

Newsletter

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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.

EDITOR: Dr Sunita Reddy

Founder-Chairperson, AIF

CORE TEAM:

Dr Shaweta Anand

(Senior Consultant & Coordinator, AIF)

Habiba Haroon

(Graphic Design & Social Media)

Aryan Bande

(Technical Resource Person)

Saba Farhin

(Newsletter Coordinator)

CONTRIBUTORS

Saba Farhin, R. Harini, Vidarshna Mehrotra, Akhilesh Bonthu, Subham Kundu

📞 9818858383

✉ anthroposif@gmail.com

🌐 <https://anthroposindiafoundation.com>

Do you want to organise training programmes in hybrid mode through hands-on workshops? We conduct trainings on themes such as ethnography, ethical use of AI tools, academic writing and publications, child rights, good parenting practices etc. among others. If you want to train your team, then look no further!

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Our team will do the rest.**

FORTHCOMING EVENT

Online Workshop on Writing an Effective Grant Proposal, 21st - 22nd December, 2024

Unlock the secrets of successful grant proposal writing in our upcoming workshop! Join us for insightful sessions led by distinguished speakers from ICSSR, UGC, ICMR, and the EU.

Don't miss this opportunity to enhance your grant writing skills.

Click [here](#) to know more about the workshop.



JOB/FELLOWSHIP ALERTS

1. Roster of Consultants for Outcomes Based Finance (OBF) Programme Expertise, UNICEF Hosted Fund
Last Date to Apply: 10.01.2025
Application Link: [Click here](#)
2. Internship: unior Archivist, DFAM, New York Headquarters
Last Date to Apply: 31.12.2024
Application Link: [Click here](#)
3. Research Assistant Internships, Wilson Centre, USA.
Last Date to Apply: 08.12.2024
Application Link: [Click here](#)
4. Special Recruitment Drive, University of Hyderabad
Last Date to Apply: 09.12.2024
Application Link: [Click here](#)

Report on the Mastering the Art of Publishing Research Papers and Bookshop organised by Anthropos India Foundation

30th November-1st December 2024



Anthropos India Foundation hosted a two-day online workshop on "Mastering the Art of Publishing Research Papers & Books," that focused on equipping participants with essential skills and knowledge for successfully publishing academic work. The sessions focused on understanding the publishing process, selecting the right journals or publishers, responding effectively to reviewer feedback, and addressing ethical concerns. It also provided the participants with practical insights into traditional and self-publishing, book proposal writing, and guidance for publishing with reputable platforms like Springer Nature and ANTHROPOS BOOKS. The workshop was designed for researchers and aspiring authors and was led by experienced professionals from diverse academic and publishing backgrounds.

The event organised by Dr. Shaweta Anand, Saba Farhin, Aryan Bande, Habiba Haroon - the organising committee of the Anthropos India Foundation; was a success benefitting 25 Phd scholars, students and professionals from various institutes in India like Calcutta University, Sambalpur University, North-Eastern Hill University etc. The participants engaged in insightful discussions with the distinguished speakers, seeking their expert guidance on overcoming challenges and obstacles in the publishing process. They shared their personal experiences, sought advice on navigating common difficulties such as manuscript preparation, responding to reviewer feedback, and choosing the right journals or publishers, and gained valuable insights into strategies for successfully advancing their academic publishing journey.

The workshop featured an impressive lineup of distinguished speakers, including Dr. Aaron Kahn, Dr. Alison Kahn, Dr. Subho Roy, Dr. Sigamani Panneer, Ms. Satvinder Kaur, Mr. Pranav Gupta, and Dr. Sunita Reddy. Each speaker shared their valuable experiences and insights into the academic publishing process. Topics discussed included strategies for getting research published, collaborating with and selecting the right co-authors, identifying suitable journals, adhering to ethical practices, positively addressing reviewer feedback, overcoming rejections, and crafting a compelling book proposal leading to a book publication.

Dr. Sunita Reddy captivated the audience by sharing her journey of publishing her first research work and her experience authoring books like *Marginalization in Globalizing Delhi* and *Ethnomedicine and Tribal Healing Practices in India*. She encouraged participants to stay resilient despite rejections, emphasizing consistency and focus on the "publish or perish" principle. She also introduced the publications of the Anthropos India Foundation (AIF), highlighting its current and upcoming titles, and offered practical advice for aspiring authors on publishing their work with AIF.

Dr. Subho Roy delivered an insightful session using a presentation to guide participants through the essentials of academic publishing. He discussed the increasing importance and challenges of publishing, highlighting interdisciplinary journals like *Public Health and Nutrition*, *Menopause*, and *Gene*. Dr. Roy emphasized the importance of patience and strategic planning in the publication process. He advised selecting appropriate outlets, thoroughly reviewing the aims, scope, and author guidelines of target journals, and understanding impact factors. He also explained how to structure an article with proper headings and subheadings and offered tips for writing an effective abstract. Sharing insights from his own journey, he encouraged participants to learn from their mistakes, stay motivated, and persist in their efforts, underscoring the "publish or perish" principle.

