

ANTHROBULLETIN

VOLUME 6 | ISSUE 12 | DECEMBER 2025



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.

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Prof. Kamal K. Misra, Professor Emeritus of Anthropology, KISS-DU, Bhubaneswar

MANAGING EDITOR

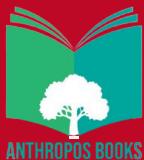
Dr. Sunita Reddy, *Founder-Chair, AIF*

EDITORIAL BOARD

Prof. Shalina Mehta
Dr. Sunita Reddy
Dr. Rajni Lamba
Dr. Shaweta Anand
Dr. Bamdev Subedi

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.

COPYRIGHT: ANTHRO BULLETIN © 2025
ANTHROPOS BOOKS



ANTHRO BULLETIN

A Digital Magazine by *Anthropos Books*
Anthropos India Foundation, New Delhi
December, 2025

CORE TEAM

Saba Farhin, *Magazine Coordinator*
Habiba Haroon, *Graphic Designer & Social Media Manager*
Aryan Bande, *Technical Resource Person*

CONTRIBUTORS:

Àgbède Oláolúwa B, Subiya Asad, Sukanya Guha Niyogi, Ratan Mukherjee

ABOUT THE COVER PHOTO:

This photograph was taken during the AIF-IGRMS Winter Workshop, December 2025. The woman featured is ***Rudan Devi***, a Sohrai painter from Jharkhand, India, seen against the backdrop of her artwork. Along with her team, she painted the walls of several huts in the Mythological Trail section of the IGRMS, Bhopal campus. Traditionally, Sohrai paintings adorn the walls of homes during festivals and special occasions, with each motif narrating a story and song rooted in the community's folklore and cultural heritage.

[CLICK HERE FOR HER CLIP](#)

9818858383

anthroposif@gmail.com

<https://anthroposindiafoundation.com>

TABLE OF CONTENTS

FROM THE MANAGING EDITOR'S DESK	02
“Living Traditions, Living Anthropology: Ritual, Memory, and Heritage in Contemporary India” by Dr. Sunita Reddy, Founder-Chair, AIF	
CHIEF EDITOR'S MESSAGE	03
“Authenticity and Authority in Ethnographic Writings” by Prof. Kamal K. Misra, Professor Emeritus of Anthropology, KISS-DU, Bhubaneswar.	
ARTICLE 1	04
“Paush Pitha-Kheer: A Celebration of Rice Harvest, Family Bonding, and Changing Traditions” by Neha Singh, Anthropology Graduate, IGNOU.	
ARTICLE 2	06
“Chenna Poda: The Roasted Sweet Heritage of Odisha” by Satchidananda Dash	
ARTICLE 3	07
“Ashes and Eternity: The Sacred Theatre of Death and Liberation in Manikarnika Ghat, Banaras” by Anindya Sarker, Former Graduate, Department of Anthropology, Shahjalal University of Science & Technology, Sylhet, Bangladesh, & Al Mahmud, BIMSTEC Scholar, School of Historical Studies, Nalanda University, India.	
ARTICLE 4	08
“Anthropology through Anthropological Survey of India (AnSI)” by Anil Kumar Sukumaran, PhD. Scholar, USHSS, Guru Gobind Singh Indraprastha University, Dwarka, New Delhi.	
ANTHROPOLOGIST OF THE MONTH	10
Dr. Shweta Rawat	
YOUNG SCHOLARS: NOTES FROM THE FIELD.....	12
“Anabguni, the puberty ritual of Gadaba: a fieldnote from Lamtaput block, Koraput district, Odisha” by Sada Badanayak Ph.D. Scholar, Dept. of Anthropology, Utkal University, BBSR	
THROUGH THE LENS	14
“The Making of Ayyanar’s Terracotta Votive Horses” by Sauban Ahmad, M.A., Third Semester, Department of History of Art, Indian Institute of Heritage, New Delhi.	
BOOK REVIEW.....	16
“Piers Vitebsky - Dialogues with the Dead: The discussion of mortality among the Sora of eastern India. Cambridge University Press, 1993. 288 pages. ISBN 0 521 384478” by Ruchisri Sahu, University of Hyderabad.	
REFLECTIONS ON ANTHRO BULLETIN	18
“Reflections on Threads of Resilience: Life in Indore’s Slum Communities- Yash Singh Sisodiya (Volume 6 Issue 11)” by Ranjan Chatterjee, Junior Research Fellow, Anthropological Survey of India, Southern Regional Centre, Mysuru (Mysore)-570026	
OTHER NEWS AND UPDATES	20
Forthcoming and Past Events, Fellowships and Job Alerts.	

Living Traditions, Living Anthropology: Ritual, Memory, and Heritage in Contemporary India

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

Dear Readers,

I am blessed to get pearls of wisdom from my teacher and mentor, Prof. Kamal K. Misra, thirty-five years back and continue to learn from him. In his chief editor's message, he traces ethnography's meanings, contrasts theory and method, reviews critiques of traditional and alternative writing, acknowledges limits, and advocates rigorous, reflexive, transparent ethnography to enhance validity, ethics, and scholarly reliability. The winter workshop organised by AIF on 'Ethnography and Documentation of Material Culture' in collaboration with IGRMS from 24th to 28th Dec. at IGRMS, gave hands-on experience and training to 40 scholars from various parts of the country.

This volume covers articles across kitchens, temples, riverbanks, village courtyards, and cremation ghats...speak in different voices yet echo a shared truth: culture in India is lived daily, enacted through food, ritual, craft, scholarship, and memory. Whether it is a rice pitha shaped by many hands, a slice of roasted chenna offered to a goddess, the eternal fire of Manikarnika, or the careful documentation of communities by anthropologists, each narrative reminds us that tradition is not static heritage—it is an ongoing practice.

Food emerges as a powerful entry point into this living cultural world. The celebration of Paush Pitha-Kheer in eastern India situates cuisine firmly within agrarian cycles, seasonal rhythms, and family life. Made from freshly harvested rice, pithas and kheer are not merely festive delicacies but ritual foods expressing gratitude to land and labour. The gradual fading of collective pitha-making—once accompanied by songs, storage practices, and intergenerational participation—mirrors broader social shifts: nuclear families, market dependence, and changing tastes. Yet, even in its transformed form, Paush Pitha continues to carry memories of harvest, care, and belonging. Similarly, the practice of Ashadh Kheer in Bihar, tied to the Adra Nakshatra, reveals indigenous ecological knowledge where food, astronomy, and health beliefs converge. These traditions underscore how culinary practices encode environmental wisdom long before the language of "sustainability" entered public discourse.

From the hearth to the temple, Chenna Poda of Odisha tells another story of food as heritage. Born accidentally yet sanctified through ritual, this roasted sweet bridges devotion, livelihood, and regional identity. As prasada offered to Maa Kali in Nayagarh, Chenna Poda transforms everyday ingredients into the divine. Its preparation—whether in sal-leaf-lined earthen ovens or modern bakeries—illustrates how tradition adapts while retaining a symbolic core. The call for a GI tag and the celebration of Chenna Poda Dibasa signal contemporary efforts to protect culinary heritage from homogenization, reminding us that safeguarding culture also requires institutional recognition. If food anchors life and continuity, Manikarnika Ghat in Banaras confronts us with mortality and transcendence. The article on Manikarnika presents death not as rupture

but as passage, embedded in myth, ritual, and collective memory. The eternal fire, the Manikarnika Kund, and the belief in moksha situate individual loss within a cosmic framework. Here, anthropology meets philosophy: ashes settle on stone steps even as genealogies preserve lineage, binding past, present, and future.



In this sacred theatre, grief and liberation coexist, offering a profound commentary on how societies make meaning of death. Anthropology, as several contributions remind us, is both observer and participant in these cultural worlds. The overview of the Anthropological Survey of India (AnSI) highlights the institutional role of anthropology in documenting, preserving, and interpreting India's immense bio-cultural diversity. From museums and archives to field stations and training programmes, AnSI represents a commitment to systematic knowledge production—one that must remain responsive to ethical responsibilities and changing social realities. That responsiveness is vividly illustrated in the fieldnote on the Anabguni puberty ritual among the Gadaba. Rich in detail, the account shows how life-cycle rituals regulate vulnerability, gendered transitions, and community cohesion through symbolism, seclusion, food taboos, and collective celebration. Far from being mere "custom," Anabguni is a social technology that manages change—biological, social, and spiritual—within a shared moral universe.

