# ANTHRO BULLETIN

VOLUME 6 | ISSUE 9 | SEPTEMBER 2025

ANTHROPOS INDIA FOUNDATION

ANTHROPOS BOOKS

A digital magazine that celebrates cultural diversities of India.

## ABOUT ANTHROPOS INDIA FOUNDATION

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 that is unique to their cultures and 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 conducts workshops, trainings and advocacy on various issues, especially on children. AIF promotes Visual Anthropology through vibrant, authentic, meaningful ethnographic films and photo documentation.

## ABOUT *ANTHRO BULLETIN*

Starting from January 2025, AIF's monthly Newsletter has been upgraded into a monthly digital magazine, ***Anthro Bulletin,*** with a renewed focus and energy. As anthropologists, we have always been keen on covering the diversity of our country from various perspectives. Over time, we have explored a wide range of topics, and seeing the richness of the emerging content, we have transformed the Newsletter into something more appropriate and culturally stimulating. From now on, our monthly ***Anthro Bulletin*** will feature articles on themes related to Indian art, crafts, culture, and festivals from a unique, anthropological perspective, highlighting the country's rich diversity and traditions besides sharing the regular news updates. We have the '*Young Scholars - Notes from the Field*' column featuring fieldwork, travelogues, or PhD-related work of young and bright scholars, providing them a platform to share their valuable insights and experiences here as well. We are also excited to introduce a new column, '*Through the Lens*', featuring photo essays on human experiences. **Please write to us if you want to submit your article!**

**We also welcome you to share high-resolution, portrait-size, self-clicked pictures of cultural events, traditions, and festivals to be featured on our magazine's cover page every month.** Please note that the selection of articles and pictures is at the discretion of our editorial team and is based on several factors, including how well the submissions align with our objectives.

All submissions can be emailed to **aif.newsletter2025@gmail.com.**
We also welcome sponsors who would like to support this magazine.



**DISCLAIMER:**
All the articles in this digital magazine are solely the opinions of the contributors.
Anthropos India Foundation does not hold any responsibility for the same.




***ANTHRO BULLETIN***
A Digital Magazine by *Anthropos Books*
Anthropos India Foundation, New Delhi
Septemeber 2025



9818858383
anthroposif@gmail.com
https://anthroposindiafoundation.com

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## Celebrating Traditions

Dr. Sunita Reddy, Founder-Chair, Anthropos India Foundation

Dear Readers,
Season's Greetings and Happy Festivities!
India's beauty lies in its diversity — a kaleidoscope of cultures, languages, rituals, songs, and dances, each carrying profound meanings. ***Anthro Bulletin*** celebrates this richness by bringing to light the regional and local festivals — the "little traditions" — that often remain unknown beyond their local contexts.

In this issue, Madhushree's article introduces "*Khudurukuni Osha* - the maritime festival .of Odisha" — a ritual of devotion, sisterhood, and prayer — closely aligned with the "great tradition" of *Rakshabandhan*. Through this festival, we witness the deep cultural symbolism of love and protection between brothers and sisters.

Equally engaging is the story of *Jeetiya* from Bihar, a ritual interwoven with food, faith, and the eternal bond between mothers and their children. Originally observed for sons, it now embraces daughters as well — beautifully reflecting an evolving sense of equality and inclusiveness within traditional frameworks.

As we celebrate human bonds, we also turn inward to honour our ancestors through *Pitru Paksha*. Saumyanjali's article eloquently connects this practice — observed during the lunar days of the Hindu calendar — to cosmic energies and anthropological interpretations of death, memory, and continuity.

Dr. Luna Goswami's article "Puberty Rites of Assamese Community" explores the cultural traditions and evolving practices surrounding a girl's initiation into adolescence in Assam, reflecting both continuity and change in society. In the Young Scholars column, Kulesh Bhandari's "Field Notes from Dumka's Hills," portrays the struggles and resilience of Jharkhand's tribal farmers, where farming under harsh soil, invasive weeds, and looming high-voltage lines is not just cultivation but survival and hope.

Dr. Lamba's distinguished lecture on "Body Art and Tattooing" was a visual and intellectual treat — tracing the history, symbolism, and contemporary evolution of this ancient form of expression. Continuing this artistic journey, Karma's piece explores the mural art of Ladakh's monasteries, where workshops bring together professionals and enthusiasts to learn traditional forms like *thangka* and wall painting, keeping cultural heritage alive.

In our Book Review section, Dr. Shavnam presents an insightful critique of a Routledge publication on the evolution of Primary Education in India — a layered journey through time, policy, and pedagogy. We also share thoughtful reflections from readers who continue to engage deeply with the themes and spirit of ***Anthro Bulletin.***

This season also brought a personal milestone — attending the national conference "Anthropology in Contemporary Practices: Pathways for a Sustainable Future" at my alma mater, the University of Hyderabad, in honour of Prof. B.V. Sharma's superannuation. Walking those familiar corridors after three decades, meeting teachers, classmates, and younger scholars — many of whom follow AIF — was a deeply fulfilling experience. It reaffirmed the vitality and relevance of our discipline.

Our ongoing efforts to revive and reimagine anthropology continue through panel discussions, now available on our YouTube channel.

I am delighted to share these pearls of traditional and anthropological wisdom through this monthly magazine. The Anthropos team continues to weave together culture, scholarship, and reflection — bringing to you a vibrant tapestry of ideas and insights.

Enjoy the festivities, and may they fill your days with warmth, reflection, and joy.

# MYSTIQUE OF RITUALS - Going Beyond Certitude of Enactments

Prof. (retd.) Shalina Mehta, Department of Anthropology, Panjab University

*"Don't confuse the teacher with the lesson, the ritual with the ecstasy, the transmitter of the symbol with the symbol itself."*

*- Neil Gaiman*

Dear friends,

Beginning September, we enter a phase of celebrations marked by festivities, that are intertwined with rituals. For centuries these are performed as tangible part of every institution and are embedded in the cultural ethos of the communities. These are performed as per the cultural norms and given its effervescence recorded with panache. In various articles that were contributed by young researchers for the ***Anthro Bulletin***, rituals associated with cultural events were narrated with dexterity and due reverence to cultural sensitivity and responsibility. In this issue also, young researchers have elucidated rituals associated with local festivals of various Janjati's from different states of the country. There is a popular perception that forms, offerings and enactments that accompany these celebrations has a sense of certitude.

I want to offer caution and a caveat to young researchers undertaking this empirical documentation. When they elucidate these with their ethnographic skill sets and reflexive instinct, they should also record continuous processes of innovations, modifications and negotiations that may have influenced its contemporary performance. Recording of historicity of rituals[1] is as significant as its existing practises. These are critical for recording processes of exclusion and inclusion that are reminiscent of power equations, inherited hierarchies and dominant social discourse of the period.

Many rituals have a gendered dimension symbolized by women being the primary saviours of these traditions e.g. *Jeetiya*: The Festival of Mothers and Children in Bihar by Neha and even *Khudurukuni Osha*: The Maritime Festival of Odisha by Madhushree Barik in this issue. In a gendered spirit Symbolizing women power is much celebrated temple festival of Pongal performed at the Attukal temple in Thiruvananthapurum, Kerala where thousands of women gather to prepare ritual feast for Goddess *Bhadrakali*, barring entry of the Men to the premises during the ritual celebrations[2]. In patriarchal societies women are often not allowed to enter sacred spaces and are segregated from ritual performances. Denial of permission for women to enter Sabarimala temple in Kerala, restrictions on Muslim women to offer Namaz inside the mosques, or constraints imposed on women following Roman Catholic tradition from ordination in the Church are few examples of cultural barriers/refrains on women from equal participation in ritual practices.