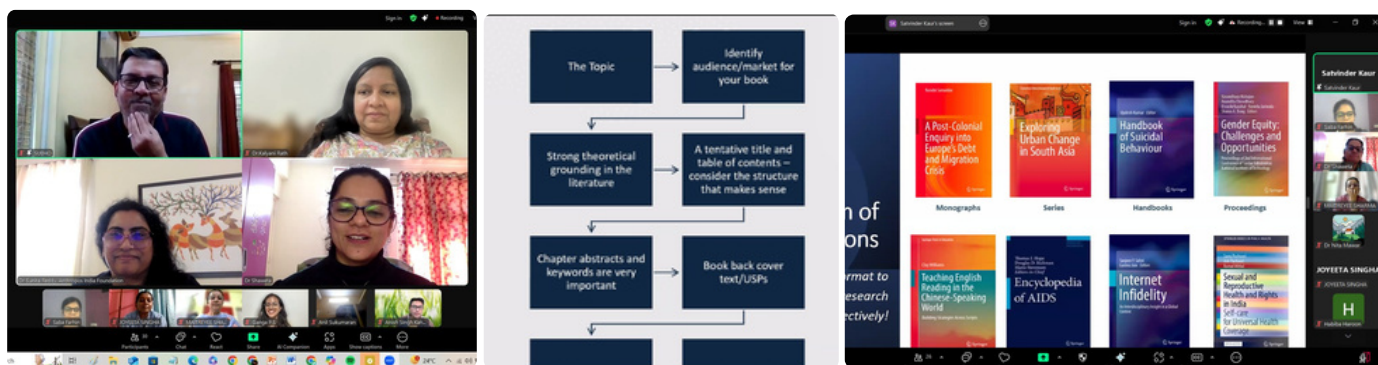
Dr. Aaron and Dr. Alison Kahn led a joint session on publishing in international journals. Dr. Aaron advised choosing research topics you're passionate about, enriching articles with current insights, avoiding outdated work, and addressing research gaps. He provided tips on writing concise, formal articles, avoiding slang, and crafting strong book proposals with market demand. Dr. Alison shared strategies to overcome self-doubt, including creating a professional website to showcase work and building collaborations. She also discussed publisher licenses and ways to strengthen academic credibility.

Dr. Sigamani's session was an interactive and activity-based workshop designed to enhance participants' research and academic skills. The session focused on essential prerequisites such as preparing research reports, manuscripts, and addressing peer review feedback. Participants were encouraged to engage in writing analytical fieldwork reports, research papers, and contributing to editorial and peer review processes. Through discussions based on participants' responses to the presented material, the session emphasized practical application and critical thinking to prepare for real-world research and publishing activities.

Ms. Satvinder Kaur's session provided an insightful overview of the publication process with Springer Publications. She discussed the spectrum of publishing, including research papers, books, and the essential components of a strong proposal. She highlighted the costs involved in open-access publishing, the ethical practices Springer upholds, and guidance on converting a PhD thesis into a quality book. The session also addressed the challenges of using unreliable digital tools like ChatGPT, unethical research practices, and the decline of low-cost publishing in Asia and Africa post-COVID. Mr. Pranav Gupta, the final speaker, provided an informative overview of the Indian publishing industry, focusing on its structure

and opportunities. He introduced the Federation of Indian Publishers and its role in representing and supporting the industry. Highlighting the diverse genres available for publication, he encouraged authors to explore various avenues. Additionally, he emphasized the importance of adhering to copyright laws and giving proper acknowledgment in publications, ensuring ethical practices. His session offered valuable insights for aspiring writers and researchers seeking to navigate the publishing landscape in India.

The workshop concluded with Dr. Sunita Reddy engaging with participants, seeking their feedback, addressing their concerns, and offering valuable advice tailored to their current situations. She highlighted publication opportunities with Anthropos India Foundation, encouraging participants to contribute through research articles, papers, blogs, and books. Her closing remarks inspired attendees to actively pursue their academic and professional goals while leveraging the resources and platforms provided by the foundation.