Material culture, too, speaks powerfully. The photo-essay on Ayyanar's terracotta votive horses foregrounds endangered craft traditions sustained by hereditary potter-priests. Each horse, assembled from multiple fired parts and consecrated through ritual, stands as a guardian not only of villages but of cultural continuity. Documenting such practices is itself an act of preservation. IGRMS's huge, beautiful collection of these is remarkable. Finally, the review of Piers Vitebsky's Dialogues with the Dead returns us to memory as a social force. Among the Sora, conversations with the dead are not metaphors but active engagements shaping property, emotion, and personhood. This work resonates deeply with Manikarnika's eternal fire and with everyday rituals of food and craft: all reveal how societies refuse to sever ties between the living and the dead, the past and the present. Taken together, these contributions affirm anthropology's enduring relevance. They show that rituals endure not because they resist change, but because they adapt—carrying meanings forward even as forms shift. In documenting, reflecting upon, and critically engaging with these practices, anthropology does more than record culture; it participates in its continued life.

Happy reading...

Wish all the readers a very happy, productive and peaceful new year ahead.

Authenticity and Authority in Ethnographic Writings

Prof. Kamal K. Misra, Professor Emeritus of Anthropology, KISS-DU, Bhubaneswar

Any meaningful engagement with ethnographic inquiry must begin with a clear understanding of what the term "ethnography" itself denotes. Roy Ellen (1984), for instance, identifies at least five distinct, though subtly differentiated, meanings attached to this concept. In its most common usage, ethnography refers to empirically grounded accounts of the culture and social organization of particular human populations, underscoring its foundation in intensive field-based data collection and their careful, systematic analysis. This understanding of ethnography acquires a different inflection when juxtaposed with theory. Whereas theory is typically concerned with structured and abstract modes of thinking about a subject, ethnography functions as a crucial methodological instrument through which such theoretical organisation is made possible.

Ethnography is not only different from theory, but an ethnographic account of a living community is fundamentally distinct from historical or archaeological narratives, the latter relying on altogether different evidentiary tools and analytical procedures to arrive at their conclusions. Beyond these conceptual distinctions, the term ethnography is also employed to denote a specific set of research practices, most notably, intensive qualitative investigations of small human groups conducted through participant observation. Ethnography may also refer to an academic field of study concerned with the comparative examination of ethnic groups or human populations. As Roy Ellen aptly observes, "ethnography is something you may do, study, use, read or write," and these varied usages reflect the diverse yet conceptually legitimate ways in which scholars have appropriated the term (1984: 8). The evolving discourse on the nature and significance of ethnography within social science research has long engaged anthropologists and scholars of cultural studies. This interest intensified once ethnography came to be acknowledged as an indispensable means of gathering empirically grounded and methodologically sound data for analysis and scholarly reporting. Within anthropological traditions, ethnographic practice is often broadly classified into two strands: "traditional ethnography" and "alternative forms of writing". Traditional ethnography adheres to established conventions that serve the scientific paradigm, marked by a particular narrative structure that aspires to present social or cultural life in its presumed totality, foregrounds the detached image of the researcher, constructs representations of 'the people', privileges the *emic* point of view, emphasizes rapport, and maintains an objective, generalizable style (Klumbyte, 2001). Predominant before the 1960s, this ethnographic practice has been widely critiqued for its subjective, contextual, and ideological orientations, as well as for its inadequate engagement with history, processes of change, political economy, and situational contingencies. In response to these limitations, the post-1960 period witnessed the emergence of alternative modes of ethnographic writing that sought to redress the shortcomings of traditional ethnography. These approaches foregrounded new narrative and methodological strategies attentive to the relational dynamics between anthropologist and informant, the social and contextual embeddedness of the researcher, the significance of political economy and historical forces, and the ethical and political economy and historical forces, and the ethical and political conditions shaping fieldwork. Consequently, alternative ethnographic writing embraced elements such as subjectivity, reflexivity, dialogic engagement, multiple, perspectives,

openness, and the articulation of conflict as integral to ethnographic representation (*ibid.*). In the 1980s, James Clifford and George Marcus' edited volume, *Writing Culture* (1986), George Marcus and Michael Fischer's volume, *Anthropology as Cultural Critique: An Experimental Moment in the Human Sciences* (1986), and many others paved the way for a powerful theoretical movement within anthropology and related disciplines.



While we ought to acknowledge and credit the critiques of traditional ethnography for exposing many of its conceptual and methodological failures, we should also dispassionately admit that alternative writings, cited above, do not entirely transcend these problems and are themselves far from unproblematic. Persistent concerns, ranging from the tension between subjectivity and objectivity, the continued dominance of author-centred narratives, and the enduring authority of the anthropologist over final interpretation, to ethical and political sensitivities, the limitations of emergent theoretical paradigms such as social history and political economy, and the challenges posed by native anthropology, etc., continue to animate anthropological debates. However, we contend that ethnographies are, to a significant extent, textual constructions shaped by political and historical contexts, moral and ideological commitments, disciplinary conventions, and the constraints of the theoretical frameworks they employ.

In addition to what has been discussed above, the very tradition of anthropological fieldwork carries inherent limitations that govern the form and texture of these textual constructions, inevitably bearing upon the reliability, validity, and authenticity of ethnographic writing, concerns that every ethnographer must critically confront. What, then, are the options before us? Should ethnographic practice and writing be abandoned altogether? I argue against such a conclusion. Rather than limiting ourselves to critique alone, I advocate a more conscientious and reflexive ethnography. While perfect objectivity may remain unattainable in ethnographic practice and representation, it can nevertheless be meaningfully approximated. To this end, the scientific standards and methodological rigour available within the social sciences must be carefully upheld to cultivate an impartial engagement with cultural data and thereby enhance its validity and reliability. Given that absolute value neutrality is virtually impossible in ethnographic research, from the personal predispositions of the ethnographer to the structural conditions of fieldwork itself, the ethnographer must develop the ethical practice of explicitly acknowledging potential sources of bias that may shape the ethnographic account. Such transparency, I suggest, offers a way to mitigate enduring disputes over authenticity and authority in ethnographic research and writing.

References

Ellen, R. F. (1984). *Ethnographic Research: A Guide to General Conduct*. London: Academic Press.
Klumbyte, N. (2001). Mapping problems in ethnography: A critique of traditional methods of analysis. *Lietuvos etnologija: Etnologija ir socialinė antropologija*, 1, 261-274

"On behalf of the Anthropos India Foundation, all those associated with it, and in my personal capacity, I extend to our readers warm wishes for a joyful and a truly productive New Year, 2026."

Paush Pitha-Kheer: A Celebration of Rice Harvest, Family Bonding, and Changing Traditions



By Neha Singh

In rural India, each season carries its own cultural significance, and the month of Paush (December-January) is especially associated with the celebration of Paush Pitha-Kheer. This festival, celebrated mainly in Eastern India—including Bihar, Jharkhand, Odisha, and West Bengal—is not only about delicious food but also deeply intertwined with agricultural life, domestic traditions, and community bonding.

1. Post-Harvest Food Ritual

Paush Pitha-Kheer marks the gratitude and joy following the rice harvest. Families use freshly harvested grains, rice, and other seasonal ingredients to prepare pithas (rice balls) and kheer (sweet pudding). Preparing and sharing these dishes is considered a ritual of blessed food, expressing thanks to nature and celebrating the fruits of labour.

2. Varieties of Pitha

Pitha comes in several varieties, reflecting the culinary richness of the region:

Sada Pitha: Simple plain rice ball.

Gud Pitha: Sweetened with jaggery.

Khoya Pitha: Rich and creamy with khoya.

Aloo Chokha Namkeen Pitha: Savoury version with spiced mashed potatoes.

In earlier times, sada pitha and gud pitha were stored for 2-3 days and eaten as morning snacks. Families used to make enough quantity to last, and children and elders all participated in shaping the pithas while singing traditional songs.

3. Changing Traditions

With modernisation, these practices are becoming rare:

- Grandmothers have aged, and daughters-in-law often make kitchen decisions.
- Children are influenced by modern lifestyles and ready-made food options.
- Market varieties have reduced the need to store pithas, so they are now made in small quantities to be consumed the same day.
- Nuclear families have replaced joint families, making the collective pitha-making and song-singing ritual less common.



Image 1: Khoya Doodh Pitha, Aalo Chokha Pitha, Sada Pitha



Image 2: Namkeen lamba Pitha, photo clicked by the writer at Goh, Bihar



Image 3: Milk dipped Khoya Pitha (Condensed milk stuffed rice ball)



Image 4: Gud kheer(sacred jaggery milk pudding)

4. Timing and Cultural Belief

Paush Pitha is traditionally consumed only in Paush, paired with kheer. Eating it in Maagh(Jan-Feb) is considered inauspicious, though consuming it without kheer is allowed.

