Newsletter

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ANTHROPOS INDIA FOUNDATION

NEW!

ABOUT US

Founded in 2011, Anthropos India Foundation (AIF) promotes the discipline of Anthropology, its philosophy and its methods to engage in applied and action research. Our work seeks to address issues of local communities through a bottom-up approach unique to communities and their people. We conduct community-based research rooted in local knowledge systems, local culture and ecology to inform policy initiatives and drive transformational impact. AIF also promotes Visual Anthropology through vibrant, authentic, meaningful ethnographic films and photo documentation.

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Register now!
Click **here** to know more about the workshop.

JOB/FELLOWSHIP ALERTS

1. Various Teaching Positions in Central University of Gujarat
   Last Date to Apply: 09.01.2025
   Application Link: Click here

2. Stenographer Grade-II (Deputation) in Indian Council of Social Science Research
   Last Date to Apply: 26.01.2025
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4. GovAI Summer Fellowship 2025
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DISTINGUISHED GUEST LECTURE SERIES
GUEST SPEAKER: DR. R. SIVA PRASAD
TOPIC: 'AI and Indigenous People'

Anthropos India Foundation (AIF) hosted a distinguished lecture by Dr. R. Siva Prasad, Honorary Professor at the Centre for Digital Learning, Training, and Resources, University of Hyderabad on 17 December, 2024. The lecture, ***"AI and Indigenous People,"*** examined the potential of artificial intelligence to preserve indigenous knowledge, promote cultural heritage, and address ethical concerns surrounding data sovereignty and community rights, underscoring the significance of multiculturalism and localised solutions in achieving sustainable development. The event was chaired by Dr. Sunita Reddy, Founder-Chairperson of AIF, who delivered the valedictory address. The distinguished guest was introduced by Dr. Shaweta, Senior Consultant and Coordinator at AIF, who highlighted his notable contributions to anthropology and academia.

Dr. Prasad commenced the lecture by providing a comprehensive overview of the historical context surrounding indigenous communities and their interactions with technology. He emphasised the role of modern technology in the past and its implications for the future, providing illustrative examples of AI applications in agriculture, healthcare, and environmental management.

The lecture then shifted focus to the socio-economic impacts of AI on indigenous populations. Dr. Prasad presented a striking statistical example, noting that approximately one-sixth of the world's population comprises indigenous peoples, who have successfully managed 80% of the world's remaining biodiversity through their unique local, cultural, and linguistic knowledge. He emphasised the importance of protecting indigenous knowledge and bridging the gap between AI and indigenous communities. He highlighted the need for Indigenous data sovereignty, collective intellectual property rights, and the inclusion of Indigenous perspectives in AI design and application.

The lecture explored the concept of a techno-social system that underscores the intimate link between the technological aspects of AI and its social aspects. He stressed that governments have a critical role to play in acknowledging and addressing this dynamic, ensuring that AI technologies are aligned with the cultural values and social norms of Indigenous communities.

Some recommendations by Dr. Prasad were:
1. *Develop Indigenous AI solutions that safeguard the cultural identity, cultural ethos, and entire socio-cultural and ethical way of life of marginalized communities worldwide.*
2. *Promote indigenous data sovereignty and collective intellectual property rights.*
3. *Ensure the inclusion of indigenous perspectives in AI design and application.*
4. *Foster community-led initiatives and collaborations between AI researchers and developers with indigenous communities.*

In conclusion, Dr Prasad's lecture on "AI and Indigenous People" offered a nuanced and thought-provoking examination of the intricate relationships between artificial intelligence, indigenous communities, and the natural environment. The lecture emphasized the need for a more inclusive and equitable approach to AI development, one that respects the rights, dignity, and traditional knowledge of Indigenous communities. The audience engaged deeply with the subject, posing insightful questions about the potential of combining natural intelligence with AI to achieve net-zero carbon emissions.

He suggested that localized solutions, grounded in cultural rights, are essential. He cited the example of the UNESCO Information Ethics Group and its collaboration with tech companies. As an anthropologist, Dr. Prasad has played a significant role in bridging the gap between indigenous knowledge systems and AI development, highlighting the importance of interdisciplinary collaboration in creating a more sustainable and equitable future.