BOOK REVIEW

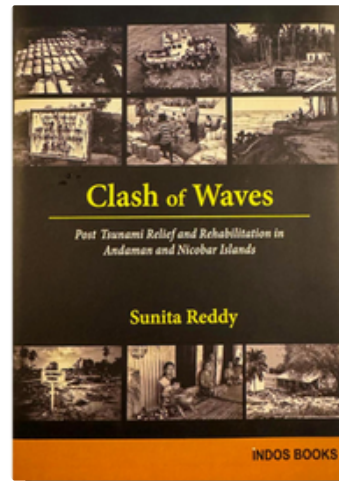
“Clash of Waves: Post Tsunami Relief and Rehabilitation in Andaman and Nicobar Islands” by Sunita Reddy. Book reviewed by *Habiba Haroon, AIF*

This book offers an in-depth anthropological analysis based on five years of longitudinal research into the post-tsunami relief and rehabilitation efforts following the devastating tsunami of December 26, 2004. The tsunami caused widespread destruction across the coastal regions of Tamil Nadu and the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, profoundly disrupting lives and livelihoods. Dr Reddy aptly titles her work *Clash of Waves*, reflecting the clash between the waves of helplessness and rehabilitation. Her keen ethnographic observations holistically capture the disaster—from the human and physical devastation to the efforts of governments and NGOs, as well as the challenges faced by victims in returning to normalcy. She highlights the importance of anthropology in disaster studies, emphasizing that disasters are not merely “physical phenomena with technical solutions” but also events with deep social, cultural, economic, and psychological impacts.

Through vivid examples, such as the experience of the Nicobarese, Dr Reddy illustrates how government-built shelters—both temporary and permanent—often clashed with the cultural values and preferences of affected communities. She critiques the “demand-based” approach of post-tsunami relief, which lacked grassroots involvement and relied heavily on top-down planning. Her approach, she argues, undermined the resilience and traditional knowledge of local communities, making even the most extensive and costly efforts ineffective.

She also highlights how aid distribution sometimes exacerbated tensions within communities.

However, even a decade later, the impacts of the tsunami remained, despite substantial financial investments in relief and rehabilitation efforts.



Dr Reddy criticizes the relief measures as chaotic and poorly coordinated, likening them to “firefighting” rather than sustainable solutions. In conclusion, *Clash of Waves* offers a holistic perspective for understanding disaster management, making it an essential resource for social scientists, NGOs, and policymakers involved in disaster studies and planning. The book serves as a vital contribution to the field, advocating for community-driven approaches to disaster relief and recovery.

YOU CAN BUY THE BOOK [HERE](#).



Prof. Deepak K. Behera

Professor Deepak K. Behera is currently the Vice Chancellor of Kalinga Institute of Social Sciences (KISS) Deemed to be University in Bhubaneswar, Odisha. He has had a distinguished career, earning numerous national and international honours, including Fulbright Visiting Fellow at California State University, Long Beach; DAAD Visiting Guest Professor at the University of Tübingen, Germany; Carlos Chagas National Foundation Research Fellow in Brazil; National Research Foundation Fellow in South Africa; European Union CISCA Fellow; Indo-French Academic Exchange Fellow, ICSSR, New Delhi; and Indo-Israel Cultural and Educational Exchange Fellow, UGC, New Delhi. He has also served as the Vice Chancellor of Berhampur University, Sambalpur University and Rajendra University. Professor Behera is a recipient of the prestigious Sarat Chandra Roy Memorial Gold Medal by the Asiatic Society, Kolkata, for his outstanding contribution to the field of Cultural Anthropology in India. He is the author of more than 120 research publications and 19 books in the fields of Tribal Studies and Children & Childhood. Additionally, Professor Behera was a Fulbright Visiting Professor at California State University, Long Beach, and a (Retired) Professor in the Department of Anthropology at Sambalpur University. 25 scholars have earned their Ph.D. and two others a D.Litt. Degree working under the supervision of Professor Behera. He is currently the President of the United Indian Anthropology Forum.

In an interview, Prof. Behera shared insights into his career journey and vision for the upcoming generation of anthropologists.

Can you share your journey and what inspired you to pursue a career in anthropology?

My journey has been one of ups and downs, starting from a rural primary school in Sundargarh, an economically backward district, to studying at CS Chandrasekhar Behera Zilla High School in Sambalpur. After completing the 11th standard (not yet a 10+2 system), I joined GM College (now a university) and graduated with Botany honours in 1976. During this time, I was an accomplished cricketer, representing Odisha in the under-21 Col C K Nayudu Trophy and aspiring to play in the Ranji Trophy.

Due to the demanding practical schedule in science, I switched to Anthropology, which had been newly introduced at Sambalpur University, which had fewer practical sessions. Initially, I struggled, even facing ridicule from the head of the department, Prof. S.N. Ratha, who doubted my ability to succeed. Deeply humiliated but determined, I gave up cricket and channelled my energy into mastering Anthropology, applying the principles I learned from cricket—hard work, patience, self-confidence, dedication, and willpower. Within six months, I turned things around, becoming a university gold medallist, and eventually completing my Master's and PhD.

I began my career as a temporary lecturer and retired as a professor after serving as the Head of the Department for 13 years. My collaborations with over 50 overseas scholars

enriched the department. I served on the Executive Council of the International Union of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences (IUAES) for 11 years and as the founding Chairperson of its Commission on Anthropology of Children, Youth and Childhood for over two decades. Currently, I am the Vice Chancellor of Kalinga Institute of Social Sciences, Bhubaneswar, in my fourth tenure as a Vice Chancellor after similar roles at Berhampur, Sambalpur, and Rajendra Universities.