5. Regional Variations

- Bihar & Jharkhand: Paush Pitha, rice flour with jaggery, coconut, or sesame seeds.
- Odisha: Chhena Pitha or Enduri Pitha, rice flour and cottage cheese, steamed in turmeric leaves.
- West Bengal: Poush Parbon Pitha, rice flour, coconut, and date palm jaggery.

6. Seasonal & Astronomical Significance of Ashadh Kheer

Bihar's culinary traditions are also tied to seasons, lunar phases, and local wisdom. During Ashadh (June-July), on Adra Nakshatra, special kheer is prepared and eaten together with Daalpuri and mango. Traditionally, it is believed that consuming all three together protects the body from the harmful effects of poisonous creatures such as snakes, scorpions, and monitor lizards, which were once common in the region.

This practice demonstrates how Bihar's traditional foods connect agriculture, seasonal produce, astronomy, family celebrations, and traditional health practices, reflecting a deep understanding of nature and the local environment.

7. Agrarian Cultural Practice

Paush Pitha-Kheer is more than just a culinary festival. It reflects agricultural traditions and gratitude towards nature, using fresh, seasonal produce. It reminds communities of the importance of sustainable living, natural resources, and the cycles of the earth.

Conclusion

Paush Pitha-Kheer and Ashadh Kheer with Daalpuri and mango together showcase the richness of Bihar's food heritage, where harvest, season, lunar calendar, family bonding, and traditional health practices are all interwoven. While modernisation has altered how these foods are prepared and consumed, they remain symbols of culture, gratitude, and community, preserving the region's heritage and connecting people to the rhythms of nature and ancestral wisdom.

Chenna Poda: The Roasted Sweet Heritage of Odisha



By Satchidananda Dash

Introduction: A Sweet Born by Chance

Food traditions often carry legends, and Chenna Poda is no exception. Chenna Poda, literally meaning “roasted cottage cheese,” is a beloved sweet from Odisha that has grown from an accidental kitchen creation into a symbol of Odia oneness. Local accounts trace its invention to Nayagarh District of Odisha, where lies a small town called Daspalla in the early 20th century, when confectioner Sudarsan Sahu experimented with leftover chenna (cottage cheese), sugar, and semolina. Left overnight in a coal oven, the mixture baked into a golden, crusty, sweet, with a soft center. What began as an accident soon captured the hearts of locals and gradually became a source of delight for parishioners. On the other hand, its deep connection with the Maa Kali Temple of Nayagarh, where it became a ritual offering, makes it a living heritage of devotion and taste. Even today, Nayagarh is known as the home of Chenna Poda. Many sweet shops near the Maa Dakhina Kali Temple still follow traditional methods, baking in sal-leaf-lined earthen ovens in their making. Pilgrims visiting the temple often carry Chenna Poda as an offering, strengthening its sacred association and embedding it in the spiritual fabric of the region. Beyond the temple, Chenna Poda travels into household rituals and festivals. During Durga Puja, Raja, and Kartik Purnima, families prepare or buy Chenna Poda to share among kin. Its burnt golden crust is symbolically rich, signifying the transformation of the everyday into the divine. The story of Chenna Poda is also one of survival and livelihood. For many small-scale confectioners, particularly around the Maa Kali Temple precinct, sales to pilgrims provide a steady income. Street vendors prepare Chenna Poda in clay ovens, their stalls perfumed with the smoky aroma that draws both devotees and tourists. Chenna Poda is not just a dessert—it is prasada (sacred offering). It is prepared and offered to the goddess, believed to please her fiery form with its smoky sweetness. This ritual connection has



Figure: Inside the sanctum of Maa Kali temple- September 2025

transformed Chenna Poda into a sacred marker of Nayagarh's identity. At larger fairs and festivals, the sweet enjoys a special place as both a cultural symbol and a commercial product. With growing urban demand, bakeries across Odisha now sell Chenna Poda in modern ovens, yet the Nayagarh temple version retains unmatched authenticity.

Transmission Across Generations

For Odias living away from home, Chenna Poda evokes nostalgia. Its taste recalls temple visits, festive markets, and shared meals—an edible heritage that sustains cultural identity across distances. In Odia households, Chenna Poda often accompanies family rituals. Mothers and grandmothers take pride in making it at home, teaching younger generations the art of preparation. Recipes, often unwritten, are passed down orally. In Nayagarh, temple priests and local confectioners also preserve ritual methods, ensuring continuity between sacred and domestic traditions. Chenna Poda is more than a sweet—it is a sacred offering, a livelihood, and a cultural emblem. From the sanctum of Maa Kali Temple in Nayagarh to homes across Odisha, it narrates the story of faith, creativity, and continuity. Every slice carries both sweetness and symbolism, reminding us that food can embody history, devotion, and identity. Like art or craft, Chenna Poda is a culture baked into every bite—an edible heritage that links people, temples, and traditions. Today, Chenna Poda is celebrated as “the pride of Odisha.” Each year, on April 11th is celebrated as “chenna Poda Dibasa” to raise awareness and demand amidst all. Also, there is a growing advocacy for a Geographical Indication (GI) tag to protect its authenticity and link it firmly to its place of origin. Modern variations exist—such as chocolate, dry fruit, or oven-baked versions—but the essence remains unchanged. What makes Chenna Poda enduring is not just its taste but its role as prasada, heritage, and identity all at once.



"Ashes and Eternity: The Sacred Theatre of Death and Liberation in Manikarnika Ghat, Banaras"



Anindya Sarker



Al Mahmud

On the sacred banks of the Ganga, where time itself feels suspended, stands Manikarnika Ghat, the principal cremation ground of Varanasi. For centuries, this ghat has symbolised both the inevitability of death and the promise of liberation. Here, the fire never ceases—the pyres burn day and night, carrying countless souls toward moksha, release from the cycle of rebirth.

The Myth of Sati and the Shakti Peeth

The origins of Manikarnika are rooted in ancient mythology. According to legend, when Sati Devi immolated herself after Daksha's insult to Lord Shiva, a grief-stricken Shiva wandered the world carrying her body. To ease his sorrow, Lord Vishnu released his Sudarshan Chakra, which cut her body into 51 pieces. Each fragment fell upon the earth and became a Shakti Peeth, a sacred shrine of the Divine Mother. At Manikarnika, it is said that Sati's earring (Manikarnika in Sanskrit) fell, giving the ghat its name. The goddess here is worshipped as Vishalakshi and Manikarni, and the shrine remains a significant seat of devotion for followers of Shaktism, close to the great Kashi Vishwanath Temple.

The Sacred Kund

Another legend tells of Lord Vishnu's tapasya. After thousands of years of penance to please Shiva, Vishnu begged that Kashi should never be destroyed, even at the end of the world. Moved by his devotion, Shiva and Parvati appeared before him to bless the city. To honour their presence, Vishnu dug a well for their bath, known as the Manikarnika Kund. To this day, the Kund sits beside the ghat, considered one of its holiest features.

The Ritual of Fire

Every day, mourners carry bodies through the narrow alleys to the ghat. Wrapped in cloth and garlands, the departed are placed upon wooden pyres. Priests chant mantras, families circle the fire, and then the flames rise—flames believed to be eternal, said to have been burning since time immemorial. For the living, this ritual is more than farewell. It is the acceptance that death is not an end but a passage, and that to be cremated here ensures the soul's eternal peace. The ashes that settle on the stone steps are a stark reminder of impermanence, yet they also speak of transcendence.



Figure: Sacred Fire, Manikarnika Ghat, April 2024

Memory and Lineage

Manikarnika is not only a place of cremation but also of memory. The ancient genealogy registers of Varanasi, which trace family lineages for generations, are preserved here, linking the past with the present. Families who arrive to cremate their loved ones often consult these records, connecting their personal story with the city's vast spiritual heritage.

The Essence of Manikarnika

To witness Manikarnika Ghat is to confront life's deepest truths. It is a place where fire and water, creation and destruction, sorrow and salvation exist side by side. Pilgrims see not despair but release, not loss but liberation. In the crackling flames, the flowing river, the chants, and the silence, Banaras whispers the eternal truth: life ends, yet the soul journeys on.

Note from the Author: All photographs were captured by the author during fieldwork in April 2024. Usage permitted for publication in Anthro Bulletin, September 2025 edition.