Rapport (1999, p.24)[3] defined ritual as "performance of more or less invariant sequences of formal acts and utterances not entirely encoded by the performers". Thus, ritual performances invariably become a kind of mechanical process to be followed in a programmed performative exercise and are not questioned. Paradoxically, the performers are not entirely aware of the meaning of these utterances and accompanying acts but are committed to it as a sanguine act and expect others to understand its sanctity. Anthropologists and sociologist have drawn attention to rituals being "conventional, repetitive but nevertheless adaptive interaction between people" (Erikson 1966, p.337). Embedded notion of adaptive interaction between people makes rituals energetic communitarian events. However, inherent in these celebrations is also a notion of symbolic reverence that often acquires dimensions of a popular culture. Subsequently, these community events get commodified and become part of market economics diluting ritual sanctity. There is immense elasticity[4] built into them. *Durga Pujo, Ganesh Chatruthi, Dusshera* are legendary Hindu festival that are increasingly acquiring symbolic and economic dimension, inching closer to being part of a popular culture.

Religious rituals are sanctimonious and associated with a particular belief system. They offer obeisance to religious and cultural icons. These have evolved over the years to become identity markers and political instrumentalities. Subsequently, inherent philosophies, morality, rationality, wisdom and sodalities that extend beyond individual community loyalties are subsumed under the preponderance of its effusive crust. In its political incarnation, when invariant sequences in the perceived performance of rituals are transgressed, conflict and at times violence is witnessed because of the belief that it is the violation of the sanctity of the performance by the 'other'. Recent texts in anthropology and social sciences have focused on examining changing aspects of ritual and its ubiquity in the texts of politics and religion. Concepts like "ritual politics"[5], "political ceremonial" and "religious ritual" nudge scholars to study ruptures and disenchantments with established systems of power and authority and scrutinize role of religious symbols and its mobilization in protest movements.

I want to conclude this editorial recollecting Turner's (1973, p, 1100)[6] definition of rituals as repeatable actions which are designed for affecting supernatural creatures or powers in the name of the purpose that

are identified by individuals, practiced from a certain point and which cover mimics, words and objects. If we contextualize these profound words in this era of information warfare and AI and examine intense use of rituals and religious symbols in competitive political churning, value of social science theories astounds in its scientific wisdom and validation.

**References:**

[1] Phool Walon Ki Sair a floral festival unique to Delhi's syncretic cultural tradition, celebrated in the month of September since 1812 is symbolic of secular spirit that in the texts of ritual certitudes is not even discussed.
[2] The festival is celebrated in the month of February-March in the Malayalam month of kumbhum and is also in the Guiness Book of World Records.
[3] Roy A. Rapport (1999) Ritual and Religion in the making of Humanity, Cambridge University Press is a must read for the students of anthropology of religion.
[4] In a paper titled Elastic rituals: A multi religious Analysis of Adaptations to Covid -19 by Monica Cornejo-Valle and Borja Martin –Andino, (religions-14-00773.pdf); an interesting analysis of adaptations and tweaks made to rituals is presented. Premised on 40 conversations with the members of the Protestant and Evangelical denominations, Sunni Muslims, orthodox Churches Judaism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Sikhism, Bahai and several other faiths, regarded as minorities in their countries of current residence, a detailed analysis of ritual adaptations is carried out along with understanding general context of change and Challenges and subjective experiences. I recommend young researchers to read this paper for developing methodological nuances to go beyond the dominant narrative of certitude of rituals and its sanctity.
[5] Read Rajkumar Jackson Singh' s article Ritual Politics as a cultural Intervention to political Movements in Economic and Political Weekly, Vol.60, Issue No. 23.07.2025
[6] Turner, V.W. (1973), Symbols in African Ritual, Science, New Series, 179 (4078), pp 1100-1105.

# Khudurukuni Osha: The Maritime Festival of Odisha

*By Madhushree Barik*

**Introduction**

The maritime festival of Odisha, popularly known as *Khudurukuni Osha* or *Bhalukuni Osha*, is observed in the month of *Bhadraba*, i.e. from August-September on the Sundays by unmarried girls and women, mainly in the coastal regions of Odisha. In this festival, young girls worship *Maa Mangala* to pray for their brothers' health, safety, and prosperity. The observance of this festival is more than worship; rather, it is a festival that symbolizes protection for girls, prayer for the security in a brother's household, and a gentle reminder of faith in justice. It teaches us that cruelty to the innocent will not prevail, and there is a divine power to secure those who endure with patience and devotion. The belief among girls that *Maa Mangala* will help them, whatever the cause of their distress, keeps the ritual alive even after many centuries.

*Maa Mangala*

**Historical Background**

The festival of *Khudurukuni Osha* is marked by the story of *Tapoi*, who was the only and the youngest sister to her seven brothers. Being born in a rich trader family and pampered by her parents as well as brothers since childhood, all her demands were fulfilled by her family members. Once *Tapoi* demanded *Sunachanda,* i.e. a moon made out of gold, to which her family obliged despite a few thoughts. But when the golden moon was completely made, both of her parents died. After that, due to worsening financial conditions, all seven brothers went into trading during maritime voyages. But then all the sister-in-laws of *Tapoi*, except the youngest one, started to ill-treat her. They denied her food, deprived her of rest, and also forced her to herd goats in the jungle throughout the day. Despite all these, *Tapoi* patiently kept on waiting for the return of her seven brothers. One day, when her favourite goat *Ghormoni* went missing in the wilds, the cruelty of her sister-in-laws grew unbearable. The youngest sister-in-law realised *Tapoi's* pain, and hence she advised *Tapoi* to pray to *Maa Mangala* by keeping fast on Sundays for the return of her seven brothers. Then very soon her prayers were answered, and all her brothers returned from the maritime voyage. They got to know about their sister's awful conditions, and thereafter they worshipped *Tapoi* as a goddess. They told *Tapoi* to take her revenge, to which she cut each of her sister-in-laws' noses except for the youngest one.

**Festival Rituals**

During the Sundays of the *Bhadraba* month of the Hindu calendar, i.e. August-September, young girls wake up early in the morning and collect various flowers. Then, after taking a bath, they make small heaps of sand called '*Baluka*', and decorate these with turmeric powder, vermillion, and flowers on the banks of nearby rivers or ponds, and then the girls pray to the Sun. For this ritual, mainly the flowers of cucumber and ridge gourd plants are used. The young girls also used to draw *Jhoti* designs on the floor, made with rice flour paste. The young girls observe fast throughout the day, and in the evening they break their fast after installing an idol of the Goddess and worshipping her, along with offering *Khuda bhaja* (broken rice), *Chuda* (flattened rice), *Lia* (fried paddy), *Ukhuda* (fried sweetened paddy), *Mishri* (Sugar candies), and coconut to the goddess. Episodes from the life history of *Tapoi* are sung by all the girls while performing all the rituals. The rituals are performed every Sunday during the *Bhadraba* month, and hence the same rituals are observed for four Sundays, and each Sunday is called *Pali*. So there are first, second, third, and fourth *Pali* or Sundays in this festival. The garlands made by the girls are not strung on a thread, but on strips of dried bark from the plantain tree. They sing the following ditty while making garlands:

*"Phoola singhasana karanti phoolare*
*Asana paranti phoolara chauni*
*Sundara mala gonthithanti phoolaro*
*Phoolare kacha ti bahu ti phoolare mandile deha ti"*

*Baluka puja*

*Offerings in puja*

# Jeetiya: The Festival of Mothers and Children in Bihar

*by Neha*

Every year in September, the villages of Bihar and neighbouring regions come alive with the colours, songs, and silent strength of women observing *Jeetiya Vrat*, also called *Jivitputrika*. This festival is one of the most touching examples of how tradition, food, and faith come together to celebrate the bond between mothers and their children.

**A Festival of Motherhood**

*Jeetiya* was once kept only for the well-being of sons, but with time, it has changed. Today, mothers observe the fast equally for both sons and daughters. In their eyes, children—whether boy or girl—are like the two eyes of the same face. This gentle transformation makes *Jeetiya* a celebration of motherhood itself.