For accessing the lecture on YouTube, click <u>here</u>.

Siva Prasad Rambhatla   Dr Sunita, AIF

BOOK REVIEW

Marginalization in Globalizing Delhi: Issues of Land, Livelihoods and Health
Book reviewed by Vidarshna Mehrotra, AIF

Introduction

This edited volume offers a profound examination of the complexities of urbanisation and globalisation in Delhi, focusing on their impact on marginalised communities. Through its interdisciplinary perspective, sheds light on critical land, livelihoods, and health issues in the city's rapidly transforming landscape. The editors' emphasis on empirical research and case studies enriches the discourse, while contributions from diverse scholars offer fresh insights into urban governance, displacement, and the dynamics of inclusion. The book addresses the systemic inequalities and vulnerabilities that emerge after the neoliberal urban reforms, making it a valuable resource for scholars and practitioners of urban studies, sociology, and anthropology.

Structure and Scope of the Book

The book is divided into three sections, each addressing an important dimension of urban transformation. The first section, Land and Changing Landscapes explores land use changes and ecological implications through satellite data and remote sensing. Case studies, such as Nanda Dulal Das's analysis of cropland conversion, and Milap Puniya's critique of Gurgaon's peripheries provide readers with a comprehensive understanding of the challenges facing urbanization perpetuate marginalization. The second section, Livelihoods and Vulnerabilities, investigates the socio-economic fallout of urbanization, with a strong focus on gendered inequities. It also offers a comparative analysis of employment patterns and highlights women's exclusion in peri-urban areas, while other chapters critique land acquisition policies and the legal frameworks shaping displacement.

The final section, Health, and Public Amenities examines spatial and socio-economic disparities in access to healthcare and infrastructure. Dr. Singh's and Dr. Reddy's contributions reveal the adverse effects of privatization and corporatization, emphasizing the urban poor's heightened vulnerabilities in a neoliberal economy

Overall, the book offers a nuanced critique of Delhi's urban trajectory, combining empirical research with theoretical insights. Its interdisciplinary approach and focus on marginalized groups provide readers with a comprehensive understanding of the challenges facing rapidly urbanizing cities, making it an essential contribution to the discourse on urban inequities in India.

To buy the book, please click here.

Dr. R. Siva Prasad
Interviewed by Saba Farhin, AIF

Dr. R. Siva Prasad did his PhD from the University of Mysore through the Institute for Social and Economic Change (ISEC), Bangalore, under the supervision of the late Prof. M.N. Srinivas, an eminent social anthropologist. Dr. Prasad is former Professor and Head of the Department of Anthropology and was also an Honorary Professor at the Centre for Digital Learning, Training and Resources, University of Hyderabad. He has held esteemed positions such as RBI Chair Professor, and Regional Director at the Council for Social Development, Hyderabad. He has been Assistant Professor, ISEC, Bangalore; Consultant (Sociology), OM Consultants (India) Pvt. Ltd., Bangalore; Assistant Professor (Sociology), ICSIM, Bangalore; and Lecturer in PG Studies in Sociology, Mangalore University.

Dr. Prasad has guided numerous research scholars and contributed extensively to academic literature through publications in reputed journals, and edited and co-edited books. He served on the editorial boards of various journals. He was actively associated with two National Commissions for Denotified, Nomadic, and Semi-Nomadic Tribes (DNSNT) under the Government of India. He has also been involved with the Danish Missions in Karnataka in 1989 and 2003 on Environmental Master Planning of the Western Ghats and Watershed Development Programmes. Currently, Dr. Prasad is a member of the Information Ethics Working Group under UNESCO's Information for All Programme (IFAP) and a Steering Committee Member of Translations Commons. Dr. Prasad has been at the forefront of fostering impactful research and policy initiatives and in this interview, we explore his journey, perspectives, and insights on key anthropological/sociological and ethical issues.