I was a visiting Guest Professor at the Eberhard Karls University of Tübingen, Germany and have received numerous national and international honors, including the Fulbright Fellowship, fellowships from Brazil's National Foundation, South Africa's NRF, Indo-French Academic Fellowship, and academic awards from the EU, ICSSR and UGC. My academic contributions include 120 papers, 19 books on 'tribal studies', and 'children and childhood', and the supervision of 25 PhDs and two D.Litts. I am also the recipient of the Sarat Chandra Roy Memorial Gold Medal from the Asiatic Society for my contributions to Cultural Anthropology.

What began as an accidental choice has defined my life. Today, I hold deep respect for the teacher who doubted me, as his challenge pushed me to achieve beyond expectations.

Anthropology is a relatively lesser-known subject and was often a second choice for many successful anthropologists, including you. Do you believe initiatives should be taken to spread awareness of this subject and highlight its significance?

You're absolutely right, many seasoned anthropologists became anthropologists by accident, not by choice and it was an accident in my case as well. I'm now more into academic administration, but I find anthropology incredibly rich. Perhaps my success in academic administration stems from my focus on this area. It has provided me with innovative ideas that I've applied in administration. As I mentioned in my lecture organised by Anthropos India Foundation, anthropology is a lesser-known field, and within it, areas like the anthropology of children and childhood are even less explored. This is a critical subject, especially in education. At my institution, which includes a school, college, and university, I apply anthropological perspectives on children and childhood extensively. Anthropology should challenge contemporary issues, particularly in education. With the introduction of NEP 2020, the discipline has a vital role to play in addressing cultural perspectives and indigenous education. We must voice our insights instead of being silent spectators.

I encourage young scholars like you to explore this promising field. It's still relatively unexplored, with only a few like Professors Sunita Reddy and Gitika Ranjan working on it in India. Specializing in the anthropology of children and childhood offers immense potential.

Your published research primarily focuses on 'tribal studies' and 'children and childhood'. Is there any issue you've encountered over the years that is commonly overlooked and should be addressed?

There is a noticeable trend in anthropology where children are often sidelined in research, particularly in ethnographic studies. Children are typically given a peripheral role, and are rarely viewed as social actors with rights. Lawrence Hartsfield's 2002 article highlights this issue, arguing that anthropologists have systematically ignored children, drawing parallels between early anthropological views of children as 'primitives', 'immature', 'irrational', and 'not yet fully human beings'.

This oversight is evident in classic ethnographic studies, where children, despite constituting a significant portion of the population (e.g., 35% in India), are excluded from the study in anthropology. This neglect stems partly from the misconception that children fall outside anthropology's domain, being relegated instead to developmental psychology. Consequently, there is a severe lack of literature on the anthropology of children and childhood in India, especially regarding indigenous children.

Another issue is treating childhood as a single, homogenous category. Childhood is a cultural construct, varying across time, space, and cultural contexts. Failing to account for this diversity leads to erroneous conclusions. Addressing these issues requires Indian anthropologists, especially younger scholars, to explore this largely neglected field. This area holds immense potential and should be prioritized in future research.

What are some of the most significant challenges you've faced in your research in all these years and how did you overcome them?

I have not faced many significant challenges in my research, as I have always sought to turn challenges into opportunities. The only major difficulty early on was the lack of adequate literature on the anthropology of children and childhood. I overcame this by accessing excellent resources from overseas libraries during my tenure as a visiting professor at various universities and with the help of international colleagues.

Throughout my career, I have supervised 25 scholars in tribal studies and the anthropology of children and childhood, with most of my publications focusing on these areas. I co-authored works with over a dozen reputed overseas scholars and brought more than 100 international academics to Sambalpur University, despite its locational disadvantage. I also organized major events like the IUAES Inter-Congress 2012 and WAC 2022 in Bhubaneswar. My research has taken me on 43 international academic tours, and I've served as a visiting professor at eight universities across South America, North America, Europe, Africa, and South Asia. I have received prestigious international scholarships and fellowships, including acting as a counterpart to Professor Georg Pfeffer in the Odisha Research Project funded by the German Research Council. This collaboration resulted in seven German scholars completing their doctorates under my local supervision and the publication of 10 volumes on tribal studies by Concept Publishing, New Delhi, now widely used in Indian and overseas universities. Overall, I have embraced challenges as opportunities, striving to overcome them throughout my academic journey.

How do you see the field of anthropology evolving in the next decade, especially in India? What advice would you give to young anthropologists who are just starting their careers?