**Rituals and Fasting**

The festival begins with *Nahai-Khay*, when mothers eat a pure meal of *noni saag, madua roti, jhingi sabji*, and *kachchu* root (*kanda*). Sweet and festive foods like *pua*, *puri*, *thekua*, and *nimki* are also prepared. These are offered to God and later given to children as *Othgan*—sacred *prasad* that carries a mother's blessings.

On the main day, mothers observe *nirjala vrat*—fasting without even a sip of water. No matter how weak or unwell, most mothers insist on keeping the fast, saying with pride that "*Teej aur Jeetiya koi aurat nahin chhodti hai*." Their strength becomes a silent prayer for their children's long life.

**The Sacred *Mala* and *Othgan***

A special tradition of *Jeetiya* is the *Jitiya* Mala, a necklace with raised designs, each symbolizing a child. Worn only during this festival, it is purified every year and placed on the children as a mark of divine protection. The next morning, after puja, mothers give each child their *Othgan* —a bundle of *thekua, mishri*, fruits, and sacred thread. It is more than food; it is a mother's blessing, wrapped in sweetness.

***Paran* with Symbolic Food**

The fast is broken with *Satanja*—a mix of seven items like *chana, chawal, gehun, matar, kanda, khira beej*, and *noni saag*. Each food carries a wish: that the child may be playful like *chana*, radiant like rice, strong like *kanda*, and prosperous like *noni saag*. Later, families cook *kadhi-chawal, bhabra, bajka, zamikand* curry, and fish, turning the house into a space of joy after austerity.

**A Living Culture**

Jeetiya is more than a festival—it is a mother's promise to her children. It is the beauty of the community, where women protect even the smallest insects, saying, "*Aaj iski maa bhi Jeetiya rakh rahi hogi.*" It is the strength of faith, the fragrance of *thekua*, the glow of *sindoor*, and the quiet power of sacrifice.

In the heart of Bihar, *Jeetiya* continues to remind us that motherhood is both love and devotion, tradition and resilience.

# Eclipse Etiquettes: Chandra Grahan and the Code of Conduct

*By Saumyanjali Mishra*

When the Earth, Moon and Sun decide to have their own rendezvous, they tend to make their own cosmic theatrics, manifesting as 'Eclipses', occurring anywhere between four to seven times a year. This September, we got free tickets to one of these celestial shows. On the 7th September 2025, we witnessed a Total Lunar Eclipse, or '*Poorna Chandra Grahan*', a planetary event that transpires when the three heavenly bodies, i.e. the earth, moon and sun, are aligned in a syzygy, with our planet between the other two. When the Earth's shadow falls on the lunar surface, it gives the Moon a reddish-orange glow, earning it the epithet Blood Moon.

This year, the Blood Moon perfectly coincided with the beginning of '*Pitru Paksha*', a significant period (16 lunar days) in the Hindu Calendar for honouring our ancestors. And I nearly missed this rarity, a realisation that dawned on me after scrolling through a myriad of WhatsApp statuses. But then I ran upstairs as quickly as I humanly could and finally took a sigh of relief. Naturally, my smartphone came out of my pocket and into my hands, and I found myself clicking pictures of the red orb, the serene observer of the world, as it blushed red and shyly hid away behind dark clouds.

**Figure:** The Blood Moon, during the Total Lunar Eclipse on September 7, 2025.

The next day, during a class lecture, I heard a friend say how he didn't eat anything until the eclipse ended. Some of my classmates were laughing, some were sitting unbothered, while I was reminded of a short video I saw on my LinkedIn just that morning. The video was comparing the World Media and the Indian Media on the eclipse day. In the video, the clip from world media explained the science behind the eclipse, while the clip from Indian media featured a religious practitioner and astrologer discussing what to avoid during an eclipse. The video was probably a playful visual representation of '#India_is_not_for_Beginners', but in actuality, it highlighted the idiosyncrasies of our culture, our traditions and codes of behaviour underlying them.

The dual concept of 'Purity and Pollution', in Hinduism, is studied by many scholars, such as Louis Dumont (Homo Hierarchicus), Mary Douglas (Purity and Danger), M.N. Srinivas (Religion and Society among the Coorgs of South India), and S.C. Dube (Indian Society), among others. Purity is the pristine state of the soul, and pollution is the contamination thereof. These concepts play a major role in people's lives, influencing both religious practices and routine actions, with elaborate rules governing the maintenance of purity and avoidance of pollution.

*Grahans* or Eclipses are considered to be impure, and are believed to be periods of disturbed cosmic energies, the periods when the negative energies are amplified. This inauspicious period is termed as *Sutak Kaal*, which comes from two Sanskrit words, '*Sutak*' meaning impure and '*Kaal*' meaning time. In Hinduism, the *Sutak Kaal* is observed particularly before and during eclipses (both solar and lunar) or after a birth or death in the family. It typically begins 9 to 12 hours before the eclipse and lasts until its conclusion. However, the duration varies depending on the type of cosmic event.

Propitious actions and significant decisions are avoided during this inauspicious time to avoid unfavourable outcomes. Because of the unstable atmosphere, temples are frequently closed and people are advised to stay indoors.


**Figure 2:** A screenshot of the short video mentioned.

People eschew eating, cooking, and engaging in religious rituals in order to preserve the sanctity of sacred objects, foods and deities. On the other hand, it is thought that eating Tulsi (*Ocimum tenuiflorum*) leaves neutralises the negative effects. During this time, pregnant women take extra care. Cleaning the house and taking a bath after the eclipse are thought to be auspicious ways to drive out bad energy.

The moon, a symbol of serenity and beauty, transforms into a harbinger of impurity when eclipsed by the Earth's shadow. A syzygy on a random day triggers a unique code of conduct, rooted in ancient traditions and so-called 'pseudo-science'. Short, fun video becomes an eye-opener and the basis of research. WhatsApp statuses become reminders, while class discussions prompt us to question our understanding of the world. With the courage to challenge the boundaries of common sense, logic and rationality, we continue to learn and unlearn conundrums of nature, culture, and the cosmos.

**References:**


1. Bean, S. S. (1981). Toward a semiotics of "purity" and "pollution" in India. American Ethnologist, 8(3), 575–595. https://doi.org/10.1525/ae.1981.8.3.02a00100
2. Dube, S.C. (2020). Diversity and Unity. Indian Society. Young India Library. National Book Trust, India.
3. Espenak, F., & Meeus, J. (2021). Periodicity of Lunar Eclipses. NASA GSFC Eclipse Web Site. https://eclipse.gsfc.nasa.gov/LEsaros/LEperiodicity.html
4. HM Nautical Almanac Office and United States Naval Observatory. (2012). Syzygy. Glossary, The Astronomical Almanac Online.
5. Jagran. (2025, September 7). Chandra Grahan 2025. Jagran. https://www.jagran.com/spiritual/
6. Kapur, R. (2022). Understanding the Concepts of Purity and Pollution in the Hierarchy of the Caste System. Research Gate.
7. NASA. (2025). The Moon & Eclipses. Science at NASA Website https://science.nasa.gov/moon/eclipses/
8. OB News. (2025). Chandra Grahan 2025 Sutak Kaal: What is Sutak? How long before in lunar eclipse and a solar eclipse? OB News. https://www.obnews.co/Flow/News/id/11885363.html
9. Olivelle, P. (2011). Caste and Purity: A Study in the Language of the Dharma Literature. In: Language, Texts, and Society: Explorations in Ancient Indian Culture and Religion. Anthem Press; 217-246.
10. Sinha, N. (2025). Chandra Grahan 2025: Sutak Kaal Timings, Rituals and the Spiritual Significance of the Lunar Eclipse on Pitru Paksha. Times Now News. https://www.timesnownews.com/spiritual/
11. Times of India. (2025). Chandra Grahan 2025: What is Sutak Kaal, and why are so many things prohibited during this period? Times of India. https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/life-style/soul-search/