Figure: Eternal Fire, Manikarnika Ghat, April 2024

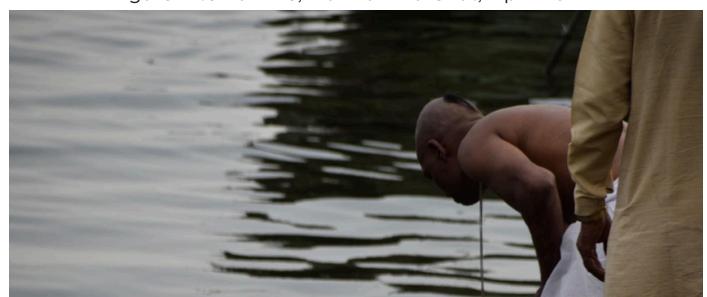


Figure: Reflections on the Ganga, Manikarnika Ghat, April 2024



Figure: A Final Farewell, Manikarnika Ghat, April 2024

Anthropology through Anthropological Survey of India (AnSI)



By Anil Kumar Sukumaran

Through this article, I am attempting to familiarise Anthropology to young scholars, budding Anthropologists and enthusiastic readers of Anthropology. Content of this publication is drawn from the ANSI Domain^[1], however, the presentation is purely mine, but it's just to enhance the readability. This is purely educational and academic article and hence no rights involved.

Anthropology was widely used and popularised by the British Rulers in pre-independent India. Anthropology was pursued by Administrators as a 'resolution science' at that time to understand and manage the 'melting pot cultures' widely spread across India. Thus, Anthropology became a popular science in Administrative Studies, because of which it was introduced as an academic subject in many Universities. In order to study and research the social stratifications, the Anthropological Survey of India (AnSI) was established in 1945 at Varanasi and later shifted to the Anthropological Museum in 1949. Later, based on the requirement, AnSI were attached with libraries, research labs and museums to preserve the collected artefacts, material crafts, and samples gathered during field visits.

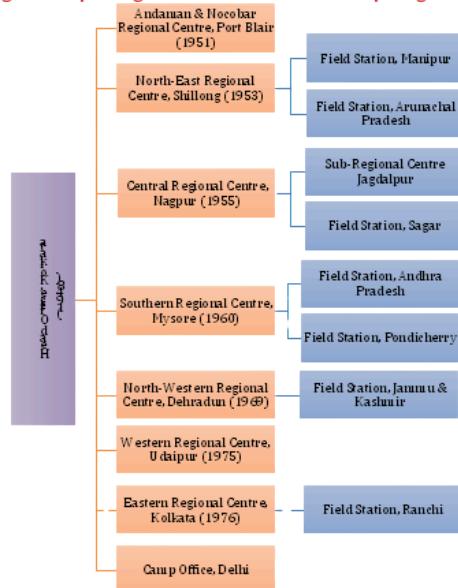
The Principal Objectives/Vision of AnSI are:

1. To investigate the biological and cultural aspects of diverse tribes and communities constituting India's population.
2. To examine and safeguard human skeletal remains from ancient and contemporary periods.
3. To serve as an educational/training hub for students pursuing Anthropology.
4. To collect, document, preserve, and curate the bio-cultural heritage, as well as the traditional arts and crafts of the people of India, through Anthropological Museums.
5. To disseminate research findings through publications to contribute to the collective understanding of India's diverse populations.

As of date, Anthropological Survey of India works under the aegis of the Ministry of Culture and employs about 200 odd staff, including 111 Anthropologists. AnSI has its Head Quarter in Kolkata and has seven Regional Centres (RC) and eight Field Stations (FS) spread-over all directions of India. An organogram is placed on the following page depicting the year of establishment of Zonal Offices and their corresponding Field Stations. Apart from these, there is a Camp office of AnSI in New Delhi. Apart from the Head office, AnSI has four Wings: Research Wing, Administrative Wing, Technical Wing and School of Anthropology. Research Wing is bifurcated into two Divisions: Physical Anthropology and Cultural Anthropology. Physical Anthropology Division encapsulates Morphology, Human Biology, Palaeoanthropology, and Allied Disciplines compromising of Linguistics, Human Ecology, Central

Museum, Psychology and Folklore sections. Administrative Wing comprised of Accounts, Establishment and General Sections which manages the infrastructures of AnSI. Technical Wing through its nine units manages Basic Data Archives, Sound Laboratory, Programme Management Information, Clearing House, Printing Publication, Publication Distribution, Photography and Cinematogra

Organogram Depicting Establishment of Anthropological Survey of India



AnSI has Museums, research centres, field stations and guest houses attached to its offices. Anthropologists and researchers may contact these offices to avail these facilities. Each Regional Centre is a repository of knowledge and publications of that region/area. Attached museums preserve the native art, artefacts, tools, utensils used by aborigines of that area. Each library is a unique treasure of knowledge, photographs, pictorials for reference purpose. Readers may reach <https://ansi.gov.in/> for further details.

Address and Contact Details of Offices of Anthropological Survey of India

Prof. B. V. Sharma, Director,
Address: EN-79, Sector-V, Salt Lake, KOLKATA-700091, West Bengal
Email: director@ansi.gov.in; [bvsss@uohyd.ac.in](mailto: bvsss@uohyd.ac.in). Mobile: +91-9391010651
Head Office: Dr. Umesh Kumar, Head of Office, HQ KOLKATA-700091, West Bengal
Email - hohq@ansi.gov.in; Mobile - 9433032127; Landline: +91-33-23570090/91/92/94
Camp Office, New Delhi
Address: West Block 2, Wing No.6, 1st Floor, R.K. Puram, Sector-1, NEW DELHI - 110066
Email: honwrc@ansi.gov.in. Mobile: +91-9836781302

Andaman & Nicobar Regional Centre (ANRC)

Dr. Somorjit Ningombam, Head of Office,
Address: Post Bag No. 3, PORT BLAIR – 744101, A&N Islands
Email: hoanrc@ansi.gov.in; ddonerc@ansi.gov.in. Mobile: +91-9958860948

Central Regional Centre (CRC)

Shri S. S. Barik, Head of Office,
Address: CGO Complex, 1st Floor, Seminary Hills, NAGPUR – 440006, Maharashtra
Email - hocrc@ansi.gov.in; ddocrc@ansi.gov.in. Mobile: +91-7980991257

Eastern Regional Centre (ERC)

Dr. B.P. Urade, Deputy Director and Head of Office,
Address: EN-79, Salt Lake, Sector-V, KOLKATA – 700091, West Bengal
Email: hoerc@ansi.gov.in; ddoerc@ansi.gov.in. Mobile: +91-9404791124

North East Regional Centre (NERC)

Dr. Santanu Mitra, Head of Office,
Address: Mawblei, Block B, Madanritting, Shillong – 793021, Meghalaya
Email - honerc@ansi.gov.in; ddonerc@ansi.gov.in. Mobile: +91-9831575881

North West Regional Centre (NWRC)

Dr. Abhishikta Ghosh Roy, Head of Office,
Address: No. 192/1, Kaulagarh Road, DEHRADUN – 248195, Uttarakhand
Email - honwrc@ansi.gov.in; Landline: +91-0135-2759347

Southern Regional Centre (SRC)

Dr. Harashawardhana, Deputy Director and Head of Office
Address: Manav Bhawan, No. 93/12 and 94/12, Bogadi, MYSORE – 570006, Karnataka
Email: waradhana1966-ansi@gmail.com; waradhana2021@gmail.com.
Mobile: +91-9458150890

Western Regional Centre (WRC)

Dr. Nilanjan Khatua, Deputy Director and Head of Office,
Address: Pratap Nagar, Central School Road, UDAIPUR – 313001, Rajasthan.
Email: nilanjan.ansi@gov.in; nilanjan02museum@gmail.com.
Mobile: +91-9449130829

Sub-Regional Centre

Dr. Piyusa Ranjan Sahoo, Head of Office
Address: Dharampura No.1, Jagadalpur – 494005, Chhattisgarh
Email: piyusa@gmail.com; hosubrc@ansi.gov.in. Mobile: +91-7978763330
Field Station, Ranchi
Address: No. 163B, New AG Colony, Kadru, RANCHI – 834002, Jharkhand
Email: hoerc@ansi.gov.in; ddoerc@ansi.gov.in. Mobile: +91-9404791124

Anthropological Museums Attached/Managed by AnSI**Central Museum, Kolkata**

Address: EN-79, Sector-V, Salt Lake, KOLKATA-700091, West Bengal
Email - hohq@ansi.gov.in; Mobile – 9433032127; Landline: +91-33-23570090/91/92/94
Museum Timing: To be checked
Entry Fees: Nil

Zonal Anthropological Museum, Andaman & Nicobar Zone, Port Blair

Address: Post Bag No. 3, PORT BLAIR – 744101, A&N Islands
Email: hoanrc@ansi.gov.in; ddonerc@ansi.gov.in.
Mobile: +91-9958860948; Landline: +91-03192-232563; 232291
Museum Timing: 9.30am to 5pm, Except Mondays and Public Holidays
Entry Fees: Indian Nationals: INR 20; Foreign Nationals: INR 150; Students upto 15yrs: INR 10. Fee exempted for Defence personnel & Divyangjan