First, it is crucial to focus on decolonizing anthropology. Indian anthropologists must move beyond Western-centric perspectives, recognizing and amplifying indigenous knowledge systems. This shift requires ensuring that research practices remain ethical and do not exploit marginalized communities. Ethical awareness of representation and power dynamics is vital in addressing these issues. Next, integrating technology into anthropology is essential in today's digital age. Advances in artificial intelligence, machine learning, and data analytics are revolutionizing fieldwork and analysis. Tools like virtual ethnography, digital archives, and AI-driven data processing enable researchers to access larger and more diverse populations, broadening the discipline's reach. Another critical area is environmental anthropology,

India's diverse cultural landscape also offers immense potential for exploring cultural heritage and identity. Anthropologists can delve into topics like regional identities, traditional knowledge systems, and the impact of globalization on indigenous communities, while also preserving and analysing the politics of cultural representation. Furthermore, ethnography remains the hallmark of anthropology, yet contemporary challenges such as political polarization and government policies on citizenship and identity require researchers to navigate complex ethical and political landscapes with reflexivity and sensitivity.

For younger anthropologists, I recommend building a strong foundation in theory and methodology, as these are critical for producing high-quality research. Many Indian anthropologists excel in data collection but struggle to connect their findings with theoretical frameworks or develop strong writing skills. Developing expertise in classical and contemporary theories, as well as methodologies like ethnography, quantitative and qualitative research, and digital methods, is essential as anthropologists like Dr Sunita Reddy are promoting this digital anthropology that will gain ground in the coming years. Moreover, engaging deeply with local communities is paramount. Fieldwork remains central to anthropology, and fostering ethical relationships with the communities under study is critical for meaningful research. Always consider the broader impact of your work on the community. Young researchers should also be flexible and interdisciplinary, incorporating tools like digital technology, data science, and AI into their work. Addressing social justice and advocacy issues, such as inequality and climate change, ensures the discipline's relevance in tackling real-world concerns. Building networks and seeking mentorship is another crucial step. Attending conferences, collaborating across disciplines, and engaging with senior scholars can significantly aid career development. Experienced mentors, particularly those aligned with your research interests, can provide invaluable guidance. Lastly, I urge younger anthropologists to embrace lifelong learning. Stay curious, ask questions, and read widely. Anthropology is a continuously evolving field that requires openness to new perspectives and interdisciplinary research. Accommodating diverse viewpoints will not only enrich your understanding but also make your contributions more impactful. The next decade is an exciting time for anthropology in India, offering endless opportunities for research in a context marked by the complexities of tradition, modernity, and inequality. By balancing theoretical rigor with practical relevance and embracing cultural relativism, younger anthropologists can make meaningful contributions to the field while addressing the pressing issues of a rapidly changing world.

The future of anthropology lies in the ability of younger generations to engage with real-world issues while understanding and respecting human diversity through cultural relativism. It is vital to approach communities within the context of their own cultures and uphold the discipline's values. By 2047, today's budding anthropologists will be seasoned leaders, responsible for ensuring the discipline's survival and growth. The future of anthropology depends on their commitment to understanding and representing communities ethically and effectively.



Saba Farhin in an interview with Prof. Deepak K. Behera

DISTINGUISHED GUEST LECTURE

Dr. Behera's lecture on Anthropology of Children and Childhood 14th Nov. 2024 at 07:00 pm

On the occasion of Children's Day, Anthropos India Foundation (AIF) organized a distinguished lecture delivered by Prof. Deepak K. Behera, Vice Chancellor of Kalinga Institute of Social Sciences, Bhubaneswar. Prof. Behera is a renowned scholar with over 120 research publications and 19 books, specializing in Tribal Studies and Children & Childhood. His illustrious career includes international honours such as the Fulbright Visiting Fellowship, DAAD Visiting Professorship, and the Sarat Chandra Roy Memorial Gold Medal and many more. The event was chaired by Dr. Sunita Reddy, Chairperson of AIF, who delivered the valedictory address, and Prof. Behera was introduced by Dr. Shweta, who highlighted his remarkable contributions to anthropology and academia.

Understanding Childhood: A Cultural Construct

Prof. Behera began his lecture by emphasizing that childhood is not merely a biological stage but a cultural construct influenced by time, space, and context. He underscored the interdisciplinary nature of studying children through the lenses of cultural, biological, linguistic, and archaeological anthropology. He criticized early anthropological perceptions of children as "immature" and "incompetent," which relegated childhood studies to the domain of developmental psychology. Drawing on Melville Herskovits' seminal work *Man and His Works* (1948), Prof. Behera pointed out the limited focus on children in classical ethnographic literature despite their integral role in shaping societies.