# Puberty Rites of Assamese Community

*by Dr. Luna Goswami*

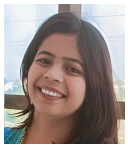
Human beings passes through different stages of life since the soul starts its new cycle of life on this earth. Every stage of life is associated with certain physical changes accompanied by some emotional changes which plays an important part in the transitional patterns of life. One can easily notice that these stages are often celebrated in every societies with their own prescribed ways of rites and rituals which vary from one another. Thus we can understand that man has same kind of emotion and sentiment barring the cultural and geographical barriers. Such practices sometimes steers and sometimes stabilizes our emotion. Arnold Van Gennep has termed these rites as the 'rites the passage'. The four stages of life as birth, adolescence, marriage and death are associated with elaborate religious practices in different societies or communities. In Assam we have different caste groups along with number of tribal communities and religious groups and therefore the admixture in the cultural traits is a very common phenomenon. Still the communities or the caste groups perform the beliefs and practices in their unique way which easily attracts one's attention to the cultural variations among the diverse groups of people.

Inititiation is such a ceremony that is celebrated during the time of adolescence both in case of boys and girls in different societies though the studies have showed that such celebrations is more common among the boys than among the girls. Among some Assamese cate groups when a girl enters her puberty it induces tension specially among the mothers as there are various taboos associated with the girl during that period of time when she notices the first stain of blood. The concern family along with their relatives remains alert and make her prepare to welcome the new stage of her life. In the earlier decades there was much conservativeness and the mothers were not much frank with their daughters. But it is a boon of modern society that mother-daughter relationship has become more friendly and the role of social media is also undeniable in creating awareness among the present generation if used intelligently. This stage of life creates a culmination of tension and excitement in the psychological process of a girl. At the beginning she is much thrilled but the cumbersome practices make her feel aloof and differentiated from the opposite sex. A girl is tabooed to see even her much lovable father and brothers both younger or elder. Thus such a practice brings the sense of the feeling of second sex and cultivates a gendered outlook of the society . As soon as the girl notices her first menstrual sign, she immediately informs her mother or any female member of a family and then she is allowed to live in seclusion for three days where she sleeps on a cot or straw over the floor, though nowadays some families allowed the girl to sleep on bed.

Those three days the girl has to eat light food but uncooked and fruits . The room where the girl stays, is lighted up by an earthen lamp with a bowl of rice along with betel nuts and areca leaves. It is believed that the rice has the power to cast away the evil spirits as this period is regarded as an impurity period. A priest or a religious practitioner is consulted giving him the proper date and time, the process which is known as '*ganana kora*'. On the fourth day she is to undergo a ritualistic bath with a paste '*mah hadhi*' (turmeric paste). Another traditional feature that is noticed is the use of the '*kala khar*' (banana soda) for bathing instead of soap. Though at present many families have abandoned this custom and prefer soap and shampoo for the purpose.

The female folk mostly the paternal and the maternal relatives takes part in this activity while the males are debarred from seeing the same. The girl is then dressed in a traditional attire '*mekhela chador*', traditionally the *mekhela* was tied over her breast which symbolizes her growth. A feast is arranged by inviting friends, relatives and neighbours and the girl is prepared as a bride where she is gifted by cash or kind by the invitees. This occasion is celebrated with much pomp and grandeur among some families which has been developed as a new trend among the Assamese society at present. All these practices changes the psychic make-up of a girl and finally she bids good bye to her childhood days and enters into her adolescence phase which awaits her with new hopes and aspirations along with all other life challenging events.

# Dr. Rajni Lamba



*Interview by Saba Farhin.*

Dr. Rajni Lamba is an anthropologist and the Chief Executive Officer of The Rural Environmental Enterprises Development Society (The REEDS), where she leads initiatives for sustainable livelihoods and grassroots-level development. Her doctoral research was conducted among the Baiga community in Madhya Pradesh under the supervision of the internationally renowned senior Anthropologist Professor Shalina Mehta, in the Department of Anthropology, Panjab University. Her thesis on 'Cure Culture Complex' of the Gond of Mandla, Madhya Pradesh is a labour of devotion to the subject, reflecting her deep engagement with indigenous populations and marginalized groups.

Over the years, Dr. Lamba has worked extensively with leading international and national organizations, serving as a consultant for UNICEF, WHO, UNESCO, UNFPA, UNAIDS, OXFAM, NABARD, KVIC, and various government departments and organizations. Her expertise spans enterprise development, microfinance, and training programmes designed for a diverse range of stakeholders, from tribal communities to marginalized workers, fostering empowerment through skill-building and sustainable microenterprises and enabling them to access opportunities through collective effort and micro-finance.

A seasoned professional, she has travelled widely within India and abroad, working with diverse cultures and development models. Her current focus lies in conserving, diversifying, and promoting indigenous crafts, industries, and livelihoods to ensure cultural preservation alongside economic growth. Passionate about preserving culture while fostering growth, her current work focuses on supporting indigenous crafts, industries, and traditional livelihoods. An avid reader and writer, Dr. Lamba continues to combine scholarship and research with practice, strengthening community resilience while advancing applied anthropological research. Currently, she is actively involved with grassroots level and administrative functionaries to conduct effective flood relief, reconstruction and rebuilding work in Punjab.

**What initially inspired you to pursue anthropology, and how has your journey with the discipline shaped the way you engage with communities today?**

My inspiration is my *Guru*, Prof. Shalina Mehta. Her first lecture in our very first BSc (Honours) Anthropology class left me starry-eyed and with soaring spirits. Our class comprised a cross-section of students from all parts of the developing world. There were students from Malaysia, Bali, Guyana, Thailand and Vietnam. It was like the culmination of the quest for my dream subject. As an army brat, I had travelled with my parents to some of the remote parts of East and North India during my schooling years. I had lived in an Accra cane house in Meghalaya and a tarpaulin (*tirpal*) and straw roofed, thick mud-walled '*basha*' in certain parts of Jammu and Kashmir. I was blessed to have my schooling in some of the prominent convents of the country, as my mother insisted on it, but my true entrenchment in anthropological thought developed and grew on me as I rode horseback through the wooded jungles of the country with my Dad and older brother. I met my indigenous peoples here. It was my Dad's insistence to get us children acquainted with the area that we were living in, that meant that all the vacations were spent travelling through the neighbouring areas, trying the cuisine, picking up the finer points of the culture and language, as well as playing with the local children to learn their dressing style and games.

These experiences just simply fell in place when Prof. Shalina Mehta spoke of her journey as an anthropologist and opened up the vistas of action anthropology through the windows of ethnography, social anthropology, medical anthropology and psychological anthropology. The years just rolled away as I completed BSc (Hons.) as a Gold Medallist, MSc. Hons as a Gold Medallist securing first class first position in every semester. Then, through an interesting incident where I was merely helping my senior friend clear the UGC NET in the very first batch in our university, I was suddenly informed that I had qualified for a fellowship. I had already bagged the National Merit Scholarship in MSc (Hons) and went to Prof. Shalina Mehta for her guidance. Secretly, I admired her as the fountainhead of anthropological theory and content. When it came to selecting an area for study, I was clear that I wanted to work among the tribals. Prof Shalina Mehta, known for her brave, bold and adventurous stance, always decided to take the Master's students on a field trip to

Mandla, Madhya Pradesh. This was before the advent of Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh, and Mandla was a huge district. On reading up about the area and travelling through the tribal belt, my future was sealed. My soul literally resonated with anthropology, and here I am almost aeons later, still wide-eyed and wonderstruck by the 'study of man in time and space.' My experiences among the tribals and later a large number of marginalized communities have been fortifying my ever-growing interest in all that connotes anthropological thought.