Zonal Anthropological Museum, Western Zone, Dehradun

Address: No. 192/1, Kaulagarh Road, DEHRADUN – 248195
Email: honwrc@ansi.gov.in; Landline: +91-0135-2759347
Museum Timing: 9.30am to 5.50pm (Monday to Friday)
Entry Fees: Contact Museum

Zonal Anthropological Museum, Central Zone, Nagpur

Address: CGO Complex, Seminary Hills, NAGPUR – 440006
Email - hocrc@ansi.gov.in; ddocrc@ansi.gov.in. Mobile: +91-7980991257, Museum Timing: 11am to 5pm (Monday to Friday)
Entry Fees: Free Entry

Zonal Anthropological Museum, North-East Zone, Shillong

Address: Mawblei, Block B, Madanritting, Shillong – 793021, Meghalaya, Email - honerc@ansi.gov.in; ddonerc@ansi.gov.in.
Mobile: +91-9831575881, Museum Timing: 9.30am to 5pm (Monday to Friday), Entry Fees: Free Entry

Zonal Anthropological Museum, Southern Zone, Mysore

Address: Manav Bhawan, Vijayanagar 2nd Stage, Bogadi, MYSORE – 570006, Karnataka
Email:waradhana1966-ansi@gmail.com;
waradhana2021@gmail.com, Mobile: +91-9458150890
Museum Timing: 9.30am to 5pm (Monday to Friday), Except Public Holidays
Entry Fees: Free Entry

Zonal Anthropological Museum, Western Zone, Udaipur

Address: Pratap Nagar, Central School Road, UDAIPUR – 313001, Rajasthan.
Email:nilanjan.ansi@gov.in; nilanjan02museum@gmail.com.
Mobile: +91-9449130829
Museum Timing: 11am to 6pm (Monday to Friday), Except Public Holidays, Entry Fees: Free Entry

Zonal Anthropological Museum, Sub-Regional Centre, Jagadalpur

Address: Dharampura No.1, Jagadalpur – 494005, Chhattisgarh
Email: piyusa@gmail.com; hosubrc@ansi.gov.in. Mobile: +91-7978763330, Museum Timing: 10am to 6pm (Tuesday to Sunday), Except Public Holidays
Entry Fees: Indian Nationals: INR 20; Foreign Nationals: INR 150; Students: INR 10.

ANTHROPOLOGIST OF THE MONTH

Dr. Shweta Rawat



Interview by Saba Farhin

Dr. Shweta Rawat is currently working as a Scientist 'F' at the Defence Institute of Physiology and Allied Sciences (DIPAS), Delhi, a premier laboratory under DRDO. An alumna of the University of Delhi, she completed both her MSc and PhD from the Department of Anthropology, where her academic grounding laid the foundation for her future work in applied and defence anthropology.

Her core area of expertise lies in anthropometry-based sizing and the design of protective gear, equipment, uniforms, and workstations, with a strong focus on human factors and user-centred design. Over the years, Dr. Rawat has worked extensively with organisations such as the Rapid Action Force (RAF), CRPF, and SPG, contributing to the development of protective anti-riot gear. One of her most significant and widely recognised contributions is PRABALA, India's first female full-body protector, designed specifically for women personnel engaged in riot control situations.

Under her leadership, several of these innovations have received national and international recognition. Dr. Rawat holds four international patents (from the USA, South Africa, Russia, and Australia) and three Indian patents, along with six design registration certifications. She is also a well-published researcher, with her work appearing in journals of international repute as well as DRDO-specific scientific literature.

Her contributions have been acknowledged through numerous prestigious awards, including the Technology Group Award (2009 and 2018), Director's Award, and the Technology Day Oration (2018). Most notably, she was conferred the "National Award for Young Woman Showing Excellence through Application of Science and Technology for Societal Benefits" by the Hon'ble President of India for her pioneering work on full-body protectors for female personnel. In addition, she and her team were honoured with the AGNI Award for Excellence in Self-Reliance on Technology Day 2022. Through her work, Dr. Shweta Rawat exemplifies the transformative potential of applied anthropology, demonstrating how anthropological knowledge can directly contribute to national security, gender equity, and societal well-being. In this interview, she shares insights into her journey, her vision for the future of anthropology in India, and her advice for young anthropologists.

What inspired you to choose anthropology, and how did your journey lead you to DRDO?

I firmly believe that Anthropology is not merely the study of the past or of ancient artifacts; it is the study of humanity in all its diversity. It is about building better lives. Anthropology has a unique ability to connect biology with humanity. I wanted to understand how humans evolved and, more importantly, what we can do in the present to improve their lives.



This intention shaped my journey—from classrooms and laboratories to DRDO. DRDO is a place where I can apply my knowledge directly, not just limit it to research publications. I can proudly say that this journey has made me an applied anthropologist. Here, I am truly applying anthropology. In a broader sense, what we call "human factors" has now become mandatory in every preliminary design review across DRDO. Earlier, anthropologists were confined largely to the Life Sciences cluster within DRDO. While Life Sciences remains one of the key clusters, our role has expanded significantly.

Today, we contribute towards human factors research in diverse areas such as tanks, submarines, protective gear, and many other projects. This expansion has opened up a vast arena for us, allowing anthropologists to apply their knowledge across multiple domains. For me, anthropology has found its purpose at the intersection where science meets service. Initially, I simply wanted to study humans. I was pursuing a Botany Honours degree, and although I completed it, plants did not attract me as much. I had a strong desire to study humans. When I appeared for the entrance examination, I emerged as the topper among students from non-anthropology background, even though many candidates had a formal background in the subject. That felt like destiny calling. I believed that if I could perform well driven purely by interest, then with proper training, I could do even better. That conviction led me to choose anthropology. Today, I feel that studying humans to strengthen our heroes has become my personal tagline.

Among your research and projects, which contribution do you consider your most significant and why?

In every project I undertake, I carry a very simple thought: behind every mission, there is a human being, and my job is to ensure the safety of that human. We work closely with the armed forces and paramilitary forces. It was very surprising to see that female troops engaged in riot control were using equipment that had been designed exclusively for male bodies. They were expected to adapt to systems that were never designed for them.

I saw this not merely as a technical gap, but as an anthropological injustice. That realization drove our work in this direction. I discussed the female full-body protector in detail in my lecture for AIF (Watch the lecture here if you missed it - <https://www.youtube.com/live/MZAdZvzer1I?si=rK7AqQgQRoJPtg9k>), but I must say that it has been one of the most appreciated products of my career. It was truly one of its kind globally. We received several patents and awards for this work.

Initially, we assumed that such gender-specific protective gear was unavailable only in India. However, we were surprised to discover that across the world, women were using the same protective equipment designed for men. This led to the development of the female full-body protector, which we named Prabala. The product was highly appreciated. At that time, the then President of India, Shri Ram Nath Kovind ji, also honoured us with an award. Prabala is very close to my heart.

As anthropologists, we often question whether such work falls within our domain. My response is simple: if something is about humans, for humans, and of humans, then it is our domain.

How do you view the current scope and future potential of anthropology, especially biological anthropology, in India?

I strongly believe that anthropology in India is on the brink of a revolution. We are growing, and it is only a matter of time. Anthropologists today are not just fieldworkers. In the future, we will increasingly be a unique combination of fieldworker, data scientist, and problem solver. This is our strength. Anything related to humans be it design, training, recruitment, performance, safety, falls within our domain.

India does not lack diversity; what we lack is a sufficient number of anthropologists who can understand and interpret that diversity. The future belongs to us. We should not worry as it is only a matter of time. Like Lord Hanuman, we simply need to realise our own strength. Once we do, our importance becomes evident, because India has been blessed with immense ethnic and biological diversity.

I had shared an example in my lecture for AIF (Watch the lecture here if you missed it - <https://www.youtube.com/live/MZAdZvzer1I?si=rK7AqQgQRoJPtg9k>).

During the design of an ejection seat for the LCA cockpit, it was observed that the system worked well for some pilots but not for others. The real issue was ethnic and biological diversity. This is precisely where anthropology becomes indispensable.

Once we understand where and how we can contribute, the entire ecosystem changes. No data collection, no recruitment, no training, and no equipment design can be done without anthropological inputs. Unfortunately, we often fail to recognise our own strength, which is why foreign data has historically been used.

Anthropology has a very bright future in India. All we need to do is identify the right opportunities and step forward with confidence.

What key advice would you give to young and aspiring anthropologists today?

My message is very simple. Anthropology is not just a subject, treat it as a responsibility! Build strong fundamentals. Learn statistics. Master your research tools. And most importantly, collaborate beyond your comfort zones.

If we choose to work only within familiar boundaries, we will achieve only limited outcomes. But when we step beyond our comfort zones, the possibilities expand enormously. To do that, your concepts must be absolutely clear. Today, bluffing does not work. You must have a strong command over theory, research tools, and statistics. Master these, and the sky truly is the limit.

There is a saying: a degree may open doors, but skills build careers. Focus on sharpening your skills. I could do this because I was fortunate to have exceptional teachers. I am deeply grateful to Professor Kalla and my Saraswathy madam—I cannot imagine my journey without them. I was blessed with the best teachers, colleagues, and friends, and they shaped my life in profound ways.

This is my advice not only to young students, but also to teachers. As anthropologists, we carry the responsibility of nurturing the next generation. We must encourage young anthropologists to explore their unique abilities and to work across diverse domains.

The future of anthropology is very bright. Do not worry...believe in it!

Anabguni the puberty ritual of Gadaba: a fieldnote from Lamtaput block, Koraput district, Odisha



By Sada Badanayak

Introduction

During my fieldwork in Lamtaput, I observed the Anabguni or Uthani ritual—one of the most important life-cycle ceremonies in Gadaba society. The ritual marks a girl's transition into womanhood at the onset of her first menstruation. The practice reflects not only cultural beliefs about purity, maturation, and fertility but also the wider social values of the Gadaba community.

First Day: Beginning of Seclusion

The ritual starts when a girl experiences her first menstruation. She quietly informs her mother or any older female relative or friend. After telling the father, the mother calls the Thela Dokri, the elderly woman recognised as a ritual specialist for puberty ceremonies.

The Thela Dokri leads the girl to a corner of the house and seats her beside two upright samar kand (arrowstraditionally used for hunting sambhar deer). These arrows symbolically guard the girl during her vulnerable state. After discussing with the mother, the Thela Dokri ties chandal sutu (white coloured a sacredthread) around the arrows in odd numbers—usually 7, 9, or 11 rounds. The preference for odd numbers reflects the Gadaba belief that even numbers symbolise pairs, one representing the girl and the other an evil spirit. Odd numbers are used to avoid inviting such spirits. The number of thread rounds determines the number of seclusion days. During this period, the girl is believed to be physically vulnerable and spiritually exposed. As the thread is tied, she receives the same number of anjla (handfuls) of raw rice and turmeric slices. She places these offerings under the arrows along with onion, garlic, chilli, raw rice, turmeric, and flowers in a chipli (leaf plate). The Thela Dokri then leaves.

Days of Seclusion: Food Taboos and Hidden Routine

For the next several days, typically seven or nine, the girl remains out of public view. Food taboos are observed strictly. She eats only rice with sugar or jaggery, avoiding all curries. Parents explained that spices and cooked curries are believed to disturb her fragile bodily state. Every morning before sunrise, she finishes her daily routine and bathes in the kitchen garden to avoid being seen. Meanwhile, the Thela Dokri prepares ritual materials for Anabguni day, including:

- Kasa pani (water boiled with mango and jamun bark)
- Fruit, roots, and tubers
- Lia, muha (puffed rice, rice flakes)
- Jaggery and banana
- Eggs, dry fish, honey, cannabis, and chandal sutu
- These items will be used during purification and final rites

Anabguni Day: Ending Pollution (Sutok Chidani)

Early on the ritual morning, the Thela Dokri, the girl's mother, and other women accompany the girl to a nearby stream. They stop at Dela Bat, a road junction, where the girl stands facing east. The Thela Dokri pours kasa pani over her head while women produce ululi, a celebratory tongue sound. This act symbolically removes impurity and marks the end of pollution. At the stream, the Thela Dokri draws ritual geometric designs with black, red, and white colours. Offerings such as black bangles, black bead, rice, garlic slices, turmeric, dry fish, and a one-rupee note are made to Kamni or Jal Kamni, the water goddess. The girl bathes and waits at the stream bank until the Disari (ritual priest) begins the next ceremony.

Ghat Biru at the Sangam

The Disari prepares offerings and walks to the river accompanied by villagers playing drums and horns. The worship takes place at the Sangam, a junction of three streams, believed to be a potent ritual site where dangers are broken. The Disari draws an elaborate gonda (geometric designs) using five colours and prepares a fire altar for homo jog (sacred fire ritual). The girl sits on a stone before the altar and makes offerings as instructed. A stitched leaf plate filled with flowers, fruits, rice, cannabis, sandal, and betel nut is rotated around her head three times. She spits on it three times to symbolically expel impurity, and the plate is thrown into the flowing water. Herbal water stored in a dried gourd is poured on her head, and the gourd is also discarded. Animal sacrifice—usually fowls and a goat—follows. The girl discards her old clothes and slippers in the river, crosses a thorny plant without looking back, and returns home for a fresh bath and new clothes.



Baradeli: The Groom Pole

Back home, preparations begin for the Baradeli, a symbolic groom pole representing fertility and the transition to reproductive maturity. It consists of a young Blackberry, Banana, or Mango plant cut from the forest by a bara dhangda (groom), usually her uncle's son. The Disari installs the Baradeli with offerings of puffed rice, sweets, lamps, and seven or nine brass pots stacked and tied with bamboo. A kalasa filled with water, mango leaves, and a coconut is placed beside it.



Barapani Dalani: Pouring the Ritual Water

The Thela Dokri circles the Baradeli as many times as the girl's seclusion days while singing puberty songs. The girl sits on a jatha (wooden mortar). Barapani—fresh water collected at dawn and sealed with a banana leaf and a one-rupee note—is poured over her. Five people then apply tika on her forehead with rice and money. She bathes again and wears new clothes for the final ceremony.

Tika Basani: Gifts and Blessings

The Thela Dokri leads her in 3-5 rounds around the Baradeli. The Disari chants mantras, and the girl sits on her maulani's (paternal aunt's) lap. Family members and relatives offer tika (rice put on forehead), gifts, and blessings. Gifts commonly include:

- Money
- Clothes
- Utensils
- Rice
- Sometimes livestock such as goats, sheep and hen etc.

After everyone finishes tika, the girl is moved from the altar in Tika Uthani. Her mother, grandmother, and maulani symbolically beg bhikhya from her, and she drops rice into their saree ends, an act of blessing for their well-being.



Baradeli Banglani: Immersion of the Groom Pole

The Baradeli is uprooted and carried in a festive procession to the stream for immersion. The bara dhangda, sang dhangdi (a small girl companion), men, and women join the walk with songs and music. Immersion marks the ritual's formal end.



Anabguni Bhoji: The Puberty Feast

The host family organises a grand feast with both vegetarian and non-vegetarian dishes. For those who do not eat in the common feast, chancha (separate packets of rice, vegetables, oil, and spices) is distributed. No one is allowed to leave hungry. The evening ends with drinking-pendum (rice beer), landa (millet beer), desi liquor and IMF,L and the community dances Dhemsaa throughout the night.



The Making of Ayyanar's Terracotta Votive Horses



By Sauban Ahmad

Ayannar is revered as the guardian deity in rural areas of Tamil Nadu, and temples devoted to him are usually located on the outskirts of the villages, which are architecturally modest and centred around nature and communal worship. The icon of Ayannar is surrounded by his 21 other mythological companions and his wives, Pushkala and Purnakala. The most striking features of these shrines are the monumental terracotta standing horses symbolising the deity's protective nighttime watch over the village.

The making of these horses is a highly specialised and endangered art. These votive horses are commissioned by devotees and are crafted by Velar potter-priests. The information in this photo story is based on the hands-on practical I carried out at the Crafts Museum, New Delhi, as part of my coursework.

The votive horses of Ayyanar are constructed in multiple, separately modelled parts, each of which is created as a hollow form that is later united. The torso is shaped cylindrically, widening toward the top and tapering gently at the bottom, from which the frontal legs emerge. The central body is richly decorated with elaborate geometric and floral designs. The decorative scheme varies from one horse to another. The surface is organised into multiple horizontal registers.

In Figure 1, the upper register of the torso shows a variety of relief patterns, such as the simplified floral and semi-floral motifs, which are arranged to create beauty and balance. The register immediately below this is encircled with the teardrop followed by bell-like motifs. The head of the horse is elongated and is rendered in a stylised manner, yet it maintains expressive anatomical details. Figure 2 depicts the almond-shaped eyes, which are outlined with concentric carvings, suggesting a poised and aware state. The ears rise upright and end in a sharp point, giving the horse an alert and attentive look. The mouth is slightly opened, revealing the teeth and even the tongue, which enhance the sense of movement and vitality.

The neck is also well adorned with a variety of ornamental designs, such as rope motifs and embossed designs that resemble bells, and the geometric band enhances the overall aesthetic richness. The bridle and harness are also elaborately decorated with thick, rope-like bands running across the face and the neck, suggesting their strength and ceremonial grandeur.



Figure 1: Torso of the horse



Figure 2: Head of the horse

In Figure 1, the upper register of the torso shows a variety of relief patterns such as the simplified floral and semi-floral motifs, which are arranged to create beauty and balance. The register immediately below this is encircled with the teardrop followed by bell-like motifs.

The head of the horse is elongated and is rendered in a stylized manner, yet it maintains expressive anatomical details. Figure 2 depicts the almond-shaped eyes which are outlined with concentric carvings, suggesting a poised and an aware state. The ears rise upright and end in a sharp point giving the horse an alert and attentive look. The mouth is slightly opened, revealing the teeth and even the tongue which enhance the sense of movement and vitality.



Figure 3: Leg of the horse

The neck is also well adorned with a variety of ornamental designs, such as rope motifs and embossed designs that resemble bells, and the geometric band enhances the overall aesthetic richness. The bridle and harness are also elaborately decorated with thick, rope-like bands running across the face and the neck, suggesting their strength and ceremonial grandeur.



Figure 5: The votive horse in kiln

Once sculpted and decorated, these individual components are then moved to an open, partially enclosed kiln. This type of kiln is effective in firing terracotta and helps achieve red hues. When the firing is complete, then these votive horses are consecrated with rituals known as 'Kutirai Etuppu'.



Figure 4: The torso of the horse is being kept in the kiln.



Figure 6: Ayyanar votive horses (completed form and assembled)

Ultimately, the making of Ayyanar's terracotta horses demonstrates the continuity of ritual and craftsmanship upheld by hereditary potter communities of rural Tamil Nadu, positioning them as essential heritage assets that require continued recognition, documentation and active preservation.

Piers Vitebsky's Dialogues with the Dead The discussion of mortality among the Sora of eastern India.



By Ruchisri Sahu

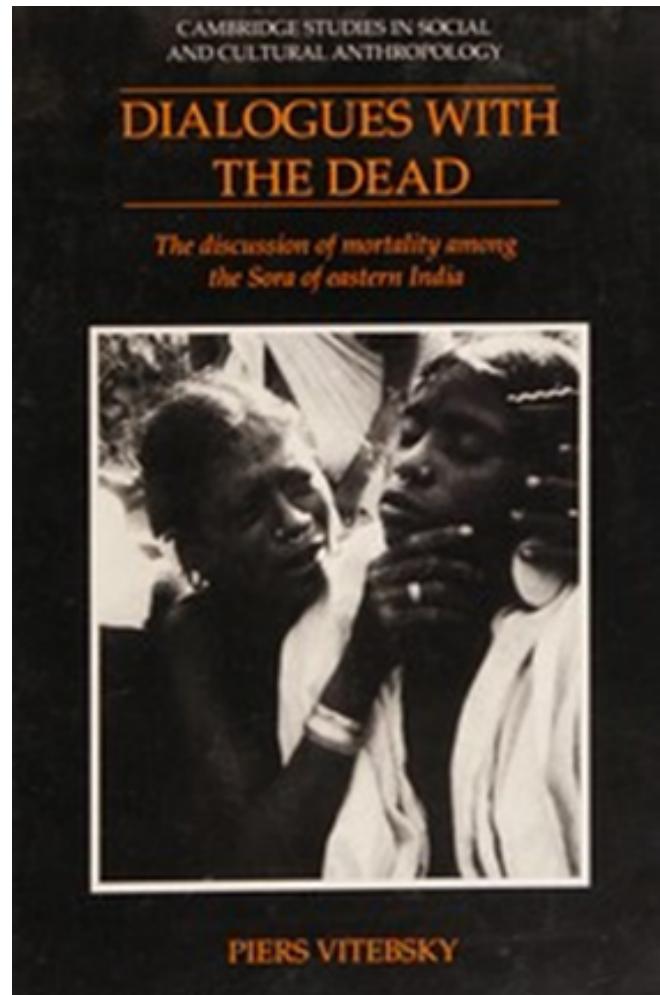
Cambridge University Press, 1993. 288 pages. ISBN 0 521 38447 8

Piers Vitebsky's *Dialogues with the Dead* is a strikingly original study that brings the everyday and the uncanny of Sora life into careful, humane ethnographic focus. The book rests on eighteen months of intense fieldwork among the Sora, mostly in 1976 and 1979, supplemented by later visits, and it combines extended verbatim transcriptions, systematic analysis of ritual and grammar, and reflective theoretical engagement. Vitebsky locates his subject at the intersection of religion, psychology and social structure, and he offers, through close reading of dialogues mediated by trance shamans, a model of personhood that challenges Western assumptions about memory, agency and bereavement.

Summary of argument and method

Vitebsky frames the study around a central ethnographic observation. In Sora villages, the living routinely converse with the dead, who speak through shamans in trance. These dialogues serve multiple social functions: they inquire into causes of illness, they negotiate property claims and marriage disputes, and they shape the emotional lives of the living through sequences of public speech and ritual feeding. Vitebsky argues that these interactions are not marginal or purely expressive. Instead, they constitute a sustained technology for maintaining social continuity, for negotiating attachments and resentments, and for making sense of mortality. He translates the key Sora term sonum as Memory with a capital M, and uses this gloss to show how the dead exist for the Sora as exterior actors who affect living persons across time and landscape.

The book's empirical method is a strength. Vitebsky works almost entirely in the Sora language, transcribes extended dialogues, and presents long excerpts as nearly dramatic scripts. These passages are not ornamental. They are the raw material for his argument that dialogues, far from being symbolic residues, are active forms of social diagnosis and moral adjudication. The book is structured in three parts. Part one outlines the metaphysics of sonums and the social formation of persons. Part two follows a funeral in



minute detail, showing the contested inquests that seek to locate the cause of death and to redeem the deceased. Part three expands the time frame and reads dialogues with multiple dead persons to show how memory, inheritance and forgetting operate across generations. The contents page supplies a clear map for the reader, and Vitebsky's appendices and notes provide useful documentary backup.

Key contributions: There are three contributions that make this book essential reading. First, it reframes death as a social process rather than as a private loss. For the Sora, death is a phase in an ongoing network of personhoods. The dead are not absent. They are present as Memories who may nourish crops or send illness, and who occupy locative positions in the landscape.

Vitebsky teases out an elaborate typology of Memories, separating Ancestor Memories, which are stabilising, from Experience Memories, which echo the mode of death and can be aggressive. This typology clarifies how social claims are made through ritual speech.

Second, Vitebsky's linguistic and narrative sensibility is unusual for field studies of shamanism. He attends to verb forms, to modes of voicing and to the grammar of agency. He shows how Sora verb morphology enacts a shift from patient to perpetrator as persons move from being victims to becoming agents in the afterlife. This is not an abstruse point. It grounds his claim that personhood is distributed, dynamic and relational rather than atomised and bounded.

Third, the book offers a robust critique of cross-cultural appropriation. Vitebsky engages with psychoanalytic models of mourning, especially Freud's essay *Mourning and Melancholia*, and he argues that the Sora practice cannot simply be transplanted into Western psychotherapy. The social scaffolding that makes dialogues effective in Sora's life, including communal space, public acknowledgement and a landscape of shared Memories, is absent from clinical settings. Thus, Vitebsky both invites clinicians to learn and warns against simple therapeutic borrowing.

Style and readability

Vitebsky writes with narrative deftness. Although his subject matter can be unsettling, his prose balances analytic precision and humane description. The long transcriptions demand concentration, yet they reward the reader with immediacy and moral complexity. Occasional theoretical detours, for instance, his engagement with Eliade on shamanic cosmology and with Carrithers on narrativity, are placed to illuminate rather than to distract. The volume is also well organised for classroom use; chapter headings, plates and figures aid navigation.

Limits and critiques

No study is without limitations. One concern is the book's historical snapshot. Vitebsky acknowledges rapid change among the Sora and notes that younger people, many of whom become Baptists, no longer participate in dialogues with the dead. Readers may therefore wonder how representative the recorded practices remain. Vitebsky's ethnography is deep but temporally bounded. A contemporary follow-up would be valuable to track how Christian conversion and market integration have reshaped a Memory ecology. Another issue is theoretical portability. While Vitebsky's typology is persuasive for the Sora case, the translation of *sonum* as Memory risks importing Western semantic expectations. Vitebsky is aware of this tension and explicitly treats Memory as a heuristic device, yet some readers may prefer more comparative work across cultures to test the concept's cross-cultural purchase.



Conclusion and audience

Dialogues with the Dead is a major contribution to the anthropology of death, ritual studies and the anthropology of personhood. It will repay the attention of scholars interested in shamanism, language and ritual, and it will also challenge clinicians and students of bereavement to think more carefully about social forms that structure mourning. The book combines ethnohistorical sensitivity, rigorous textual evidence and theoretical ambition. It refuses simplistic parallels between Sora practice and Western therapy, while insisting that both domains have something urgent to teach us about how humans keep each other in being after death. For any reader who wishes to understand how memory, agency and grief are socially made, Vitebsky's book is indispensable.

Recommendation

Read this book slowly and with a notebook. The rewards come from attending to the dialogues themselves and to Vitebsky's patient unpacking of terms and verb forms. It is an ethnography that deepens our understanding of how communities hold the dead and how the living, through speech and ritual, reforge themselves in the face of loss.

Acknowledgement: This review draws from Vitebsky's text and its documented fieldwork and archival materials within the book. Where specific claims about publication and field dates are reported, they are cited from the volume itself.

Reflections on Threads of Resilience: Life in Indore's Slum Communities- Yash Singh Sisodiya (Volume 6 Issue 11)



By Ranjan Chatterjee

Yash Singh Sisodiya's *Threads of Resilience: Life in Indore's Slum Communities* is a compelling visual ethnographic intervention that challenges the reductionist representations of urban poverty. Rather than portraying slum settlements as spaces of lack alone, the article centres on everyday practices of survival, creativity, and collective care in Nand Bagh, Musakhedi, and Avantika Nagar. Through carefully curated photographs and contextual narration, he invites readers to rethink what resilience looks like when it is entrenched in conventional routines such as stitching garments, tending plants, sharing machines, or navigating floodwaters together. In doing so, the piece aligns with a growing anthropological insistence on seeing marginalised urban spaces as sites of social production rather than mere objects of policy concern.

One of the article's key strengths lies in its emphasis on women-led microenterprises, particularly home-based stitching units. These spaces blur the border between domestic and economic life, illuminating how gendered labour is reconfigured under conditions of precarity. The sewing machines, which are often shared, borrowed, or collectively maintained, symbolise not only livelihoods but also social interdependence. From an anthropological perspective, this resonates with the feminist notion that critiques formal/informal binaries and highlights how women's work sustains urban economies while remaining structurally misunderstood. This visual narrative delicately pushes readers to recognise these microeconomies as integral to Indore's broader textile ecosystem rather than as peripheral or 'informal' add-ons.

The article's attention to adaptive architecture and incremental housing is equally striking. The exposed brick walls, unfinished plaster, and improvised drainage channels tell tales of aspiration that were negotiated through constraints. The housing pattern here is not static; it evolves in response to changes in families, resources, and shifting environmental conditions. This incrementalism reflects what urban anthropologists have long argued: slum settlements are not chaotic anomalies but rational responses to exclusionary urban planning. The images of residents collectively responding to monsoon flooding emphasise this point; resilience is not merely individual tenacity but also a socially organised capacity rooted in kinship, neighbourliness, and shared knowledge. The presence of green pockets, such as banana plants, potted gardens, and small, cultivated spaces, also adds another important layer to the narrative. These are not just aesthetic choices; they are acts of care that provide food, shade, privacy, and psychological relief. In dense urban environments where

residents are often denied access to public green spaces, such as micro gardens, which become quiet assertions of dignity and environmental agency. From an ecological anthropology lens, these practices complicate the dominant assumption that poverty necessarily entails environmental degradation. Instead, they reveal how marginalised communities actively negotiate sustainability within severe spatial and economic limits.

At the same time, the article opens space for further critical engagement. While resilience is powerfully documented, there is a risk that is common in both the policy and the popular discourse of resilience, becoming a romanticised trope that obscures structural violence. The author signals systemic challenges such as inadequate sanitation, congestion, and flooding, but future reflections might more explicitly connect everyday ingenuity to the political-economic forces that make such ingenuity necessary in the first place. How do municipal governance, land tenure insecurity, and uneven access to welfare shape the conditions under which resilience is performed? Addressing these questions would deepen the conversation between visual documentation and structural critique.

Methodologically, *Threads of Resilience* exemplifies the potential of visual ethnography to communicate anthropological insight beyond academic text. The images do not merely illustrate the text; they function as ethnographic arguments. This is particularly significant in a publication such as Anthro Bulletin, which seeks to engage diverse audiences. This article demonstrates how visual anthropology can humanise urban policy debates by focusing on lived experiences, emotions, and relationality, which are elements that are often flattened in statistical representations of slum life.

In conclusion, Sisodiya's contribution is an important reminder that urban margins are not devoid of order, meaning, or hope. By documenting how residents of Indore's slum communities stitch livelihoods, homes, and futures together from limited resources, *Threads of Resilience* expand our anthropological imagination of the city. It calls on scholars, practitioners, and policymakers alike to look beyond deficit-based narratives and to seriously engage with the social infrastructures that sustain life at the margins. Such engagement, however, must move from recognition to responsibility, ensuring that resilience is supported by justice and not used as a substitute for it.

APPRECIATION FOR ANTHRO BULLETIN

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

By Dr. Shree Bhagwan Roy
Founder Chairman of IBRAD

"Enjoyed the August Issue of **Anthro Bulletin** thoroughly. Mg Ed Sunita Reddy's comprehensive capture of 'Cultural Pulse of August' compels us to anxiously await the coming 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, the 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 make it a perfect package. For all that Anthros Editors & the team deserve 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's 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 detail 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 write-ups. I am sure in a 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.

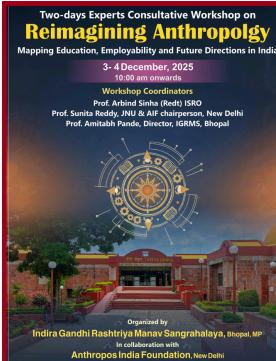


FORTHCOMING EVENT

An online lecture will be organised as a part of our Distinguished Guest lecture series. For updates, please follow our website's events page-
<https://events.anthroposindiafoundation.com/>

PAST EVENT

- Organized by the Indira Gandhi Rashtriya Manav Sangrahalaya (IGRMS), Bhopal, in collaboration with the Anthropos India Foundation, New Delhi, the **Two-day Experts' Consultative Workshop on Reimagining Anthropology** was held on **3-4 December 2025** at IGRMS, Bhopal.



For more details - [Click here](#)

- Organized by the Indira Gandhi Rashtriya Manav Sangrahalaya (IGRMS) in collaboration with the Anthropos India Foundation, the **Workshop on Child Protection & Child Rights Sensitisation** was held on **5 December 2025 at Avritti Bhawan, IGRMS, Bhopal.**

For more details - **[Click here](#)**

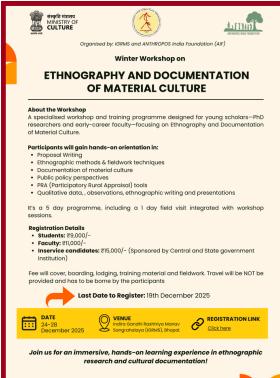
- Organized by IGRMS, Bhopal, in collaboration with the Anthropos India Foundation, the **Winter Workshop on Ethnography and Documentation of Material Culture** was held from **24-28 December 2025** at the **Indira Gandhi Rashtriya Manav Sangrahalaya (IGRMS), Bhopal.**

For more details - **Click here**

- For our Distinguished Guest lecture series, an online lecture was organised and delivered by **Dr. Shweta Rawat** on December 31st 2025, 6:30 pm onwards

For more details - [Click here](#)

YouTube live Link - [Click here](#)



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.

FELLOWSHIPS AND JOB ALERTS

1. Calls for Proposals: Collaborative Scientific Research Program (CSRP) 2026
Last Date to Apply: 28.02.26
Application Link: [Click here](#)
2. Doctoral Recruitment Call 2026 – Social Sciences, Humanities & Cultural Studies
Last Date to Apply: 02.03.26
Application Link: [Click here](#)
3. Faculty Opportunities at IIT Indian Institute of Technology, Dharwad, India
Last Date to Apply: 31.01.26
Application Link: [Click here](#)
4. CRASSH and Charles Wallace India Trust Fellowship
Last Date to Apply: 19.01.26
Application Link: [Click here](#)

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/UdvXdHRYAECXKLPZ>

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.

AIF Membership

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**

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