What inspired you to pursue anthropology as a field of study, and how did your academic journey shape your perspective of the discipline? Could you share any memorable experiences or challenges during your time as a PhD scholar under Prof. Srinivas?

I graduated with a degree in Botany, Zoology, and Chemistry. My upbringing was shaped by constant relocations due to my father's job in the railways. As a result, I lived with various relatives, which gave me a subdued sense of self-expression that influenced both my later academic discipline and my rebellious nature against imposed decisions. My interest in Zoology and Chemistry stemmed from my aptitude for drawing and it was also an act of defiance to avoid others goading me continuously, shaping my independent choices. Although I was initially interested in law and anthropology, a rejected application for law school led me to anthropology in 1972. Childhood experiences, like observing nomadic communities and sacrificial rituals, sparked my curiosity about cultural processes, steering me toward social anthropology despite excelling in physical anthropology. During my Masters at Andhra University, a turning point was when one of my teachers praised my answer on a topic in the exam that I wrote critically as akin to the Marxian framework, further encouraging me to pursue social anthropology. Despite the coaxing of the physical anthropology teacher, I chose the more challenging social anthropology which involved abstract thinking and working with communities. After completing my postgraduate studies in 1974, I joined the PhD programme under the late Prof. D.L. Prasad Rao. I had no scholarship initially but later due to some machinations I lost a fellowship, a meagre Rs. 200/-, which was crucial for my survival. During that time, I saw a news item about Prof. M.N. Srinivas in the Illustrated Weekly of India at our village's public library. After reading it, I wrote a letter to him, which eventually led to an opportunity at the Institute for Social and Economic Change, Bangalore, securing a scholarship and working under his wing. My struggles inspired a paper on the challenges usually faced by researchers while pursuing research and developing resilience in academics (Making Sense out of the Maze: Labyrinth of Research in 2014) in a book published by my esteemed friend Prof. Vinay Srivastava.

While pursuing my PhD at Waltair, I worked on a project under Prof. Ajit Roy, a Physical Anthropology Professor from the University of Toronto, who was a student of Prof. J.B.S. Halden. My task involved collecting extensive genealogies up to the depth of the 5th or 6th generation across three distinct communities in Andhra Pradesh — agricultural, fishing, and Adivasi. This early fieldwork allowed me to explore issues related to health, inheritance, marital distances, and more. Coming from a lower middle-class family and graduating from government schools, I faced significant challenges before joining ISEC. Initially, I was not confident about my writing and was a bit nervous when I submitted my research proposal to Prof. Srinivas. He suggested I read the works of Somerset Maugham and Aldous Huxley to improve my writing skills. He encouraged me to develop constructive criticism and a strong emphasis on humility. My PhD research was on Social Mobility in Bangalore City and was based on city survey data. It demanded extensive reading to analyse the multidimensional nature of the research problem.

In 1979, due to internal politics at the Institute, I faced some challenges, including shifting of supervisor at the Institute level. Ultimately, I got back to Prof. Srinivas who guided me through these hurdles. Teaching at Mangalore University, on the advice of Prof. Srinivas, proved instrumental in reshaping my thesis, although personal tragedies like my brother's sudden demise delayed its progress. My multidisciplinary experiences expanded through various consultancy projects on rural water supply and sanitation, social forestry, and others further leveraging my anthropological and sociological training. Prof. Srinivas's mentorship profoundly influenced my methodological approach and confidence in editing. I missed the opportunity to collaborate on potential research papers with Prof. Srinivas as I moved to Hyderabad to join the Department of Anthropology in 1991. These experiences underscored the transformative impact of resilience and adaptability in navigating academic and professional landscapes.

Could you discuss a project or piece of research that you feel had the most significant impact on the field or society? How do you view the role of anthropology in addressing contemporary social issues in India today?
Many of the answers to these questions are embedded in the earlier questions I answered. It is challenging to pinpoint how a specific piece of research will significantly impact the field or society. For instance, in public health, I worked on sanitation and rural water supply in Karnataka, providing practical solutions with policy implications that the then government implemented. Similarly, in social policy, the impact of a project depends on its relevance to larger societal needs. Since 1985, I have focused on research in development, particularly on irrigation projects and irrigation management systems affecting peasant and rural communities. My research dealt with land and water management, agronomic issues, and their influence on cultivation and environmental challenges. At the University of Hyderabad, I taught and researched peasant communities and natural resource management, integrating insights from various scholars.