The Marginalization of Children in Anthropology

Prof. Behera highlighted the marginalization of children in anthropological discourse, referencing Hirschfeld Lawrence's controversial article *Why Don't Anthropologists Like Children?* (2002). This work argued that anthropologists systematically sidelined children, often equating them with "primitive" societies, which resulted in minimal interest in children's lives. However, he noted that in recent years, the emergence of the Anthropology of Childhood as a distinct subfield has expanded the discipline's scope. Ethnographies within this field have revealed the diversity of childhood experiences across cultural backgrounds, challenging the homogeneity often imposed by developmental psychology.

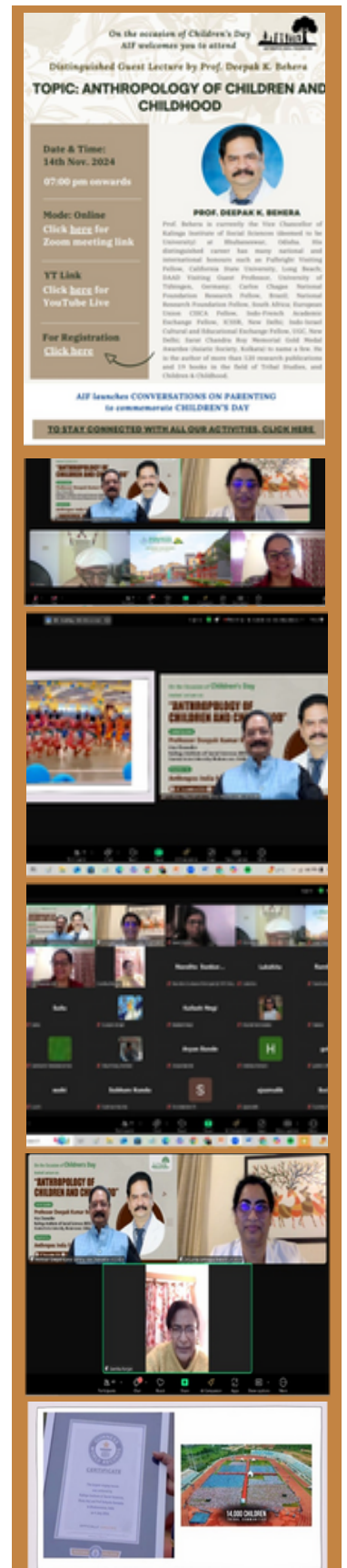
Anthropology of Childhood: Relevance in Contemporary Times

La Fontaine (1986) and Benthall (1992) were pivotal in establishing the Anthropology of Childhood as a legitimate field of study, and Lancy (2012) further traced its historical evolution. Prof. Behera stressed the growing importance of this subdiscipline, particularly in India, where children constitute 35% of the population. Recent works (2021-2023) have delved into the unique challenges faced by Indian children, shaped by changing socio-cultural contexts, educational reforms, and digital exposure. He underscored the urgency of studying children's agency and their role as active social actors in shaping their circumstances rather than as passive recipients of adult-imposed rules.

Vision Vikshit Bharat 2047: The Role of Anthropology in Shaping Futures

Prof. Behera concluded his lecture by connecting it to India's Vision 2047, emphasizing that today's children will become the architects of the nation's future. He argued for an inclusive anthropological approach that integrates children's voices and experiences into the study of communities. Highlighting the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, he critically examined its Eurocentric framework, and advocated for culturally contextualized policies that uphold children's rights in India. Prof. Behera called upon anthropologists to bridge the gap between theoretical frameworks and ground realities to create a more child-inclusive anthropology.

The lecture, organized by AIF, served as a thought-provoking platform for exploring the intersection of anthropology and childhood, challenging prevailing perceptions, and emphasizing the importance of children in shaping both academic inquiry and societal progress.



Sacred Peaks and Silent Struggles: The Irulas' Bond with Rangaswamy Peak

by Rithitha Senthilkumar, AIF



Figure 1: Harvesting festival celebrated in Rangaswamy Peak

The Irula community, one of the six Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs) in Tamil Nadu shares a profound and enduring connection to the Nilgiris and surrounding areas including parts of Kerala and Karnataka. This connection is twofold: it encompasses both their deep-rooted relationship with the landscape and their intricate belief systems. This article delves into their relationship with Rangaswamy Peak, a site of immense spiritual and cultural significance while highlighting the challenges posed by external influences, modernization and the commodification of their sacred traditions.

Irulas: The Irula community, also known by names like Iruligaru, Iruliga and Iruvan is believed to derive its name from the Tamil word “Irul” meaning “darkness” or “night.” This connection stems from their dark complexion, their life in dense forests and their tradition of holding significant events such as tribal councils, marriages and funerals during the night (Thurston, 2020). Irulas have preserved their unique language, Irula Baasha which belongs to the proto-Dravidian family.

Religious Beliefs and the Role of Ranga: The Irulas practice a polytheistic faith rooted in territorial and clan affiliations. They worship Toga, protective and familial deities alongside Kula Deivam (clan deity) and ancestral spirits. This belief system which integrates nature worship and elements of Hindu deities exemplifies the syncretic evolution of their spirituality.

The deity Ranga holds a pivotal place in their pantheon. Ranga is said to manifest at three sacred sites: Rangaswamy Peak in Kotagiri, Karamadai and Biligiri Rangana Hills in Mysore, underscoring the spatial dimensions of Irula spirituality. Rituals for Ranga often involve community pilgrimages and acts of devotion such as tonsuring their children at shrines like the Karamadai Rangaswamy Temple, Rangasamy Betta, Bannari Mariamman Temple and Rangaramar Temple in Sathyamangalam (Hockings, 1989).

The Rangaswamy Temple presents a remarkable example of stone worship, where natural elements are seamlessly intertwined with spiritual beliefs. The sanctity of the temple is rooted in its distinctive rock formations, which are revered as the embodiment of the deity Rangaswamy (Lord Vishnu). This practice can be understood through the

lens of fetishism, a concept introduced by Auguste Comte which describes the attribution of divine or supernatural qualities to inanimate objects. In the context of the Irula community, this reverence for the rock formations represents a fusion of fetishistic beliefs with nature worship. The rocks are not merely geological formations but are perceived as sacred entities embodying divine power. This connection reflects a cultural tradition where sacred landscapes and material objects are seen as vessels of spiritual significance—a practice that resonates with the broader patterns of indigenous and tribal spirituality

Rangaswamy Peak: A Sacred Summit: Located on the northeastern hills of the Nilgiris, Rangaswamy Peak serves as the spiritual heart of the Irula community. Known as Rangaswamy Koil, the shrine becomes the center of their harvest festival celebrated from May to June. This significant event involves an arduous trek through dense forests to honour their deity with rituals exclusively performed by Irula priests to preserve the sanctity of their practices.

The Irula priesthood plays a central role in maintaining the sacred traditions associated with Rangaswamy Peak. The Irulas have their own priests who perform rituals for both the Irula community and Hindu worshippers. Among the Irulas there are twelve exogamous lineages (ie) Kurunaga, Olaga, Chambai, Devennan, Kalkatti, Kuduvan, Kuppan, Perava, Porigan, Punga, Uppikan, and Vellaikan. Traditionally, these priests come from the Kalkatt lineage particularly from families residing near Kallampalayam village in Nilgiris (Hockings, 1989).

Rituals at Rangaswamy Peak are conducted on Saturdays in the Tamil months of Purattaasi and Aippasi (mid-August to October) culminating in significant ceremonies. The Irula priest meticulously prepares the altar with offerings such as smashed coconuts, bananas, incense, camphor and marigold petals.

The Badagas, another prominent ethnic group in the Nilgiris, have sought to integrate Ranga worship into Hindu practices introducing rituals like palabhishekam (pouring milk over the deity). This process of Hinduisation often undermines the autonomy of the Irulas and diminishes their cultural identity. While the Badagas have contributed to infrastructural improvements such as electricity and water

for Rangaswamy Koil disputes persist over the nature of rituals performed.

The Irula community, whose traditional practices are deeply rooted in animism, emphasizes rituals centered on offerings like grains, flowers and stone worship which reflect their connection to the natural environment. In contrast, the Badagas' adoption of Hindu rituals has shifted the focus toward more elaborate ceremonies often requiring financial resources and symbolic materials not traditionally used by the Irulas. This process of Hinduisation not only alters the ritualistic practices at Rangaswamy Koil but also risks marginalizing the Irula community by overshadowing their cultural traditions.

Commodification of Sacred Landscapes

Rangaswamy Peak, one of the 40 curated trekking trails under the "Trek Tamil Nadu" initiative—a collaborative project between the Tamil Nadu Forest Department (TNFD) and the Tamil Nadu Wilderness Experiences Corporation—stands as a stark example of the commercialization of indigenous sacred landscapes. While this initiative aims to promote eco-tourism and adventure through its "tough" trekking trail, it inadvertently commodifies sites like Rangaswamy Peak stripping them of their spiritual significance and disrupting the Irula community's autonomy over their sacred spaces.

The TNFD appears to be striving for a balanced approach by regulating trekking activities and incorporating conservation principles. However, the realities on the ground raise significant concerns. The influx of tourists has led to increased littering, noise pollution and damage to the fragile ecosystem surrounding the peak.

The increasing commercialization of Rangaswamy Peak may also influence the aspirations and identities of the Irula youth. Through a phenomenon known as the demonstration effect, the Irula youth may observe tourists' behaviours, lifestyles and material desires leading them to aspire to similar ways of life. This can result in a gradual shift away from their indigenous traditions and values as modern lifestyles and consumerism take precedence. Over time such exposure can contribute to the erosion of the Irulas' cultural identity distancing younger generations from their sacred rituals, traditional knowledge and ancestral connections to the landscape.

Given these challenges, it is essential to adopt a more inclusive and sustainable approach. A few recommendations include:

- **Cultural Safeguarding Measures:** Recognize the Irulas as stakeholders in the management of the site and consult them in decision-making processes. Ensure that cultural practices are not overshadowed by tourism activities.
- **Tourism Zoning:** Restrict trekking activities to designated zones to protect sacred areas and reduce environmental damage.
- **Eco-sensitive Tourism:** Introduce strict eco-tourism guidelines that include limits on the number of visitors, waste management policies and educational campaigns to foster respect for the site's sacred significance.
- **Cultural Education Programs:** Develop initiatives that educate tourists about the Irula community's cultural heritage to foster respect and prevent behaviours that may influence or disrupt local traditions.



Figure 2: Stone worship of Lord Rangaswamy

- **Revenue Sharing and Youth Engagement:** Allocate a portion of tourism revenue to support the Irula community particularly youth programs that strengthen cultural identity and economic opportunities rooted in their traditions.

Opening indigenous worship places like Rangaswamy Peak to tourists without adequate safeguards risks eroding the cultural fabric of the Irulas and compromising ecological balance. A more collaborative and respectful approach is crucial to ensuring that the spiritual and cultural heritage of such sites is not lost in the pursuit of commercial gains.

Preserving Irula Identity Amidst Modernization

The cultural and spiritual significance of Rangaswamy Peak is deeply intertwined with the identity and livelihood of the Irula community. For generations, Rangaswamy Koil has been more than a place of worship for the Irulas; it has served as a cultural hub, a source of spiritual solace and a site where their customs, rituals and ancestral knowledge converge. The temple is integral to their belief system emphasizing a connection to the natural world and the sacred landscape. It also fosters a sense of community and continuity playing a pivotal role in the transmission of traditional knowledge to younger generations.

The advent of tourism through initiatives like "Trek Tamil Nadu" has brought both opportunities and challenges for the Irula community. While promoting eco-tourism and development, these initiatives risk commodifying sacred landscapes like Rangaswamy Peak, threatening ecological balance and disrupting cultural harmony. The process of Hinduisation further complicates the challenges faced by the Irula community at Rangaswamy Koil. Despite these pressures, the Irulas continue to demonstrate quiet resilience, steadfastly practicing their rituals and upholding their traditions reaffirming their deep connection to Rangaswamy Koil and preserving their identity amidst change.

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'Bandna Parab': A Festival of Gratitude

by Dipankar Mahato, West Bengal
(English translation by Subham Kundu, AIF)



Bandna Parab is one of the most cherished festivals of the Kurmi community, celebrated alongside Kali Puja. Known as "Goru Chuma" or "Cattle Worship," this festival honors the invaluable contributions of cattle to agricultural life. Before harvesting paddy, the Kurmi people express their gratitude to their cows and bulls through this vibrant festival.

The celebration begins with women beautifying their homes by applying fresh clay on courtyards and walls. On the evening of Amavasya (new moon night), earthen lamps are lit with sal leaves and rice flour wicks at various sacred spots, such as Tulsi altars and house entrances. This ritual, called Kanchduari, marks the festival's onset. Afterwards, households prepare an array of traditional rice cakes (pithe).

In the cowshed, a special lamp with clarified butter (ghee) is lit, a practice known as Jagor Jalano. Oil is applied to the horns of the cattle, and young men, known as Jhangriyas, stay up all night singing Ahira songs accompanied by drums (dhol and dhamsha). The Jhangriyas visit homes, where they are warmly welcomed. The following morning, the Jhangriyas and village youth tour the entire village, singing and playing instruments. Women smear their faces with a mixture of rice flour and water as a gesture of goodwill. Agricultural tools like plows, yokes, and harrows are cleaned in ponds and placed near the Tulsi altar.

Women then prepare special offerings, grinding rice and mixing it with jaggery and ghee to make pithe cakes, which are later used in the Goraya Puja.

The head of the household performs Goraya Puja, worshiping the cattle and offering the first harvested paddy sheaves, which are crafted into garlands and placed on the cattle's horns. The second day is known as Budi Bandna or Goru Khunta. Cattle are decorated with oil, vermilion, and colorful patterns, and then tied to posts. A traditional ritual ensues where dried cattle hides are used to excite the animals, testing their strength as they try to push the hides with their horns. This spirited event is accompanied by Ahira songs and dancing. The festival concludes with all the Jhangriya groups gathering at a central location, celebrating with Ahira and Jhumur songs and dances.

At its core, Bandna Parab reflects the agrarian Kurmi community's profound respect for their cattle. These animals are revered as deities due to their indispensable role in agriculture. Primarily celebrated in the agrarian districts of Purulia, Bankura, Paschim Medinipur, and Jhargram in West Bengal and in few parts of Jharkhand, this festival symbolizes the harmony between humans and animals, celebrating their interconnected lives while preserving agricultural traditions.



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