultural fabric**, shaping identities and traditions across generations.
- However, its **genetic consequences** raise concerns about **hereditary diseases and drug response variations**.
- With new **scientific research** shedding light on the health impact of **inbreeding and genetic mutations**, the need for **genetic counselling, public awareness, and improved healthcare policies** has become more urgent than ever.
- Future strategies must focus on **balancing cultural traditions with medical advancements** to ensure better **health outcomes for all communities**.

3. Human Evolution and Route of Human Migration
 (Use this content in the topic of syllabus – Unit 1.4 Paper I)

- Scientists have established that **Homo sapiens evolved in Africa** and **later migrated to various parts of the world**. The routes and timing of these migrations are still debatable among the scientists. The **coastal dispersion theory** suggests migration along coastlines, though it lacks strong archaeological evidence.

Human Evolution

- Human evolution is the **evolutionary process that led to the emergence of anatomically modern humans,** beginning with the evolutionary history of primates—in particular **genus Homo**—and leading to the **emergence of Homo sapiens** as a distinct species of the **hominid family, the great apes.**

Route of Human Migration

– Genetic studies have provided insights into human evolution and migration patterns. By analyzing mitochondrial DNA mutations, scientists confirmed that Homo sapiens evolved in Africa over millennia before migrating globally. While scientists widely accept the out-of-Africa theory, they differ on the timing and routes of migration.

Two Theories of Dispersion:

– Coastal Dispersion Theory: Studies suggest humans migrated along coasts, benefiting from warm climates, abundant food, and tropical conditions. Research in 2005 using mitochondrial DNA of 260 Orang Asli individuals (Tribe of Malaysia) indicated rapid coastal migration around 65,000 years ago, reaching Australia via the Indian Ocean. A

2020 study on 2,700-year-old DNA in Japan linked coastal migration to genetic affinities with Taiwanese tribes. Andaman Islands' settlements also correlate with coastal journeys. Challenges to the Theory: Archeological evidence in India contradicts this model. Inland Palaeolithic sites dominate, with no archeological traces along the Indian Ocean coastline to support coastal dispersion.

Conclusion

- The study offers new data but emphasizes the need for precise dating. Evidence challenges purely coastal migration theories but requires careful interpretation due to submerged sites and undated regions.
- The study also highlights broader dispersal in Saurashtra, covering coastal, hinterland, and inland areas, suggesting a multifaceted migration pattern.
- This detailed analysis of inland vs. coastal migration patterns continues to evolve, emphasizing the need for integrating genetic and archeological findings.

4. Key Findings of India's CAR T-Cell Therapy Clinical Trial
(Use this content in the topic of syllabus – Unit 9.1 Paper I)

- The clinical trial results of India's first **Chimeric Antigen Receptor (CAR) T-Cell Therapy**, published in **The Lancet Haematology**, report a **73% response rate** in leukemia and lymphoma patients.
- **High Success Rate**: The trial involved patients with relapsed or refractory B-cell cancers **(Leukemia** (cancer affecting bone marrow and blood) **and Lymphoma** (cancer of the lymphatic system)), who often have limited treatment options.
- Among the patients analyzed, **73% showed a positive response to the therapy,** offering new hope for such cases.
- **Comparable to Global Therapies:** India's **CAR T-cell** therapy matches global effectiveness but is **20 times cheaper,** costing Rs 25 lakh compared to Rs 3-4 crore internationally, where total expenses can exceed Rs 8 crore.
- **Side Effects Observed:** The clinical trials of India's CAR T-cell therapy reported manageable side effects, with patients experiencing **neutropenia** (low white blood cells), **thrombocytopenia** (low platelets), and developing **anemia** (low red blood cells). Some patients showed **cytokine release syndrome (CRS),** causing fever and inflammation. **Two treatment-related deaths** were reported, but overall, the **safety profile was considered manageable**.
- **CAR T-Cell Therapy About: CAR T-cell therapy is an advanced cancer**

treatment that modifies a patient's T-cells (a type of immune cell) to fight cancer more effectively.

- **Working: A patient's T-cells** are extracted from their blood and genetically modified (to recognize and attack cancer cells). These modified cells, known as **Chimeric Antigen Receptor (CAR) T-cells,** are multiplied and reintroduced into the patient to target B-cells and prevent relapses.
- **Importance:** When B-cell tumors relapse or become refractory (return after treatment or do not respond to initial therapy), treatment options are limited, often leading to patient death. Uncontrolled B-cell growth causes severe complications due to their role in antibody production.
- **India's CAR T-cell therapy** provides an additional, patient-specific treatment option, as the modified T-cells remain in the body, offering long-term immunity against cancer recurrence. It is a patient-specific treatment, making it highly precise compared to traditional chemotherapy.
- **NexCAR19:** In 2023, NexCAR19 became India's first approved indigenous CAR-T cell therapy, developed through a collaboration between IIT Bombay, Tata Memorial Centre, and ImmunoACT (a company incubated at IIT Bombay).