**Looking back at your extensive work with grassroots-level communities and organizations, which contributions or initiatives do you consider the most significant and impactful in your career?**

The most significant and impactful aspects have revolved around microfinance, micro-enterprises, revival of crafts, linking people with government initiatives and facilitating the subtle bridging of evolutionary phases in the lifestyles and livelihoods of rural industry-based communities.

The most dynamic changes were manifested through our work among rural women who were already fighting on various fronts of health, childbearing and child rearing, drudgery of household work, care of animals and homestead, besides helping in agriculture. This entire routine was further compounded with zero decision-making, lack of financial independence and absolutely no say in their own reproductivity. Years of work among them through several interventions bordering on mother and child health care, as well as sitting on the drawing board of block-level to state-level rural health action plans, one glaring truth surfaced. Empowerment entailed financial empowerment, inclusion and control. From 2002 onwards, through the vehicle of NABARD programmes, our organization has worked intensively to help rural women revive their rural industry and gain supremacy over their enterprises and attain financial strength. Whether it was domestic violence at the hands of alcohol and drug addicted males or lack of value faced due to being 'here nor there' because a girl was considered '*parayee*' or alien in her natal home after marriage and was always a '*baharlee*' or outsider at her affinal home. The wheels truly turned for her when she could utilise her latent talent and earn enough money to exercise her choices, command her own position, besides demanding participation in the family and community affairs. There has been a sea change which is progressing wave by wave despite inherent hurdles. The pathways are in place, examples of microenterprises are mushrooming, and gradually, the demand for training, capacity building, and skill enhancement has begun to arise from the grassroots. It is no longer top-down but in the very essence of the term 'bottom to top' manifestation of need-based, area-specific and tailor-made solutions suited to individual and community-level pace of progress as well as per inherent genius.

**How do you envision the future of anthropology in India and globally, especially in terms of addressing contemporary challenges like sustainability, livelihoods, and cultural preservation?**

Very bright, purposeful and most fruitful in both government and non-governmental sectors. Today, we stand poised on the threshold of an era of action anthropology transcending all levels of endeavour of humankind. The vision is of applying a human face to an increasingly artificial intelligence-oriented world. To ensure we are still master's of the game, anthropologists have to be both at the helm and vanguard of all the activities that make up the sum total of human development. Many of our leading lights are using their expertise to create avenues for gainful employment. A case in point is the recent lecture of Prof. A.B. Ota, wherein it was highlighted how strongly he has been advocating the cause of anthropologists in several government organizations, especially the Tribal Research Institutes across the country. Similarly several other doyens have worked relentlessly towards this cause. The United Indian Anthropologist Forum (UIAF) has been working ceaselessly in bringing forth the significance of the anthropologists role in high-rise, glass and steel citadels of the corporate world.

Sustainability is a dynamic equation as situations and people adapt to the changing kaleidoscope of survival and progression. This is evident in the changed shape of livelihoods content and character across the world. The scale and expanse of the livelihood spectrum has blossomed manifold. All these are signs of progress. However, the costs need to be weighed in as well. There is a need for awakening, assimilation and dissemination. For example, Ayurveda-based cures have been around for thousands of years, but post-2020, the COVID-19 pandemic provoked renewed interest in all parts of the world, making Ayurveda a significant approach to health care. I see livelihood opportunities in pickle-making for our rural women and youth.

Today, women in the metro cities do not have the time to peel garlic, prepare sprouts or even make their own preserves like pickles, jams, or chutneys that are a staple in Indian cuisine. This opens up a world of opportunities for our micro-enterprise savvy rural women living in the periphery areas of these very metros. Our culture comprises every iota of our being. It is the food we eat, clothes we wear, habits we have adopted of worship and celebration, as well as our rites de passage. The changed times have opened doors of opportunity where communities are ready to service these needs. Already the process can be witnessed on Amazon, Blinkit, Zepto, Instamart and a plethora of others who are all providing the via media where we can keep in touch with our roots and yet are soaring to touch the skies.

It is Blinkit that tells me Ganpati is coming, Navaratri is on, Onam, Bihu, Ugadi-you name it, and they have it down pat with all accessories, clothes, rituals – How many anthropologists do you think are working behind the scenes here?

**What advice would you give to aspiring and young anthropologists who wish to combine academic research with meaningful social impact at the community level?**

Be fired with an inner zeal to work for preserving, sustaining and propagating the basic goals of survival to supremacy in a human framework that remains in command of utilizing time and space. Always be eager to question. Never hesitate to say your piece on what you feel is relevant or irrelevant in a scenario unfolding before you. Do not simply drive through or walk across a roadway or flyover coming up in your vicinity - ask questions about trees being chopped down, about rivulets being stemmed, about the vastly increased traffic impact in terms of air quality. Question the tourists' influx in virgin areas, question the rising piles of waste materials from glass, paper, plastic to fabrics, chemicals and electronic peripherals. Ask, ask, ask, - why, how, what, wherefore. Provoke others to think of the by-ways and the alternatives. Read-up extensively. Attend dynamic sessions online and offline. Your silence can damage generations. Be responsible. This is what it entails to be an anthropologist. We are the students of time and space and have the duty to document, analyse, and disseminate to our spatial prerogatives across temporal segments of the developing and the developed.

Academic research is never in isolation. My teacher gave me the simple '*mantra*' of 'Re-search'. The objective was to look intensely, understand, assimilate and then look again and yet again to understand all facets of the conundrum, document expansively, provoke thought and ensure others are compelled to carry forward the torch of the research. Keep the curiosity of a child despite having the power to dwell upon realities like an expert.

An anthropologist never dies - just turns over a new leaf and begins all over again with wide-eyed wonder.

**CONCLUSION:**

"*Thank you, Anthropos! You are most kind in giving me this platform. My journey in anthropology is ongoing. We are living in dynamic times as have all generations that lived before us. Mankind has come a long way from the cave dwelling stage. Some doomsday - mongers are threatening that we are headed that way once again but I have full confidence in the anthropologists who are keeping a finger on the pulse and giving the vital shot of hope to all human kind.*"

# Farming under High Voltage: Struggles and Resilience in the Tribal Uplands of Jharkhand

*By Kulesh Bhandari*

**The Valley of Contradictions**

The village of Thengimo in Dumka district, Jharkhand, is a landscape of paradoxes. From a distance, the green paddy fields look like velvet carpets spread across the foothills. The mist clings to the surrounding hills, wrapping them in mystery. Tall sal trees punctuate the horizon, their trunks weathered yet dignified, silent witnesses to generations of struggle.

But above this idyllic picture runs a lattice of steel and power: 33,000-volt high-tension lines, humming with unseen electricity. They cut across the sky, indifferent to the people who farm beneath them. For the farmers, these wires are not symbols of progress but constant reminders of danger.

Beneath the wires, the land is rocky, the soil acidic, the challenges unending. And yet, in these very fields, families return every season to sow rice, maize, mustard, or *karela*. Here, farming is not a choice — it is survival.

**Figure 1:** Green paddy fields beneath the looming high-tension power lines in Simardhuma Ramgarh, Dumka, Jharkhand.

**Farmer's Voice – The Sound of Struggle**

When I sat with a farmer in his small patch of land, his voice was weary but steady:

"मिट्टी चाहे खट्टी हो, लेकिन इसी से चावल निकालना है। यह खेती कोई आसान काम नहीं—पत्थरों से भरी ज़मीन, जिसमें हल चलाना बेहद कठिन है। बरसात में पानी ठहरता नहीं और उसे रोकने का कोई सहारा नहीं, फिर भी किसान हिम्मत नहीं हारते।"

He explained that farming here is subsistence-based. The crops grown are rarely surplus; they are meant to feed families, not markets. At best, a household owns one *katta* (0.16 acre) to five *katta* (0.8 acre) of land, often fragmented and only half fertile.