My PhD work blends theory and methodology, looking into caste, class, and other social dimensions using Marxian and non-Marxian perspectives. Besides theoretical contributions, I have conducted impact assessment studies in forestry, sericulture, public health and other areas (projects were funded by the World Bank, SIDA, CIDA and DANIDA) utilising observable evaluation and other anthropological approaches to provide solutions to the stakeholders. I conducted training programmes for the NGOs (15 initially and later 75), working on the HIV/AIDS project for the Andhra Pradesh State AIDS Control Society, and training professionals, including anthropologists. This work highlighted the importance of anthropologists over solely professional doctors in such contexts. Collaborating with public health initiatives and policy reviews, including collaborative projects with colleagues in the Administrative Staff College of India, Hyderabad, I contributed to a critical viewing of public health policiesand interventions. The overall contribution of my

work to public health and societal development remains significant. I have worked on several impactful projects, including two under the Danish missions (DANIDA) - one on watershed management, and another on environmental master planning secured major funding for the Karnataka government. My contributions were recognised as an anthropologist, and my name was recommended to the then Danish Embassy for such works. Later, at the University of Hyderabad, I had to shift more towards academic research, though I undertook one or two consultancy projects for agencies like DFID.

My experiences underscored the importance of quick, practical solutions aligned with community needs. As anthropologists, we must engage beyond traditional methods, embrace interdisciplinary collaboration, and focus on solutions that benefit communities. For instance, while working on World Bank and Danish projects, the emphasis was on listening to people, modifying project objectives to suit the needs of the beneficiaries, and ensuring community acceptance. This approach influenced successful projects, including the AP Social Forestry Project in the late 1980s. Anthropology, as a multidisciplinary discipline, allowed me to contribute across disciplines. During my PhD, I was encouraged by Prof. Srinivas to incorporate statistical and quantitative methods to draw anthropological insights into my research that contributed to theoretical and methodological depths of understanding the problem of social mobility in an urban context. This proved important in diverse projects I was associated with, including a longitudinal study on children by the Centre for Economic and Social Studies examining policy impacts on their lives. My interest in law also led me to study Customary Modes of Dispute Resolution in Schedule V Areas to review PESA (2002), funded by the NIRD&PR, Hyderabad, and UNDP, focusing on alternative dispute resolution mechanisms in Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, and Orissa states. These experiences taught me the value of participatory approaches in development projects. Top-down methods often fail without community consultation and adaptation. Projects succeed when funders and implementers consider people as stakeholders, not just numbers. For example, while working with the World Bank, I argued for more human-centred economic analyses, emphasising that anthropologists could bring valuable perspectives to interdisciplinary teams.

I recall interacting with Dr D. Subba Rao, then Special Collector posted to look into the agency area problems post-Naxal movement, who later became the Governor of the Reserve Bank of India, during my fieldwork in 1975 in the Adivasi area of Parvatipuram in Andhra Pradesh. He mentioned that the government had constructed houses for communities that remained unoccupied. I pointed out that the government had failed to consult these communities about their preferences, such as the direction and layout of houses or their reluctance to live alongside other groups. This interaction emphasised the critical need for participatory approaches in development planning.

This is how I look at the role of anthropology in addressing contemporary social issues and fostering persuasive, evidence-based communication to influence policies positively.

How do you think the field of anthropology needs to evolve to remain relevant in the future? How do you see technology influencing the field of anthropology today? For example, in areas like information ethics, which deals with the responsible use of data and technology, how can anthropologists contribute to creating a more ethical digital world?

I have been working on these issues for nearly eight years, focusing on understanding the implications of digital technology on indigenous communities. As part of UNESCO's Working Group on Information Ethics under the Information for All Programme (IFAP), I have been contributing as an anthropologist, engaging in discussions with the other members of the Working Group. Our team leader, a senior Belgian scholar, played a key role in drafting UNESCO's AI ethics guidelines, the official document addressing the ethical concerns in AI. I have referred to the works of Indigenous scholars, particularly from Australia, to highlight how digital technologies impact the cultural and linguistic aspects of the Indigenous communities. Their work, "Indigenous Protocols," emphasises preserving cultural knowledge and languages using digital technologies. For instance, when indigenous languages and their cultural knowledge are undermined, their application value to address the problems is lost forever. Efforts to revive languages through scripts or technology, such as keyboards for Indigenous languages, are ongoing, but these take years to develop and adopt. My advocacy extends support to such initiatives by connecting communities with technology experts. Anthropology has always adapted to contemporary issues, and I believe we must guide students to explore relevant and emerging areas like digital anthropology, and digital forensics. Anthropology's strength lies in adapting methodologies like digital ethnography and addressing issues such as Indigenous knowledge preservation, language digitisation, and ethical AI. For instance, reliable local databases are crucial for creating effective AI models, and communities must co-produce this knowledge, retaining intellectual property rights and data sovereignty. I have raised these issues at forums like Translation Commons and IFAP conferences, advocating for the ethical use of Indigenous knowledge to address many problems in health, agriculture, environment, and disaster management. Moreover, tech companies must be sensitised to biases in AI algorithms and the ethical dimensions of using community data. Partnerships are key to ensuring that digital tools positively benefit both communities and society at large. Responsible AI, a concept we promote, emphasises accountability and respect for the communities that contribute knowledge and data. Universities and organisations must also educate students about the responsible use of digital technology, balancing its advantages with potential risks. These efforts underscore anthropology's evolving role in addressing modern challenges by collaborating across disciplines and leveraging digital technology responsibly and inclusively.

As someone who has guided students and contributed extensively to the field, what advice would you give to aspiring anthropologists and social scientists?

When guiding students, I always emphasise their interests over mine. Many students used to ask me to suggest an area of work, but I believe one can only excel in a field they find personally fascinating. Without genuine interest, one tends to jump between topics without focus. I encourage students to explore areas that they find interesting, delve into the literature, identify gaps, and contribute meaningfully. Many of my students have worked in diverse fields like knowledge systems, resource management, environmental issues, entrepreneurship, and other areas, often surpassing my knowledge in their chosen areas. I only acted as a guide, offering theoretical insights and logical structure to their research. I take pride in fostering diverse interests among my students, which showcases anthropology's versatility. For instance, one of my students worked on Manipur's architecture, which was well appreciated. I have a Senior Architecture faculty friend from Delhi, now working on his PhD in Portugal, who consults me and is exploring anthropology's intersection with architecture. These experiences demonstrate that anthropology connects with every field, from environmental studies to trade unions, management, and beyond. I advise aspiring anthropologists to adopt a multidisciplinary approach, avoid being influenced by personal biases, and embrace the holistic nature of anthropology. However, holism poses challenges in methodology and theory, as integration across physical, archaeological, and other perspectives remains limited. Anthropology's vastness means anyone can specialise in an area with passion. Esteemed anthropologists the world over exemplify this versatility by excelling in diverse fields. My advice: treat your work with passion, remain adaptable, and recognise that there is anthropology in every subject, method and learning opportunity.
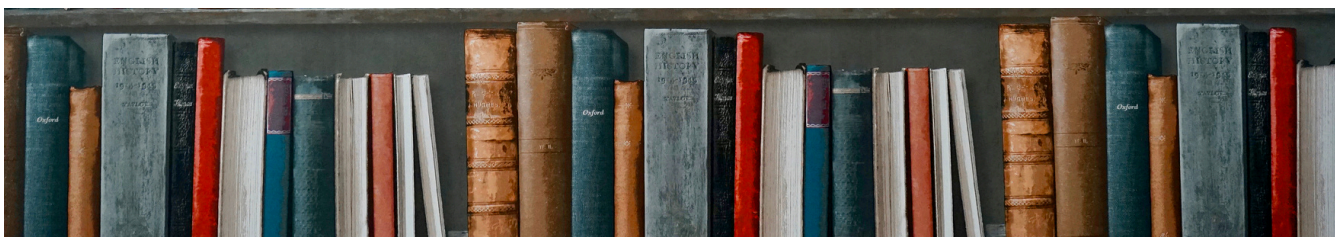
Belsnickel and Beyond: Exploring the Unique Traditions of Christmas Across Cultures

By Rithitha Senthilkumar, AIF

A Global Celebration of Christmas Traditions

Christmas is celebrated all over the world but the ways people mark this festive occasion are as varied as the cultures that embrace it. While many follow familiar customs like giving gifts, decorating trees or singing carols others have unique traditions rooted in local history and beliefs. These customs highlight the creativity and richness of cultural expression making Christmas a holiday that feels both global and personal.

For example, in Japan, families enjoy meals from KFC during Christmas, a tradition that began with a clever marketing campaign in the 1970s. In Austria, the fearsome Krampus roams the streets during Krampusnacht, punishing naughty children. In Catalonia, Spain, children laugh and cheer with "Caga Tió," a log that "poops" presents. Meanwhile, in Venezuela residents roller-skate to church filling the streets with joy and a sense of community. These traditions, though unconventional, embody the shared spirit of celebration and unity that defines Christmas.

Belsnickel: A Unique Christmas Figure

Among these fascinating customs is the story of Belsnickel, a figure from German folklore. Belsnickel's origins trace back to the Palatinate region of southwestern Germany, where he is also known by names like "Kriskinkle," "Beltznickle," and "Pelsnichol." The name "Belsnickel" is derived from two German words: "bels," meaning fur, and "nickel," a nickname for St. Nicholas. This reflects his appearance as a fur-clad figure associated with Christmas traditions rooted in St. Nicholas's lore.

When German immigrants settled in the United States, particularly in Pennsylvania Dutch communities, they brought Belsnickel's tradition with them. Here, he became a beloved yet slightly intimidating part of Christmas celebrations. Dressed in tattered clothes and a fur coat, he carries a mix of rewards and discipline: candies and nuts in one hand and a switch in the other. Instead of arriving discreetly through the chimney, Belsnickel announces his presence by knocking on windows or doors, often surprising the children inside.

Once he enters a home, Belsnickel questions the children about their behaviour, sometimes asking them to recite Bible verses to prove their virtue. Those who have been well-behaved are rewarded with treats such as cakes, nuts, and candies scattered on the floor. However, if the children greedily grab the treats, they may receive a light tap from his switch. For those who fail to demonstrate good behaviour, Belsnickel's punishments serve as a reminder of the importance of humility and discipline.

Belsnickel in Popular Media: The Role of The Office

In recent years, Belsnickel's story has reached wider audiences, thanks to modern media. A notable example is the popular TV show The Office. In one episode, Dwight Schrute, a character with Pennsylvania Dutch heritage, dresses as Belsnickel for the office Christmas party. Complete with a fur coat and switch, Dwight's portrayal of Belsnickel brought this unique tradition to the attention of viewers worldwide.

This humorous yet authentic depiction sparked curiosity about Belsnickel and his origins. It also showcased how media can serve as a powerful tool for sharing cultural traditions.

Cultural Syncretism and Social Regulation

Belsnickel's tradition is not just an entertaining story but also carries deeper social lessons. His dual role as a giver of rewards and a bearer of discipline teaches children about accountability and morality. By holding children to their promises to be good, Belsnickel embodies the concept of social regulation—using customs and traditions to reinforce community values and norms.

This practice ties into the idea of a cultural mosaic, where diverse traditions come together to create a vibrant picture of the human experience. Belsnickel's evolution from a German folk character to a figure recognized in popular media highlights how traditions adapt and thrive in new contexts. By blending the old with the new, cultural practices like Belsnickel's story continue to inspire and educate across generations.