5. New Insights into Human Evolution
(Use this content in the topic of syllabus – Unit 9.1 Paper I)

- A recent study challenges the long-held belief that **modern humans (Homo sapiens) evolved from a single ancestral population,** suggesting instead that **they emerged through the admixture of two distinct populations.**
- The research analyzed **modern human DNA** to trace population splits and reunions, relying on data from the **1000 Genomes Project** rather than ancient fossils.
- The **1000 Genomes Project** is a global initiative that sequenced DNA from populations across **Africa, Asia, Europe, and the Americas.**

Key Findings:

- **Multiple Ancestry & Evolution:** Modern humans (**Homo sapiens**) likely evolved from **2 ancestral populations, with one majority (~80%)** experiencing a significant decline before recovering, while the **other minority (~20%)** contributed genes linked to brain function and cognition.
- Some genes from the minority group underwent **purifying selection,** indicating **evolutionary pressures** that shaped human development.
- This genetic exchange contributed nearly **10 times more material** than the later **Neanderthal-Denisovan interbreeding (~50,000 years ago)**, which

accounts for **only ~2% of non-African human DNA.**

- **Genetic Mixing:** These populations diverged around **1.5 million years ago** and later interbred approximately **300,000 years ago,** forming the **genetic foundation** of modern humans.

6. NOVA 1

(Use this content in the topic of syllabus – Unit 9.1 Paper I)

- Recent research suggests that **genetics played a key role in the evolution of human speech,** with scientists linking the **NOVA1 (Neuro-Oncological Ventral Antigen 1)** gene to the development of spoken language.
- NOVA1, a neuronal RNA-binding protein expressed in the central nervous system, is essential for survival in mice and normal development in humans. A single amino acid change (I197V) in NOVA1's second RNA binding domain is unique to modern humans.
- this human-specific NOVA1 substitution may have been part of an ancient evolutionary selective sweep in a common ancestral population of Homo sapiens, possibly contributing to the development of spoken language through differential RNA regulation during brain development.
- **NOVA1:**
- **NOVA1** is a gene that **produces a protein** found in most mammals, playing a **key role** in **processing genetic information, brain development,** and **neuron activity.**
- **Modern humans** have a **unique variant of this gene**, distinguishing it from those found in **Neanderthals** and **Denisovans** (ancient human species).
- **NOVA 1 Role in Speech Evolution:** Scientists in an experiment **replaced the NOVA1 variant in mice with the human version** using CRISPR gene-editing.
- The **modified mice** showed **distinct vocalizations,** with **altered distress calls** in infants and **more complex social squeaks in males,** indicating that the gene influenced communication.
- **FOXP2: FOXP2** is also a gene linked to **speech and language.** It is found in **both humans and Neanderthals**, while **NOVA1 is unique to Homo sapiens,** making it more likely to explain human speech evolution.

SOCIO – CULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY

1. Endogamy may be the cause of the Persistence of harmful genetic variants in India
Topic in syllabus - 9.1 Human Genetics

- The study by the Centre for Cellular and Molecular Biology (CCMB), Hyderabad, highlights a significant example of how endogamy can contribute to the persistence of harmful genetic variants in India. Here's a detailed elaboration on this issue:

Role of Endogamy in Genetic Persistence
- **Endogamous Practices**
- **Types:** Endogamy in India includes caste-based, region-based, and consanguineous marriages. These practices limit gene flow between different communities and perpetuate genetic variants within closed populations.
- **Cultural Factors:** Social and cultural norms reinforce these endogamous practices, making it challenging for individuals to marry outside their immediate community or caste.

2. **Genetic Homogeneity**
- **Reduced Mixing:** Limited inter-marriage between different communities results in a lack of genetic diversity. This genetic homogeneity allows harmful variants like the MYBPC3 mutation to become more prevalent and persist over generations.
- **Founder Effect:** The MYBPC3 mutation may have originated in a specific population and, due to endogamy, has been maintained and amplified within that population.

3. **Impact on Health**
- **Cardiac Failure:** The MYBPC3 gene is critical for proper cardiac function. Mutations in this gene can lead to conditions such as hypertrophic cardiomyopathy, which is characterized by abnormal thickening of the heart muscle and can result in early-onset cardiac failure.

Broader Implications and Solutions

1. **Health Implications**
   - **Public Health Burden:** The persistence of harmful genetic variants due to endogamy poses a public health challenge. It can lead to increased healthcare costs and necessitate targeted interventions to manage and prevent genetic disorders. **Genetic Counseling:** Increased genetic counseling and screening can help identify individuals at risk and provide guidance on reproductive choices to minimize the impact of genetic disorders.