Another farmer added:

"कभी-कभी तो खेती होती ही नहीं। ज़मीन ही ऐसी है। हम तो बस इसी पर ज़िंदा हैं।"

The challenges are not limited to soil or water. Rainwater collects in narrow gullies, flooding the fields. Drainage systems choke under the spread of lantana shrubs. At night, jackals prowl the edges of the farms, their cries blending with the hum of the wires.

**Figure 2:** Farmers work in rocky fields with poor drainage, surrounded by lantana thickets that block water flow during the monsoon.

**Soil and Science – Acid Land, Bitter Harvest**

Testing the soil revealed a striking number: pH 3.8. Such acidity makes cultivation harsh and unyielding. The soil is often reddish-brown, coarse, and interspersed with stones that blunt the plough. Farmers have no modern machinery; they use wooden ploughs drawn by bullocks, their bodies straining against the rocky resistance of the earth.

They mix compost with urea and pesticides in an attempt to coax life from the ground. Yet the yields remain low. The latitude 24.523746°N, longitude 87.1892°E marks not just a geographical location but a site where science and struggle meet daily.

Crops vary with season and capacity:

- *Pahadi Dhan* (hill rice) is most common, hardy enough to grow in acidic soil.
- Maize offers some diversification.
- On better patches, farmers grow mustard, bitter gourd (*karela*), ridge gourd (*jhiga*), and k*hera*.

Irrigation depends almost entirely on ponds. In summer, they dry up; in monsoon, they overflow, drowning fields instead of feeding them.


**Figure 3:** Rainwater pond near farmlands in Thengimo. These ponds are lifelines during summer but sources of flooding during heavy monsoon rains.

**Hazards of Modernity – Death from Above**

The farmers' greatest fear lies not in the soil, but above it. The high-tension wires hum constantly, their sound amplified during rain. Farmers recount accidents when 11,000-volt lines snapped during storms, killing men in the fields. With 33,000-volt lines, the fear is worse.

"*Baris re samay rehen tana re khaj re kada kada dakay. Ame okat kedal kana: 'ena ame upare na horko*." (Santhali)
English Translation:
"During the rains, these wires make a louder noise. We only pray that they don't fall upon us."
A farmer said, glancing nervously at the wires.

The irony is brutal. Electricity runs above their heads but rarely lights their homes. What for others is infrastructure and progress, for these farmers is a threat and despair.

**Figure 4:** Steel tower of 33,000-volt transmission lines standing over paddy fields — a symbol of modernity overshadowing survival farming.

**The Invasion of Lantana – Silent Green Enemy**

The spread of *Lantana camara* adds yet another battle. This invasive alien shrub forms thick, spiny thickets around the fields. During the monsoon, lantana blocks natural drainage channels, creating stagnant pools that flood crops. Farmers call it "jangli jhaad," a useless plant that suffocates both soil and livelihood.

Clearing lantana is backbreaking, and its return is relentless. What farmers face is not just a plant, but a metaphor of their struggle: an uninvited guest choking every effort to grow food.

**Figure 5:** A dense patch of *Lantana camara* choking a natural drainage channel, disrupting both agriculture and biodiversity.

**Culture and Resilience – Faith in the Fields**

Despite the soil, wires, and weeds, the fields are not abandoned. Before sowing, families gather at the *sakua* (sal) tree, offering rice and flowers to *Marang Buru*, the deity of the hills. Rituals sanctify the act of farming; they transform survival into spirituality.

Women and children join in sowing, their songs turning labor into rhythm. The chants, the songs, the rituals — they are acts of resilience. In a land where farming often yields less than it consumes, faith becomes a form of sustenance.

**Figure 6:** Sacred sal tree near the fields, where rituals mark the beginning of cultivation. A site of faith amidst uncertainty.

**Reflection – More than Crops**

Observing these fields, one realizes that agriculture here is not just about producing rice or maize. It is about producing courage. It is about producing continuity. It is about producing resilience.

Every furrow carved into acidic soil, every seed sown beneath the buzzing wires, is an act of defiance. Farmers here grow food, but they also grow hope — hope that refuses to die, even under wires of death, weeds of invasion, and soils of acidity.

**Figure** 7; Mist-covered hills surrounding cultivated patches — a landscape where resilience is as abundant as hardship.

# Layers of Wisdom: Indigenous Knowledge in Ladakh's Mural Art

*By Karma Norbu Bhutia*

The murals of Ladakh are more than a mere visual delight; they act as a repository of indigenous knowledge systems. All the monasteries of Ladakh are painted with murals using locally sourced natural pigments (stone colours) and made using proper iconometric guidelines (*Thig Tshad*). This photo essay documents the intersection of spiritual practice, culture, and artisanal heritage that mural painting represents. Beyond technique, the murals themselves reflect Ladakhi understandings of the natural world: they often depict local flora, fauna, and cosmological elements that express an environmental worldview rooted in Tibetan Buddhism. Through visual encounters at sites like Alchi, Thikse, Spituk monastery, and Stok Palace, and insights from local artists and conservators at the Shesrig Foundation, the images trace how knowledge is transmitted, protected, and revived. In a fragile Himalayan ecology, where both heritage and climate are under pressure, mural art becomes a repository of resilience painted, preserved, and lived.

**Figure 1:** A workshop in progress at the Shesrig Foundation, where local conservators, artists, and researchers, including the author, are engaged in a presentation on Ladakh's cultural heritage. The discussion explored conservation practices and indigenous knowledge systems rooted in Buddhist art. Held in a traditional Ladakhi house, the office of Shesrig Foundation, the session exemplified how community-based forums serve as living spaces for knowledge exchange across generations and disciplines.

**Figure 2:** A centuries old mural from Thikse Monastery, depicting multiple Buddhas in seated meditation posture. Painted using mineral pigments derived from local stone and structured according to iconometric grids (*thig tshad*), the mural embodies both aesthetic harmony and Buddhist cosmology. The visible flaking and fading of pigments due to age, climatic variations, and the impact of tourism reflect the fragility of this sacred heritage and calls for the urgent need for conservation.

**Figure 3:** An assortment of pigments and conservation tools used in the preservation of thangkas and wall paintings. While natural pigments like malachite green and orpiment yellow were traditionally sourced from local minerals, they are now increasingly replaced by synthetic alternatives due to cost and limited availability. The specialized brushes, with varied tips and textures, are used in cleaning, retouching, and stabilizing painted surfaces. This image captures the shift from artistic creation to careful conservation, a process equally rooted in indigenous knowledge and contemporary challenges.

**Figure 4:** A thangka painter at the Shesrig Foundation sketches a deity using precise measurements based on centuries-old iconometric manuals (*thig tshad*). This meticulous process embodies both artistic skill and meditative discipline, core to Buddhist visual pedagogy in Ladakh. As a center for training and conservation, the Shesrig Foundation plays a key role in sustaining these indigenous knowledge systems.

**Figure 5:** A panoramic mural from the assembly hall of a Ladakh monastery, centred on *Guru Padmasambhava*, the revered tantric master credited with introducing Buddhism to Tibet. Surrounded by narrative scenes and protective deities, the composition functions not only as a religious icon but also as a visual scripture conveying Buddhist teachings, cosmology, and moral conduct. Such murals are integral to ritual life and embody pedagogical forms of indigenous Himalayan knowledge.