Belsnickel Today: Keeping the Tradition Alive

Today, Belsnickel remains an integral part of Christmas celebrations in parts of Germany and the United States. In some communities, people organise events and re-enactments where Belsnickel makes appearances delighting children and adults alike. These gatherings blend historical customs with modern interpretations ensuring that the tradition stays relevant while honouring its roots. In Germany, Belsnickel shares the spotlight with other legendary figures like Krampus, a more sinister character who also punishes naughty children. Krampus's pagan origins and terrifying appearance contrast sharply with Belsnickel's mix of humour and discipline. Together, they represent the diverse ways in which cultures celebrate the balance of good and bad behaviour during holiday season.

The Universal Spirit of Christmas

Belsnickel's story is just one example of the many ways people celebrate Christmas across the globe. Exploring these diverse traditions allows us to appreciate both the unique and shared aspects of cultural celebrations. Whether through folklore, family gatherings, or media, figures like Belsnickel remind us that the spirit of Christmas is universal, uniting people in joy, reflection, and togetherness.

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ARTICLE

Christmas in India: Flavours throughout the Subcontinent's Kitchens
By Rakhi Yadav, AIF

Festivals are all about doughnuts and delights. Christmas is one such festival that is celebrated with a lot of joy and energy. People worldwide celebrate this festival with great pleasure while enjoying traditional food such as cakes, sweets, wines, etc. with their loved ones. The Christmas celebration in the Indian subcontinent can be traced to its colonial History. The country experienced a long-term Western/European presence and influence, from the Portuguese to the British till 1947. However, the Indian way of celebrating Christmas is largely different and diverse from other countries. People from the different regions of the Indian subcontinent prepare unique varieties of dishes on the occasion of this festival. Christmas meals are not just about food but also showcase the traditions that people follow from generation to generation with great faith and emotional connection.

According to the 2011 Census, Christians constitute 2.3% of the population in India. But fascinatingly, the celebration of this festival is not limited to that population. People from different religious faiths enjoy it too. It shows the cultural and religious harmony among the Indian masses. This article delves into the traditional Indian cuisines, which start to get prepared even a month before this festival arrives. It covers the traditional Indian Christmas cuisine of plains, coasts, and the hilly regions of the subcontinent, where these unique dishes are prepared in *desi* Indian style with unique tastes, using Indian spices, dairy products, jaggery, etc.

Plains

The Allahabadi Christmas Cake, a unique dish from Allahabad (now Prayagraj) in Uttar Pradesh, offers an Indian twist to the classic Christmas cake. Originating in the Anglo-Indian community during British times, its history dates back to 1963 when a Civil Lines bakery first prepared it as the *"Desi Christmas Cake"*. Over time, this tradition spread to local Christian households during Christmas. Unlike regular plum or fruit cakes, the *Allahabadi* version stands out with its use of *petha* (candied gourd), *desi* ghee instead of butter, and ingredients like marmalade, rum-soaked dry fruits, and spices like nutmeg, cinnamon, mace, and ginger. These elements give it a distinct Indian flavour, making it a cherished festive treat from the plains of India.

Allahabadi Christmas Cake
(Photo Credit Outlook Traveller)

Coastal Regions

The coastal regions of India, especially Kerala, have a rich history of Anglo-Indian and European influence. Kerala's Malabar region, home to the Syro-Malabar Christian community — one of the oldest Catholic denominations — has unique Christmas traditions shaped by the native Indian culture. For example, their cakes are made using everyday utensils instead of ovens. Popular festive foods include *Vattayappam*, soft and fluffy steamed rice cakes made with yeast, cardamom, and nuts, and *Achappam*, crispy flower-shaped rose cookies made from rice batter and sesame seeds, influenced by the Dutch colonial cuisine. Other favourites include *Ettakka Appam*, deep-fried banana fritters paired with six-month-old grape wine, adding a special touch to Syrian Christian Christmas celebrations.

Christmas in Maharashtra's Anglo-Indian community is incomplete without *Duck Moilee*, a traditional curry blending British and Indian flavours. The name "Moilee" comes from the Portuguese word "Molho," meaning sauce, highlighting Portuguese influence in the region. Originating in the Anglo-Indian kitchens of Maharashtra, Duck Moilee has become a must-have Christmas dish. It features duck cooked in coconut milk with Indian spices like turmeric, coriander, cumin, ginger, and garlic, along with aromatic herbs. Curry leaves, green chillies, and fresh coriander further enhance its flavour giving it a distinct Indian touch. Alongside this festive favourite, several other dishes are joyfully prepared in Anglo-Indian homes during Christmas.

Goa, with its majority Christian population, celebrates Christmas with a mix of Portuguese and local traditions. The festival is especially notable for its unique foods prepared in Goan Christian kitchens. *Bebinca*, a popular dessert, reflects Portuguese influence with a Goan twist, made using flour, sugar, ghee, eggs, and coconut milk, and featuring 7 to 14 layers. Other famous dishes include Goan Fish Curry Rice, Roast Turkey, Pork Vindaloo, and Beef Roulade — a dish blending French and Portuguese influences with Indian spices. *Sorpotel*, a pork dish, is another Christmas favourite. Sweets like *Neureos*, a type of festive pastry, and *Batica*, a traditional cake, are common snacks. Goa's Christmas celebrations showcase its rich multicultural traditions and cultural harmony.

Hilly Regions

In the Northeast, Christmas celebrations are incomplete without non-vegetarian dishes, reflecting the region's tribal culture and Christian faith, influenced by the colonial past. In Nagaland, where most people follow Christianity, the festive season highlights traditional food like Smoked Pork Curry. Made with smoked pork, potatoes, tomatoes, green chillies, and local spices, it is served with plain rice and holds great importance during Christmas. Naga doughnuts are another popular festive treat, but Smoked Pork Curry remains the most celebrated dish of the season.

In Manipur, the Christmas celebration is marked by the traditional dish, known as *Nga Atobia Thongba*, which is a fish curry with mashed potatoes and pear.

Mizoram's traditional festive dish is *Kaukswe*. Inspired by Burmese Kaukswe, it is a mild curry served with noodles. Its unique feature is the blend of Indian spices cooked in coconut milk, giving it a yellow colour. Garnished with coriander and lime, the most popular version includes eggs and chicken, though there are various ways to prepare it. The other northeastern states have traditional Christmas dishes like the *Zan* of Arunachal Pradesh, Assam's *Khar* etc. Every region has its unique and diverse way of celebrating the same festivals. This diversity of celebrating the same festival with different traditional tastes and flavours showcases that the Indian subcontinent is so diverse when it comes to culture and tradition.

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1. Achappam 2. Duck Moilee 3. Nga Atobia Thonba 4. Bebinca 5. Kaukswe 6. Smoked Pork Curry
(Photo Credit: Kerala Tourism, Outlook, Nga Atobia Thonba-Lukthel, Outlook Traveller, The Week, and The Times of India, respectively)

E-Resource Center Invitation
We realize that there is no centralized resource center for the Anthropological works of Indian Anthropologists, where a scholar can look for publications - articles, papers and books. Thus, AIF is developing an anthropological e-resource center hosted at the AIF website www.anthroposindiafoundation.com. Given your valuable contribution to anthropological discourse in India, we would be glad if you can share your publication to be uploaded on the AIF e-resource center, which will benefit all the researchers from India and abroad interested in various fields of the discipline. This will be one of its kind e-resource repository. Do let us know if you have any questions or queries.

'Childhood Matters'- AIF's Participatory, Multilingual, Quarterly Digital Magazine
AIF brings out a digital magazine for increasing awareness about child rights issues and sensitize about various aspects of children and childhood. Despite stringent laws, the crimes against children are increasing, this magazine is a humble effort to create a safe environment for the wellbeing and overall development of children. It is a participatory magazine. *We welcome all the readers to freely contribute articles for the upcoming issues along with sharing their feedback at* aif.digitalmagazine@gmail.com. The editorial team will have the final say in selection of the articles. For subscribing to the upcoming issue of the magazine, kindly register **here**.

For contributing articles to our monthly Newsletter, kindly email us at: aif.newsletter2025@gmail.com.

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