2. **Cultural and Social Considerations**
   - **Challenging Norms:** Addressing the impact of endogamy requires cultural sensitivity and engagement with communities to gradually shift practices and promote genetic diversity. **Education:** Raising awareness about the genetic risks associated with endogamy can encourage individuals and communities to consider the long-term health implications of marrying within a closed group.

2. Proving the language/culture connection
(Use this content in the topic of syllabus – Unit 2.2 Paper I)
   - 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 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. Does palaeogenomics explain our origins?
 (Use this content in the topic of syllabus – Unit 1.3 Paper I)

- Pääbo is the Director of the Max Planck Institute of Evolutionary Anthropology in Leipzig, Germany and has, over three decades, uniquely threaded three scientific disciplines: palaeontology, genomics and evolution.

- The study of ancient humans has historically been limited to analysing their bone and objects around them such as weapons, utensils, tools and dwellings. Pääbo pioneered the use of DNA, the genetic blueprint present in all life, to examine questions about the relatedness of various ancient human species.

- He proved that Neanderthals, a cousin of the human species that evolved 1,00,000 years before humans, interbred with people and a fraction of their genes — about 1-4% — live on in those of European and Asian ancestry.

What has Pääbo's work shown?

- Pääbo's most important contribution is demonstrating that ancient DNA can be reliably extracted, analysed and compared with that of other humans and primates to examine what parts of our DNA make one distinctly human or Neanderthal.

What are the implications of palaeogenomics?

- The study of ancient DNA provides an independent way to test theories of evolution and the relatedness of population groups.
- Genome-wide association studies, where segments of DNA from species are compared, have found that Neanderthal DNA may be linked with autoimmune diseases, type 2 diabetes, and prostate cancer.
- The presence of Neanderthal and Denisovan DNA in people also raised questions on whether there are hard genetic distinctions between people and their extinct evolutionary cousins.

4. Female language style promotes visibility and influence online
Topic - Linguistic anthropology..Social context of language

- A female-typical language style promotes the popularity of talks in the digital context and turns out to be an underappreciated but highly effective tool for social influence. This was shown by UZH psychologists in aninternational study in which they analyzed 1,100 TED Talks.
- A large part of social interaction nowadays takes place digitally. And the digital age has brought new opportunities to interact and communicate with increasingly large audiences. The huge power for socialinfluence of digital media may come with the risk of intensifying common societal biases, such as gender stereotypes.
- One behavioral manifestation that plays a major role in such social evaluations is language use.
- In past research that focused on offliine contexts, male characteristics were associated with more influence, while female characteristics tended to be associated with less competence.

Men and women show different language styles
- To investigate how gender-linked language styles influence the impact of online contributions and whether they are subject to the same rules as in offline environments, an international research group led by the

- The researchers collected the transcripts of nearly 1,100 TED Talks (348 of which were given by women) in order to identify typical male and female language styles. For this purpose, an index was used that placedeach speaker between the extremes of very masculine to very feminine speech, which were empirically defined on the basis of large samples.

- According to previous research men commonly use more abstract andanalytical language while female-typical language has been described as more narrative, personal, social andemotional; women tend to refer more to themselves and to other people more than men.

- However, in the digital sphere, unlike offline, such qualities did not interfere with popularity. This was also reflected in the negative ratings of the TED Talks. More female-typical language style also led to fewer"unconvincing" ratings. The authors conclude that a female-typical language style may thus be a powerful tool to promote impact and visibility irrespective of whether the speaker is male or female.

5. Marriage or not? Rituals help dating couples decide relationship future
Topic in syllabus - 2.3 Marriage: Definition and universality; Laws of marriage

- Rituals such as those centered around holidays and other celebrations play an important part in human relationships. When dating couples engage in rituals together, they learn more about each other. And those experiences can serve as diagnostic tools of where the relationship is going, a University of Illinois study shows. "Rituals have the power to bond individuals and give us a preview into family life and couple life.

- Most rituals are recurring events, though some (such as rites of passage) occur just once in a person's life. Rituals have elements of routine, but they have symbolic meaning that goes beyond routine interaction.

- "Rituals provide a unique time to review one's partner and relationship; you get to see a host of behaviors and interactions that might normally be obscured," Maniotes notes. "Some of the ways rituals affected commitment to wed with these couples was by altering their view of their partner, giving them a new perspective."

- Maniotes and co-authors Brian Ogolsky and Jennifer Hardesty, researchers in HDFS, analyzed in-depth interviews with 48 individuals (24 couples) in the U.S. Southwest region.

- Respondents were on average 23 years old and had been in their relationship for 2.5 years. They were randomly selected from a larger study examining commitment to wed in heterosexual dating couples over a period of nine

months. For this study, the researchers looked at the impact of rituals. They found commitment to wed could increase or decrease, depending on the nature of the interaction.

- Rituals can reinforce bonds and strengthen commitment, but they can also showcase conflict areas and make people less likely to see the relationship heading towards marriage. For example, holiday celebrations involving rituals could highlight interactions with extended family and provide a window into how people navigate through conflict. "Rituals seem to really play a role in pausing and slowing down individuals, helping them take a better look at their relationship. They help them see, 'this is who we are as a couple; this is who we are as a family,'" Maniotes explains.

6. Proving the language/culture connection

Topic in syllabus - 2.2 The Nature of Society

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PAPER - 2

INDIAN & TRIBAL ANTHROPOLOGY

1. Beneshwar Fair 2025
(Use this content in the topic of syllabus – Unit 6.1 Paper II)

- **Beneshwar Fair** was organised from **8 to 12 February 2025** at **Beneshwar Dham in Dungarpur** district of Rajasthan. Beneshwar Fair is an **annual festival held in the months of January or February, dedicated to Baneshwar Mahadev (Lord Shiva).**
- On this holy occasion **Bhils** travel from Gujarat, Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh to take a dip at the **confluence of the Mahi and Som rivers.**
- This fair showcases the rich tribal culture of the Bhils and is called the **"Kumbh Mela of Tribals"**. During the Beneshwar fair, many **cultural and sports programs were organized** by the district administration, tourism department and tribal development department. **Archery, volleyball, tug of war, women's matka race, bhajan group, turban tying competitions** were organised.

Bhil Community
- The Bhil are **one of the largest tribal groups**, living in Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh and Rajasthan.
- The name is derived from the word 'billu', which means bow.
- The Bhil are known to be excellent archers coupled with **deep knowledge about their local geography.**
- Traditionally, experts in guerrilla warfare, most of them today are farmers

and agricultural labourers. They are also skilled sculptors.
- Bhil **women wear traditional saris** while **men are dressed in long frocks and pyjamas.** The woman put on **heavy ornaments made of silver, brass** along with rosaries of beads and silver coins and earrings.

2. Pardhi Community
(Use this content in the topic of syllabus – Unit 9.1 Paper II)

- Forest rights activists and lawyers across the country expressed their concern over the recent MP government order calling for extensive search and surveillance of nomadic tribes, including the Pardhi community, which is classified as a scheduled tribe.

Pardhi Community
- Pardhis are a **nomadic community that, since** the time of the **Mughal emperors,** have been **hired to help in shikar (hunting),** whether it was for sport for the British or for the royal kitchens of the 'zamindars' (landowners).
- They **reside mainly in Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh,** and also in small pockets of Gujarat and Andhra Pradesh.
- The word pardhi comes from paradh, which means hunter in the Marathi language.
- **In 1871,** the Pardhis were among the tribes **notified as "hereditary and habitual criminals" under** the colonial-era **Criminal Tribes Act.**
- **After independence,** the Indian government "**denotified" these communities** in 1952.
- **Occupation**: Though the **major occupation** of the Pardhi tribes is **hunting and gathering,** some have **taken up diverse occupations like cultivation** and some other occupations following the traditions of most of the tribes of the country.
- **Language**:The main language of the Pardhi tribes is their **local dialect,** which is of the **same name. Many of them** also **speak a dialect of the Gujarati** language. In the northern parts of the country, they speak a combination of Hindi and Marwari.
- **Beliefs**: Though they are **officially Hindu,most of the Pardhi practice ethnic religions.** They are firm believers in the **spirit world** and its influence on the **physical world.**

3. Juanga Tribe

(Use this content in the topic of syllabus – Unit 6.1 Paper II)

- The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) recently sought an action taken report from the district magistrate-cum-collector of Keonjhar on alleged human rights violations of the Juanga tribe, a PVTG in the district.

About Juanga Tribe

- Juang is one of the 13 **particularly vulnerable tribal groups** (PVTGs) of the total 62 tribes found in **Odisha**.
- As per the 2011 census, the Juang population stands at approximately 50,000.
- They are primarily concentrated in the current districts of Keonjhar and Dhenkanal in Odisha.
- **Language**: Linguistically, they converse in the **Juang language,** a member of the Munda family within the **Austroasiatic languages.**
- The Juangs are known for their **clan structure and kinship organisations.**

Livelihood

- I**nitially reliant on hunting, gathering**, and limited cultivation, the declaration of their forests as reserves during the British colonial era prompted a shift in traditional customs.
- Adapting to these changes, the Juang people showcased **expertise in basket-weaving,exchanging their products with neighboring caste villages** for essentials like salt, oil, and food.

Clothing

- **Historically** known as **Patuas or "leaf-wearers,"** Juang **women adorned leaf girdle**s, while **men wore small loincloths.**
- Following contact with neighbouring communities and government agencies, the Juangs were **forced to adopt clothing from other communities.**

Beliefs

- Although they have **some Hindu beliefs,** Juangs practice **mostly ancient animistic rituals.**
- Their **supreme god is the sun god.** However, they have also adopted the Hindu deities in addition to tribal gods and goddesses.

4. Gond Tribe

(Use this content in the topic of syllabus – Unit 6.1 Paper II)

- The Gujarat High Court recently sought a response from a power distribution company, the Ahmedabad district collector, and a residential society after 95 families of the Rajgond tribe sought HC directions for

electricity connections to their households.

About Gond Tribe

- The Gond or Gondi (Gōndi) or Koitur are a **Dravidian ethno-linguistic group.** They are one of the **largest tribal groups in India.** According to the 2001 census, their population was nearly **11 million.**
- **Distribution**: The states of **Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Maharashtra, and Odisha** are home to the largest Gond populations. Gond tribes also live in the states of **Uttar Pradesh, Telangana, Andhra Pradesh**, Bihar, Karnataka, Jharkhand, West Bengal, and **Gujarat**.Gonds are mainly **divided into four** tribes, namely **Raj Gonds, Madia Gonds, Dhurve Gonds, and Khatulwar Gonds.**
- **History**:Gonds settled in the Gondwana region in the ninth and thirteenth century AD. In the **fourteenth century** they **ruled several parts of central India.** They **built a number of forts, palaces, temples,** tanks, and lakes during the rule of the **Gonds dynasty.** The **Gondwana kingdom survived till** the **late 16th century.** Gond dynasties **ruled in four kingdoms - Garha-Mandla, Deogarh, Chanda, and Kherla - in central India.**
  - Gonds have been **warriors since the British period.**
  - During the British regime in India, Gonds **challenged the Britishers in several battles.**
  - They also **gained control over the Malwa after the decline of the Mughals** followed by the Marathas in the year 1690.
- **Language**: The majority of Gond people speak **dialects of Gondi**, an unwritten language of the **Dravidian language family.** Some Gond have lost their own language and speak Hindi, Marathi, or Telugu, depending on which is dominant in their area.
- **Economy**: The basis of the Gond economy is **agriculture**, but they also practice **animal husbandry.** Some Gond also gather wild plants to eat. **Religion**: The religion of the Gond tribes centers on **clan and village gods**, together with **ancestor worship.**
- **Customs and Festivals: Keslapur Jathra and Madai** are important festivals of the Gonds. Apart from this, they also celebrate Hindu festival called **Dusshera**.

4. Orans, The sacred groves of Rajasthan
(Use this content in the topic of syllabus – Unit 6.1 Paper II)

- Recently Rajasthan State governments issued a notification declaring **'orans'** as deemed forests raised fear in community dwellers about losing access to

forest produce and livelihood.

- **Supreme Court Directives on Deemed Forests**
- **Status of Deemed Forests:** A notification is given as per the directives of the Supreme Court, Oran, Dev-vans and Rundhs, as forest lands will be deemed a forest.
- **TN Godavarman case 1996:** The SC in **TN Godavarman** case 1996, directed the state governments to identify such lands and stated that all 'forest', including deemed forests, will be covered under **Section 2 of the Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980. Prohibition of Non-Forestry Activities:** The provisions under **Section 2 prohibit** non-forestry activity such as **mining, deforestation, quarrying or building infrastructure projects** on such **forest land** without permission from the central government.

About Orans

- **Community Conserved Sacred Spaces:** Orans are **community-conserved sacred spaces** rich in biodiversity and usually include a water body. The locals consider **Orans as sacred groves**, i.e., a piece of natural vegetation protected by a certain community for **religious reasons.** They are barred from cutting and felling trees due to spiritual and religious connections to the Orans. **Livestock Grazing:** Orans use their livestock for grazing and are also places for communal congregations, festivals, and other social events,
- **Habitat:** They are among the last **natural habitats** of **the Great Indian Bustard.**
- **Concerns Regarding Orans**: The current categorisation of Orans as wastelands is causing a loss of biodiversity and is affecting the livelihood of the locals in the area, as huge chunks of land are allotted for setting up solar plants. The open stretch of land, which receives long hours of sunlight and brisk winds, has become a hub of green energy with windmills and solar photovoltaic dotting it.

Sacred Groves

- Sacred Groves are small patches of trees traditionally protected by the local community for religious and cultural significance.**Protection of Nature:** It plays a crucial role in soil conservation and preventing soil erosion, which maintains soil fertility. **Mitigating Natural Disasters:** Sacred groves act as natural windbreaks, shielding nearby settlements and agricultural lands from solid winds and reducing damage, hurricanes, or storms.**Biodiversity Conservation:** They contain a high level of biodiversity because they are protected from human interference. This makes them important for rare and endangered species seeking habitats.

5. Koch-Rajbongshis
(Use this content in the topic of syllabus – Unit 6.2 Paper II)

- Ahead of the Home Minister's three-day visit to Assam, the Koch-Rajbongshis have renewed their demand for Scheduled Tribe (ST) status.

Koch-Rajbongshis
- Koch Rajbongshi is an **ancient tribe** originally **from the ancient Koch kingdom.**
- The Rajbongshi tribe is referred to as Koch Rajbongshi, or Rajbanshi, or Rajvanshi.
- The word "Rajbongshi" literally means "royal community".
- Considered as **indigenous people of South Asia**, at present they live in lower Nepal, **Northern Bengal, North Bihar, Northern Bangladesh, the whole of Assam, parts of Meghalaya, and Bhutan.**
- These modern g**eographical areas were once part of the Kamata kingdom ruled by the Koches** for many centuries.
- The community is variously designated as **OBC (Assam), SC (Bengal), and ST (Meghalaya).**
- **Language**: The Rajbongshi/**Rajbanshi language** is **spoken by one crore people**, according to a 2001 census.It has a **complete grammar.**

Religion and Beliefs:
- They are **largely Hindus** with lots of their own deities and rituals.
- **A large section** of Koch Rajbanshi became **followers of Islam,** and the present Muslims of North Bengal, West Assam and Northern Bangladesh are of Koch Rajbanshi origin.
- There are **also Christian and Buddhist Koch Rajbanshis.**

- The **primary livelihood** of the tribe is **agriculture and farming.** They live very close to nature because of the fact that **primitively they were 'Animist'** and the same significance is still prevailing among the tribe.

6. Challenges Regarding the NCST
(Use this content in the topic of syllabus – Unit 7.1 Paper II)

- **Administrative and Financial Constraints:** The NCST functions under the **Ministry of Tribal Affairs**, lacking **financial and operational autonomy**, affecting its independence in budgeting, and operations.
- **Article 338A(9)** of the Constitution mandates that the **Union and State Governments consult the NCST on all major policy matters** affecting STs. However, many states and departments **fail to seek its advice**, leading to

tribal welfare policies being designed **without the Commission's input** .

- **Manpower Shortages:** The NCST reviews tribal welfare schemes, but its effectiveness is hindered by **limited staff and poor coordination.** Historically, the NCST has faced **prolonged vacancies** in key positions like Chairperson and Members. Manpower shortages and bureaucratic delays result in prolonged resolution times, leaving many cases pending for years and weakening public trust.
- **Weak Enforcement Powers:** The **recommendations of NCST are not binding**, limiting its ability to enforce protective measures for STs.
- Despite receiving numerous petitions on **atrocities against tribals, land alienation, and denial of reservation benefits**, the NCST **lacks the power to enforce its directives**.
- This weakens its authority and **reduces accountability among government agencies**. **Lack of Awareness and Outreach:** Many **tribals are unaware** of their rights and the existence of NCST, the **Commission lacks a strong grassroots presence** .

Way Forward
- **Strengthening Legal Mandate:** The NCST should be empowered to award penalties on the lines of the powers given to the **Central Information Commission** in the context of the implementation of the various provisions of the **Rights to Information Act, 2005.**
- **Capacity Building**: A separate cadre for **NCST personnel** should be created to ensure staffing shortages do not affect its operations .
- **Mandatory Consultation on Policies**: The government should **ensure compliance** with Article 338A(9), making it compulsory for ministries and states to consult NCST on all tribal welfare policies .
- **Grievances:** NCST should have a **dedicated grievance redressal cell** to follow up on cases of violence, displacement, and human rights violations.

==7. Anthropologists call for overhaul of criteria used for identifying STs==
 (Use this content in the topic of syllabus – Unit 6.1 Paper II)

- Anthropologists and experts are calling for a paradigm shift in defining "tribes" in India. Instead of a binary classification, a **"spectrum of tribalness"** is being proposed. The demand comes amid rising claims for ST status, including by the Meitei community in Manipur.

Need for a New Approach
- No community **fully** meets the existing criteria.
- Instead of rigid criteria, scholars propose a **matrix or spectrum** with

weighted indicators to assess a community's **degree of tribalness**. The **Anthropological Survey of India (AnSI) and National Commission for Scheduled Tribes (NCST)** are deliberating on a systematic tool for classification. **Proposed Indicators for Defining 'Tribalness'**

- Experts suggest considering **both tangible and intangible** indicators, including:
- **Social institutions** – Marriage, kinship, classification of relatives

Rituals and practices

- **Language and dialect**
- **Material culture** – Headgear, weaponry
- **Self-identification** of communities. A possible tool may include up to **150 indicators**, rather than just five.
- **Concept Note & Policymaking** A **concept note** highlights the "persistent difficulty" in defining tribes. A systematic classification tool will help **Tribal Research Institutions (TRIs)** in preparing **ethnographic reports** for policymaking.

Growing Demands for ST Status

- India currently has **756 ST entries** (including sub-entries). Since the **2011 Census**, 27 communities have been added. Hundreds of communities **seek inclusion**, sometimes leading to **inter-community conflicts** (e.g., Meitei vs. Kuki-Zo & Naga tribes in Manipur).
- **Civilisational Approach vs. Evolutionary Approach :** Scholars advocate moving from an **evolutionary approach** (used in Australia, China) to a **historical or civilisational approach**. This ensures that communities are seen **as they perceive themselves**, rather than as the **"other"** studied by outsiders.

Conclusion : A **revised classification system** will help in **better governance, equitable distribution of benefits, and conflict resolution**. The focus should shift to **cultural, historical, and self-identification aspects**, rather than outdated criteria.

8. Definition of 'Tribe' in India
 (Use this content in the topic of syllabus – Unit 6.1 Paper II)

- At the recent **Indian Anthropology Congress** officials from the **Anthropological Survey of India (AnSI)** and **National Commission for Scheduled Tribes (NCST)** called for a shift in defining tribes.Instead of a rigid binary classification—tribe or not—they advocate for a **"spectrum of tribalness"**.

Scheduled Tribes (STs)

- STs are defined under **Article 366(25)** of the Indian Constitution as "such

tribes or tribal communities or parts of or groups within such tribes or tribal communities as are deemed under Article 342 to be Scheduled Tribes for the purposes of this Constitution."

- Under **Article 342**, the **President notifies STs for each State/UT** after consultation with the Governor, and modifications can only be made by **Parliament through legislation**.
- Currently, **705 STs** are notified across **30 States/UTs**, comprising **8.6% of India's population (2011 Census)**.
- They are mainly concentrated in **Central India (Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, etc.)** and the **North-East**.

Criticisms of Existing Criteria:
  – Termed **obsolete, condescending, and colonial** by scholars.
  – Many communities today **do not fully meet all criteria**.
  – Fails to reflect **regional diversity, historical coexistence, and social changes**.
  – Overly dependent on a **binary view of 'tribe' vs. 'non-tribe'**, leading to inclusion-exclusion conflicts (e.g., **Meitei ST demand in Manipur**).
- **Proposal for a 'Spectrum of Tribalness'**
- Recent academic and policy discussions (e.g., at the Indian Anthropology Congress) advocate for a paradigm shift:Replace binary classification with a **"spectrum of tribalness"** or **matrix of indicators**.
- Use a broader set of **100-150 indicators**, including: Marriage, kinship systems, language, rituals, governance structures, cultural materiality (e.g., headgear, weaponry) etc.
- Assign **weightage** to each indicator to determine the **degree of tribalness**.

9. Hmar and Zomi Tribe
(Use this content in the topic of syllabus – Unit 6.1 Paper II)

- The Hmar and Zomi tribal leaders in Manipur have agreed to cooperate for restoring peace in Churachandpur after recent clashes.
- Hmar tribe belongs to the larger Chin-Kuki-Mizo ethnic group. They are one of the Scheduled Tribes under the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution.
- **Habitat:** Found in Manipur, Mizoram, Assam (North Cachar Hills), Tripura, Meghalaya, and parts of the Chittagong Hill Tracts.
- **Uniqueness:**
  – **Origin:** Trace ancestry from Sinlung (disputed), migrated from China to Burma and then settled in Northeast India.
  – **Physical features:** Mongoloid stock, short stature, straight black hair,

dark brown eyes.
- **Language:** Speak Hmar dialect, part of the Kuki-Chin-Mizo language family.
- **Festivals:** Sikpui Ruoi – post-harvest festival with dances and music celebrating community bonding.
- **Occupation:** Practice slash-and-burn (jhum) agriculture.
- **Housing:** Build houses on hilltops with wooden planks.
- **Social structure:** Divided into exogamous clans; monogamy is strictly followed.

- **Zomi Tribe:**The Zomi are part of the larger Zo ethnic group, which includes Mizo, Kuki, and Chin communities.The term "Zomi" means Zo people.
- **Habitat:** Inhabiting Manipur, Mizoram, Nagaland, Assam, and extending into Burma (Chin State, Sagaing division) and Bangladesh (Chittagong Hills).
- **Uniqueness:Origin:** Centuries-old settlers of mountainous regions between India and Myanmar.**Physical features:** Tibeto-Burman traits, short height, straight black hair, brown eyes.**Language:** Speak one of the Kukish language dialects within the Kuki-Chin linguistic family.**Festivals:** Chapchar Kut – celebrated after jhum clearing with traditional dance and feasts.
- **Culture:** Known for vibrant traditions, distinctive customs, rich folklore, and communal harmony.
- **Social identity issue:** The British-imposed name "Chin" is considered derogatory; Zomi prefer self-identification as Zo.

10. Tribal Urbanism
(Use this content in the topic of syllabus – Unit 6.2 Paper II)

- Tribal urbanism is how tribal people and cultures interact with city life. It's about tribal people moving to cities, adapting to urban life while often facing challenges, and still keeping their cultural connections alive.
- It also includes the struggles over land as cities grow, the economic hardships many tribal people face in cities, and how urban planning often ignores their needs. Tribal urbanism can also lead to exciting mixes of traditional and modern cultures. And importantly, it's about tribal communities actively fighting for their rights in cities. It's a complex mix of adaptation, cultural preservation, and the ongoing struggle for a place in the urban world.
- **Migration and Adaptation:** Many tribal people migrate to cities like Mumbai, Delhi, or Bengaluru seeking better opportunities. For example, members of the Gond community from Maharashtra might move to Mumbai

for work in construction or the service industry. They often face challenges like finding affordable housing, navigating unfamiliar urban systems, and dealing with discrimination. Language barriers can also be a significant hurdle.

- **Maintaining Identity:** Even in urban settings, tribal communities often maintain strong ties to their cultural heritage. The Santhal community in Kolkata, for example, might celebrate their traditional festivals like Baha Parab or Sohrai in the city, forming associations to preserve their cultural practices and language. They might also maintain connections with their villages in Jharkhand or Odisha.
- **Land and Resource Issues:** The rapid expansion of cities like Ranchi (Jharkhand) has led to encroachment on tribal lands. The Munda and Oraon communities around Ranchi have faced displacement and loss of agricultural land due to urbanization and industrial development. Legal battles over land rights are a common occurrence in such situations.
- **Socio-economic Disparities:** Tribal people in cities often experience significant socio-economic disparities. For instance, Adivasi communities in cities like Ahmedabad (Gujarat) often live in slums and face high rates of unemployment and poverty. Access to quality education and healthcare can be limited, perpetuating cycles of disadvantage.
- **Cultural Hybridity:** Tribal urbanism can lead to interesting forms of cultural hybridity. For example, tribal artists in cities like Bhopal (Madhya Pradesh) might blend traditional art forms with contemporary urban themes, creating new styles of painting or music. This fusion of cultures is a dynamic aspect of tribal urbanism.

11. How This Tamil Nadu Tribal Community Has Made a Business Out of Snake Venom
(Use this content in the topic of syllabus – Unit 6.1 Paper II)

- Even young children in the Irula tribe are trained in catching venomous snakes and then tapping their venom.
- Every year the number of people in India who die from a snakebite ranges from 81,000 to 1,38,000. And the only thing that can impede death is a potent antivenom. Did you know that a major portion of India's anti-venom stock traces back to a tribe in Tamil Nadu? The Irula tribe is one of India's oldest indigenous communities that is exceptionally adept at handling snakes.
- Their expertise in reptiles and venom collection acumen cast them into the spotlight.

- However, this also made them victim to certain scams. The people of the Irula tribe were deceived into procuring snake skins — lucrative for the fashion industry — that were sold illegally. The Indian Wildlife Protection Act (1972) came as a relief to this illicit trade. But this also put a damper on the tribe's livelihood.
- Respite came in the form of help from herpetologist Romulus Whitaker, who aided the establishment of the Irula Snake Catchers Industrial Cooperative Society (ISCICS) in 1978.
- The cooperative has risen to the ranks of India's largest producer of snake venom. But venom collection is just a part of the collective's overarching aim of sustainable employment.
- Rajendra, a member of the Irula tribe, elaborated on the process of venom tapping. Once tracked down, the venomous snakes — think cobras, kraits, Russell's vipers and saw-scaled vipers — are settled into clay pots that are half-filled with sand. Each pot houses two snakes.
- The mouth of the pot, Rajendra explains, is sealed with a porous cloth to prevent the reptiles from slithering out while allowing air to enter. Then the 'milking' process begins.
- This is essentially extracting the snake venom, where the reptile is encouraged to 'bite' the container, as the antidote drips from its fangs into the container. According to reports, the cooperative has official licenses to hold about 800 snakes at a time.
- The community keeps each snake in their hold for 21 days, during which venom is extracted four times. Before releasing the snakes into the wild, a mark is made on their belly scales. This prevents the same snake from being caught again. In the last few decades, the Irulas have caught over 100,000 snakes.