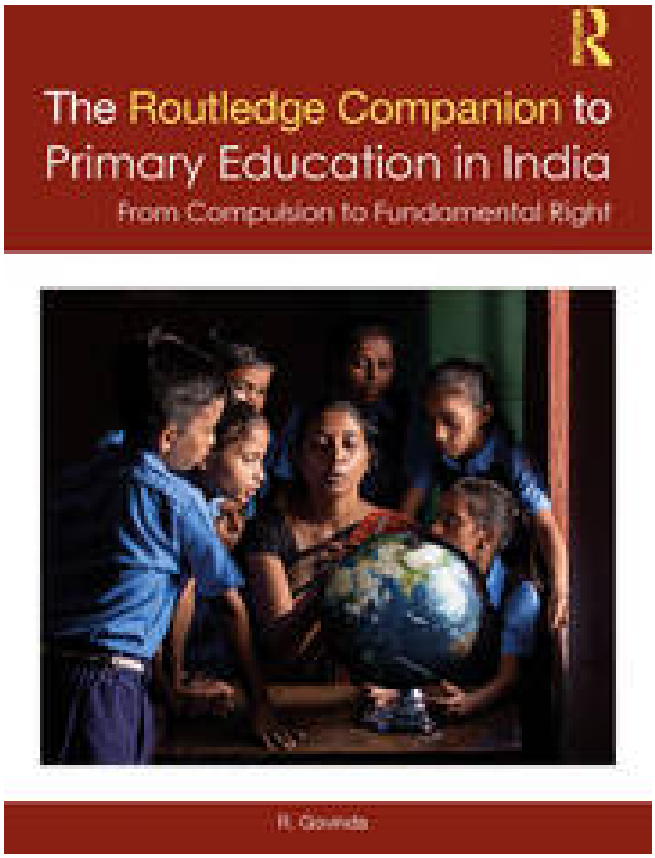
**Figure 6:** An image of *Vajrapāṇi*, rendered here in a rare orange form, from a mural panel in a Hemis monastery. The intricate brushwork and layered mineral pigments reflect the fusion of spiritual devotion and artisanal mastery. Such precision is not merely technical; it is the outcome of generations of apprenticeship, where knowledge is passed down through embodied practice. This indigenous pedagogy intertwines iconographic accuracy, symbolic meaning, and meditative discipline.

# The Routledge Companion to Primary Education in India: From Compulsion to Fundamental Right

*Reviewed by Dr. Shavnam Kumari*

This book is written by R. Govinda and he takes readers on a rich, layered journey through the evolution of primary education in India. It's not just a history book—it's a thoughtful reflection on how education has been shaped by politics, policy, and people over time. This book contains a total of 24 chapters. The reviewer divides all the chapters in four parts. The first part is Colonial Roots and Early Struggles (Chapters 1–6). This section sets the stage by looking at how British colonial rule disrupted India's traditional education systems. Gandhi called the old system a "beautiful tree," but colonial policies—especially Macaulay's push for English education—favored a small elite and sidelined mass education. While there were some reform efforts, most failed due to lack of political will and poor planning. The Baroda Experiment is a rare bright spot, showing what could be achieved with committed leadership. Overall, this part paints a picture of missed opportunities and systemic neglect. The second part is Nationalist Dreams and Fresh Starts (Chapters 8–12). As India moved toward independence, leaders like Gandhi proposed bold ideas like "Nai Talim"—a hands-on, craft-based education model that challenged colonial norms. Though visionary, it never fully took off. After independence, education was seen as central to building the new nation. These chapters explore how early policies and institutions were formed, and how the dream of universal education quickly ran into real-world hurdles. Part 3 is Planning vs. Reality (Chapters 13–20). This section dives into the persistent problems that have haunted Indian primary education. Despite ambitious Five-Year Plans, the gap between goals and outcomes remains wide. The focus shifted from just getting kids into school to actually helping them learn—but many still struggle with basic skills. Vocational training was never properly integrated, and alternative systems like non-formal education fizzled out.

The chapters also highlight three major challenges: laws that mandate schooling but don't ensure it, the ongoing struggle for girls' education, and the undervalued role of primary school teachers. Part 4 is Education as a Right (Chapters 21–24). This final part centers on the landmark Right to Education (RTE) Act of 2009. It wasn't an easy win—getting education recognized as a legal right took years of effort.




Even after the law passed, putting it into practice has been tough. Issues like poor infrastructure, uneven quality, and social inequality still persist.

The last chapter ties everything together, showing how far India has come—and how much work remains to make quality education truly universal. This book is a compelling chronicle of India's educational journey—from colonial neglect to constitutional promise. It celebrates progress but doesn't shy away from the hard truths. The dream of inclusive, high-quality education is alive—but still unfinished. Instead of a simple narrative, the book provides a rich, multi-faceted critique of what has worked and what hasn't, exploring the complex interplay of history, policy, and society.

# A note of reflection on Saba Farhin's article- "Clay to Deity: Stories of Tradition and Silent Contribution."

*By Sukanya Guha Niyogi.*

Through this article- "Clay to Deity: Stories of Tradition and Silent Contribution" by Saba Farhin, in September 2024 AIF Newsletter, the evolving practices of *Durga Puja* offer a significant lens to reflect on the intersections of culture, tradition, and social realities in Bengal. What appears at first glance to be a religious and artistic celebration of the divine feminine- "চিন্ময়ীকে মৃন্ময়ীতে আবাহন" (a grand welcoming of divine power into a clay idol), upon deeper examination, reveals profound contradictions between ritual symbolism and the lived experiences of women. In 1606, the royal family of Krishnanagar appears to have celebrated the earliest *Durga Puja* that has been documented. Inspired by Raja Krishnachandra, Raja Nabakrishna Deb of Shobhabazar Rajbari (the king's palace) in north Kolkata began the *Durga Pujo* custom at his family residence in 1757. Kumortuli originated when skilled *kumors* (Potters) were brought from Krishnanagar to make idols of the deity. By the Hoogly River, workers began to gradually settle in Kumortuli. This phenomenon shows how *Zamindars* brought culture and embraced the craftsmanship of clay into a wider world. This migration shows a shift in the craftsmanship of artisans from clay pottery or statue to the Biggest *Durga* idol, not only from clay but also from different other unbreakable materials like fibers and wood to reach a greater audience overseas.

The *Durga Puja* is a representation success of divine feminine power over evil and a united Bengali family, including the extraordinary Mother *Durga* and her children - Goddess of knowledge *Saraswati*, Goddess of prosperity *Laxmi*, Lord of wisdom *Ganesh* and Lord of War *Kartikeya*. To make the *Durga* idol, the main three ingredients are soil from the *Ganga* or other rivers, *Gochana* (Urine of a Cow) and soil from the courtyards of brothels. Some folklore says one of the most symbolically rich aspects of *Durga* idol-making has historically been the inclusion of the nine kind of soil in "*Punyo Mritika/mati*" from the courtyard of nine different classes of women- *Brahmani* (wife of priest), *Malini* (Wife of gardener), *Goalini* (Milkmaid), *Dhopani* (Washerwoman), *Sudrani* (Wife of lower caste man), *Napitani* (Wife of Barbar), *Kapalik* or *Tantric* (Occultist) and *Potita* (Sex workers). It symbolically interweaves that Goddess has been made up from women from every caste, class or work and ritualistic amalgamation of women's powers in society. Different verse presents about the use soils from the brothels or courtyard of the sex workers, explanation rooted towards the customer from every background come to the brothels for their ultimate physical satisfaction leaving there own identity before entering the doors of sex workers, also the customers forget purity - impurity and lose all the sense of virtue to emerge to sea of higher satisfaction and return with sins. The brothel becomes the ultimate place of emerging sites of all the demolishing differentiation and becomes the most virtuous door step in the world. Using this soil in the process of the divine image of Mother is symbolic inclusion and sanction of the contribution of socially stigmatized and marginalized sex workers.

Yet, the reflection that emerges is one of paradox: while the soil of sex workers is ritually sanctified, their lives remain stigmatized and excluded. The symbolic reverence accorded to their courtyards has not translated into rights, dignity, or protection.

This contradiction becomes even more pressing when seen against the backdrop of contemporary women's struggles in India. While *Durga Puja* venerates the goddess as *Shakti* (power), real women continue to face systemic violence and marginalization. The refusal of Sonagachi's sex workers since 2019 to provide *Punya mati* (Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee, 2021) must therefore be understood as an act of resistance—rejecting tokenistic inclusion and demanding genuine recognition as citizens with rights. Their protests expose the hypocrisy of a society that embraces them symbolically for ten days of ritual but abandons them in law, healthcare, and social respect for the remainder of the year.

The gender paradox extends beyond sex work. Women's participation in *Durga Puja* remains largely ritualized, restricted to roles like arrangements of *puja*, *Devi Baran* (Welcoming the goddess to the home) and lastly *Sindoor Khela*, while their involvement in decision-making, organization, and craft labour remains limited. Even in Kumartuli, women artisans, though present, rarely occupy positions of leadership. The worship of *Durga* as mother and warrior thus coexists uneasily with structural patriarchy and gendered marginalization. In the current scenario shows the contemporary shift of *Durga Puja* toward corporate sponsorship, competitive pandals, and international recognition has further complicated its meanings. While UNESCO's inscription in 2021 acknowledges the festival's cultural significance, the growing emphasis on spectacle risks overshadowing its deeper ethical and symbolic dimensions. Soil is now sourced primarily from regions like Kakdwip and Uluberia, and the ritual act of respectfully seeking blessings from marginalized women has largely disappeared. This detachment from symbolic inclusivity mirrors the broader dilution of social responsibility in the face of commercialization.

In conclusion, the narrative of Kumartuli, *Durga* idol making and *Punya mati* reveals the tension between continuity and change, reverence and neglect, symbolism and reality. The artistry of Kumartuli and the grandeur of *Durga Puja* deserve admiration, but they also demand critical engagement. Festivals that honor the divine feminine must translate into practices that honour women in everyday life. Until the soil that sanctifies *Durga* idols is matched by a society that dignifies the women who provide it, the festival's symbolism remains incomplete. True homage to *Durga* lies not only in ritual worship but in the pursuit of justice, dignity, and equality for all women.

## APPRECIATION FOR ANTHRO BULLETIN

"Sunita ji and Shalina ji you have been contributing substantially by picking up very relevant thematic discussion through the bulletin..Deserve special recognition 🙏😊"

By Dr. Shree Bhagwan Roy
Founder Chairman of IBRAD

"Enjoyed thoroughly the August Issue of ***Anthro Bulletin***. Mg Ed Sunita Reddy's comprehensive capture of 'Cultural Pulse of August' compels to await anxiously the come September tunes in the next issue. The '***Anthro Bulletin***' celebrates truly the Cultural Diversity of India by providing articles from different regions of the country and also by having contributions from related disciplines like social work, sociology, economics etc. To bring this type of rich Bulletin on time regularly is not easy. During the ongoing Ganapati Utsav, article on 'Values of Ganesh Fest' was valuable and covering Varanasi - Mahadev's nagari in monsoon was a nice comforting combination. Providing insights from the 'Anthro of the Month' speaker by Interviewing him/ her separately is also useful. Book reviews and Job Alerts at the end makes it a perfect package. For all that Anthropos Editors & the team deserves a sincere salute.

On academically sound discourse on 'Embodied Identity' /Tattoos by Chief Ed Shalina Mehta, a meaningful Message to budding anthros was timely. Her message opens with a quote by Michael Foucault, and thereafter quotes by John Bulmer, Levi Strauss, Rubin and Konyak & Zhim, to explain the evolving nature of Tattoos. This message (thick) balances the other articles (relatively thin in Geertz terms) of the Bulletin. One may wonder why some budding anthros take up the subject of Tattoos on celebrities, players, etc. For example, many of us are charmed by the type of Tattoos on cricket players Virat Kohli, Pandya brothers & others. Analysis of their Tattoos may bring anthros closer to contemporary issues and trends."

By Dr. Lalit Kumar,
Former Joint-Adviser, Planning Commission
(now NITI Aayog).

"Wonderful August edition indeed by Dr Sunita Reddy and her team. Dr. Lalit has elaborated it in full details so beautifully which is very true. You have created a good online newsletter whose readership is increasing day by day. The editorials, the interviews of the month, the writes-ups. I am sure in short time you may want to upscale it to a bulletin and then a journal too. Best wishes as we welcome September's tune too 😊🌄"

Dr. Nita Mawar
Former Director-in-Charge of ICMR-NARI.

## FORTHCOMING EVENT

An online lecture will be organized as part of our **Distinguished Guest Lecture Series**, along with an online **workshop on ethnography**.
For updates please follow our website's events page-- **https://events.anthroposindiafoundation.com/**

## PAST EVENT

- To explore how Anthropology can be reimagined to meet the challenges of tomorrow, a **Round Table Meeting** engaging with leading anthropologists was held on September 23rd 2025, 6:30 pm onwards.


For more details - **Click here**

YouTube live Link - **Click here**

- For our Distinguished Guest lecture series, an online lecture was organised and delivered by **Dr. Rajni Lamba** on September 30th 2025, 6:30 pm onwards


For more details - **Click here**

YouTube live Link - **Click here**

## FELLOWSHIPS AND JOB ALERTS

1. Various Vacancy at ICMR (Permanent Posts)

   ***Last Date to Apply:*** 10.11.2025

   ***Application Link:*** Click here

2. ICSSR's Postdoctoral Fellowship 2025

   ***Last Date to Apply:*** 31.10.2025

   ***Application Link:*** Click here

3. ICSSR's Senior Fellowship 2025

   ***Last Date to Apply:*** 31.10.2025

   ***Application Link:*** Click here

4. Resident Scholar Fellowships at SAR

   ***Last Date to Apply:*** first Monday in November

   ***Application Link:*** Click here

**NEW!**

We're thrilled to announce a brand-new column in our ***Anthro Bulletin,*** **Through the Lens** – a visual journey through photo essays capturing the richness of human experiences, cultures, and everyday life.

Stay tuned for stories that speak beyond words!

**Let's learn, grow, and celebrate anthropology together!**

**Please feel free to share your write-ups, comments and suggestions with us at aif.newsletter2025@gmail.com.**

**ANTHROPOS BOOKS**

***A Publishing House of Anthropos India Foundation***

Visit AIF website to learn more about *Anthropos Books*

https://www.anthroposindiafoundation.com/publications/book-series/anthropos-books.html

**'CHILDHOOD MATTERS'**

AIF's other magazine which is Participatory, Multilingual, Quarterly and also Digital can be subscribed here: **https://forms.gle/UdvXdHRYAECXKVLP7**

**For contributing articles and photographs to the magazine, sharing feedback or ordering print copies, kindly write to us at aif.newsletter2025@gmail.com.**

**ACCESS AIF'S E-RESOURCE CENTER BY BECOMING A LIFE MEMBER**

We have an anthropological E-Resource Center hosted at the AIF website. Become a Life Member to start accessing rare anthropological material to further your research. Details about how to become our LM below.

## Get Involved & Support Us

(Email: anthroposif@gmail.com)

- **Promote Anthropological work**
  *share your work - blogs, documentaries, videos, podcasts, photographs - for our website*
- **Intern with us**
- **Collaborate with us**
  *for organising workshops, or for contributing articles for our newsletter and digital magazine*
- **Volunteer**
- **Fund our activities**

## AIF Membership

Become a Life Member of AIF by registering with us for a one-time nominal fee of Rs. 3000/-.

**(click here).**

Life Members receive the monthly ***Anthro Bulletin***, in-house research summaries, updates on AIF's courses and events, and notifications about our quarterly magazine ***Childhood Matters*** (*with free access to past issues* **here** ). **They also enjoy exclusive access to our new e-resource center, featuring articles by eminent anthropologists, and receive special discounts on our paid events.**

**Bank details for Online Banking**
Name: Anthropos India Foundation
A/C No.: 912010012235653
Bank: AXIS BANK, Vasant Kunj Branch,New Delhi
IFSC Code: UTIB0000119



Follow Us: