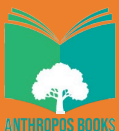


ANTHROBULLETIN

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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 called 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' 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', from this month 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.

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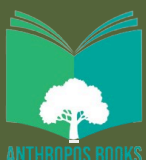
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Ritual Rhythms: Festivals as Living Traditions

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

Growing up in a traditional South Indian family, the rhythms of life were punctuated by festivals—rituals that not only offered joy but also deeply shaped our values, worldview, and relationships. *Ugadi*, *Sankranti*, *Ganesh Chaturthi*, and *Deepawali* were not just days on the calendar but seasons of anticipation and meaning. *Ugadi*, in particular, stands out in memory—my mother preparing a three-course ancestral offering while we children ventured out to gather flowers, leaves, and fruits in devotion. *Ganesh Chaturthi* meant prayerful aspirations: placing schoolbooks before the deity—mine always the math book, a plea for divine intervention in a tough subject! It's curious how regional ritual grammars vary—where we prayed to *Ganesha* for wisdom, others invoked Goddess *Saraswati*.

Such variations are not anomalies—they are the richness of India's festival cultures. From an anthropological lens, festivals in India are not merely religious observances—they are cultural texts, ritual performances, and embodied archives. They preserve histories, transmit knowledge, express ecological and ethical relationships, and offer platforms for negotiating caste, gender, identity, and power.

As we turn the pages of this issue of ***Anthro Bulletin***, we reflect on how festivals function as socio-cultural scaffolding in India. Particularly in July, the monsoon months bring an intensification of rituals—rooted in agricultural cycles, seasonal transitions, and collective memory. Across diverse regions, festivals mark renewal, fertility, and gratitude.

Take *Guru Purnima*, celebrated pan-India to honour teachers and spiritual mentors—a ritual of intellectual lineage and reverence. In Telangana, *Bonalu* channels the fierce energy of Goddess *Mahakali*, a public affirmation of divine feminine power against epidemics and misfortune. Ladakh's *Hemis Festival* merges Tibetan Buddhist cosmology with local performance, reflecting spiritual syncretism and Himalayan resilience.

Bakrid, or *Eid al-Adha*, often falling in June-July, resonates with themes of sacrifice, submission to divine will, and community solidarity. Lesser-known rituals offer powerful insights into regional cosmologies. Tamil Nadu's *Aadi Perukku* is a riverside celebration of the sacred



Cauvery—linking fertility prosperity, and feminine energy with agrarian life. Tripura's *Ker Puja* is a striking tribal ritual of protection, framed by indigenous codes and royal traditions—non-Brahmanical, pre-Vedic, and vibrantly sovereign.

Many of these rituals center women as ritual agents—*Bonalu* and *Aadi Perukku*, for instance—reconfiguring gendered roles and subverting everyday hierarchies. Festivals like *Rath Yatra*, *Kanwar Yatra*, or *Bonalu* become complex arenas—where caste identities are both reinforced and reimagined, where devotional ecstasy blurs social boundaries, and where local epistemologies resist homogenization. In this issue, we bring alive some of these festival tapestries—from the grand *Rath Yatra* of Lord *Jagannath* in Puri to the joyful *Hariyali Teej*, *Devshayani Ekadashi*, *Kanwar Yatra*, and the vibrant ritual performance of *Gugudu Kullaiswamy Jathara*. These accounts are more than colourful celebrations—they are stories of continuity and change, of embodied beliefs, and ritual economies where material and spiritual life converge. As we navigate our contemporary world—fractured, fast-moving, and often unmoored—these ritual forms anchor us in collective rhythms. They remind us that in the performance of tradition lies the possibility of transformation.



Cultural Paradigms of Celebrations and Conservation

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

"Nature is a series of events occurring in an invariable order without the intervention of personal agency."

James Frazer (1890, p.51)

Dear friends,

I admire vision, rigor, resilience and above all enthusiasm with which young researchers writing for *Anthro Bulletin* continue to celebrate India's classic traditions creatively manifested in its rich medley of festivals. The cultural paradigm defining continuity and perseverance of these celebrations is rooted in the effervescence of its ecology and spirituality. In the month of April, I had a conversation with you on Eco-spiritualism: Wisdom of ancient Vedic ecological ethos. In this issue, I will take you back to the wisdom of thoughts that were embedded in early anthropological philosophies of religion and why with the rise of scientific validation we impelled them into obscurity describing it as phantasmagoria.

I want to take you back to the construct of Animism given by Tylor (1832-1917) in his most famous work primitive culture (1871) and paradigm of /Pre-animism/Animatism given by R.R. Marett (1866-1943) in 1909 in his book *"The Threshold of Religion."* Philosophy of Animatism was interpreted by French anthropologist Arnold Van Gennep in his book *"Les rites de passage"* (1909) as Dynamism having etymological roots in the Greek word *dunamis* meaning "power, energy". To compliment these schools or 'theories of religion' were notions of ancestor worship and Atheism given by Herbert Spencer (1820-1903) in his volumes on "The Principles of Sociology, Totemism and Taboo," coined by McLennan (1827-1881) and used by Durkheim (1858-1917) in expanding notions of Sacred and Profane and theory of Magic as pseudo-science given by Frazer; (1854-1941) in his erudite style in *"The Golden Bough."* These were later extensively debated by Evans Pritchard (1902-1979) in his treatise on *"Theories of Primitive religion"* (1965), and famously by French anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss (1908-2009) in his elucidating text on *"Totemism"* (1962-63). For all these early thinkers' knowledge is power that is bestowed in the understanding of nature and spirits and the relationship that exists between nature and culture.

The idea floated by 'early evolutionist' was premised in plurality of 'spirits and ghosts' having immense power and energy that provides protection and continuity to human life. Idea of Animism for Tylor is prefaced in the study of *"the deep-laying doctrine of Spiritual Beings, which embodies the very essence of Spiritualistic as opposed to Materialistic philosophy"*. He wanted to call it *"Spiritualism"* but was restrained because in his days this idea was encapsulated in extreme views on supernatural phenomena. Ethnographies that reached his table described natives as dreamers of the dead and believers in the soul.

'Anima' is a Latin term referring to soul and a simplistic interpretation of animism popular in the texts of anthropology refers to two forms of spirit, one which dwells in all animate and inanimate objects and other that talks about plurality of spirit inhabiting various natural objects like trees, rocks, rivers etc. Tylor in his prolific writings engages with multiple forms of spirits that exist in the nature, in the woods and lakes and all celestial formations. Celebrating spirits has the rationale of conservation built into it as reflected in the constructs of totem

and taboos. Totems and Taboos like Mana are either revered or feared. Objects related to them become conduits during festivals and celebrations for its continuity. These as explained by Evans Pritchard (1966:3) citing Radcliffe-Brown (1952:96) become "part of a much larger class of phenomena which includes all sorts of ritual relations between man and natural species, representing the 'incorporation' of nature in the social order".

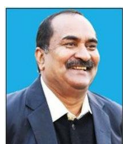


Thus, when we worship *Vat* tree (Banyan Tree) on *Harayali Teej*, or perform *Chaath Puja* offering consecrations to *Surya Devta*, (the Sun God); *Kua Pujan* worshipping of Water bodies or famous festival of Hornbill of Nagaland symbolizing its connect with the Hornbill bird, nature and survival as also the *Sangai* Festival of Manipur that sensitize people to rare species of Deer represent "incorporation of nature in the social order". They become integral to cultural paradigms of communities and sustain against all forms of adversity and verbal delusions. Interpretations given by Malinowski that totems are banned because they are 'good to eat' was contested by Radcliffe-Brown who saw its ubiquity in its ritualistic relationship with the society. It is pertinent to elucidate here that when Levi-Strauss (1962a:89) tasked anthropologists to examine "totems as good to think", he was also exploring the association between 'social order' and 'ritual behaviour'.

As students of human society, it is our primary responsibility to go beyond the public notion of festivals and look for cultural causes responsible for its sustainability over generations. Festivals are a kind of identity markers that brings communitarian consciousness to the fore. Rituals associated with celebrations are elevated to being sacred and are performed with a surreal sense of reverence. They also create a sense of personal history, a collective notion of participation and belonging and generates chords of harmony. Family and community reunions at a place during festivals resolves the boundaries that exist between public and private. This sense of collective consciousness helps in sustaining ritual traditions responsible for conservation.

My dear young friends do remember that the ideas are never dead, they transcend from one thought process to other depending on the dominant discourse of the decade, century or era. They are also deeply entrenched in social histories and political hegemonies. Early theories of religion examined plurality of belief systems and all form of knowledge and power rooted in the objects being worshipped. Once they were examined with progressive lenses and placed in hierarchical evolutionary debate of belief systems moving from animism to monotheism, essence and strength of the ideas was substituted by focus on scientific rationalism and validation. Now that we are returning to a discourse on deep ecology and Eco-spiritualism, relevance of embedded plurality in early ideas of association between nature and culture, celebration and conservation is imperative to keep human hubris at bay.

Global Links of Past with Future: Religio-Cultural Transcendence of the Car Festival of Lord Jagannath in Puri, Odisha



Prof. A. B. Ota

This year, July 5th marked the end of Lord *Jagannath's* happy sojourn to his aunts' (*Devi Gundicha*) home along with his sister, *Subhadra* and brother, *Balram*. This annual event of the Lord moving from his abode at the *Jagannath* temple to the temple devoted to the *Devi* is a momentous occasion for lakhs of devotees around the world. The gaiety and joy surrounding these festivities can be seen mirrored in the excitement in the hearts of all children as the festival holidays begin. Be it the summer holidays, *Dussehra* and *Diwali*, *Christmas* or *Eid* holidays, the purity of the child's heart celebrates the occasion of being free from all duties and simply giving vent to the child within. This could probably be one of the lighter interpretations of this grand magnum opus of a festival. Devotees in all parts of the world join this joyous vacation of the Lord for about a week.

The main event, the *Rath Yatra*, is a world-renowned feast for the eyes and overall senses, where thousands of devotees are seen pulling the deities' grand chariots. The entire phenomenon of the *Rath Yatra* is too spectacular an event to be defined. The *Rath Yatra* of Lord *Jagannath* in Puri, Odisha, is one of the oldest and most significant Hindu festivals. It is held annually on the second day of the bright fortnight of the lunar month of *Ashadha* (June–July). The festival is believed to have been initiated by King *Anangabhimadeva* III of the *Ganga* dynasty in the 12th century. This monarch is credited with setting down the tradition of the deities' annual procession.

At the beginning of the festival, the three deities are decked up gloriously and drawn by a multitude of devotees in three massive, wooden chariots. Even their gigantic chariots have names, i.e., *Nandighosha* (for Lord *Jagannath*), *Taladhwaja* (for Lord *Balabhadra*), and *Darpadalana* (for *Devi Subhadra*). These chariots are constructed anew each year for the festival using specific types of wood. The chariots are pulled by devotees chanting praises of the Lord *Jagannath* on the *bada danda* or the grand avenue going from the main temple of *Jagannath* to the *Gundicha Temple*, where they reside for a week and then return.

The *Jagannath Rath*, known as *Nandighosha*, is covered with red and yellow cloth. The yellow colour is particularly prominent in the canopy, symbolizing Lord *Jagannath's* association with *Krishna*, who is also known as *Pitambara* (the one wearing golden yellow robes). *Nandighosha*, the chariot is adorned with red and yellow



Dr. Rajni Lamba

cloth. The yellow colour is a symbolic and totemic reference to *Krishna's* golden yellow attire. The red represents energy and sanctity. The chariot has 16 wheels, each 7 feet in diameter. The chariot is essentially accompanied by the *Sudarshana Chakra*, the iconic weapon of *Vishnu*. The charioteer of this *Rath* is *Daruka*, and the rope that pulls the *Rath* is called *Sankhachuda*.

The *Jagannath Rath Yatra* is marked by a series of sacred rituals steeped in tradition. It begins with *Rath Snana*, a ceremonial bath where 108 pots of holy water are used to purify the deities. This is followed by *Rath Pratistha*, where priests bless the newly built chariots by chanting specially ordained *mantras*.

Preparations and Festive Celebrations in every devout home and heart

During the *Rath Yatra* days, *Odia* households celebrate with a variety of special foods, many of which are also offered to Lord *Jagannath* as part of the *Chhappan Bhog* (56 offerings) or *Mahaprasad*. Popular items include sweet and savoury dishes like *Khaja*, *Poda Pitha*, *Chenna Poda*, *Malpua*, *Dalma*, and *Khechedi*. One can imagine the three siblings and lakhs of holiday and festivities partakers savouring the delicious foods. There is a wave of expectation and excitement in every action. There are a number of myths and legends associated with this iconic festival that is celebrated on a grand scale across the world. Mention of the festival is known to have been encapsulated in the ancient texts like the *Brahma Purana*, *Padma Purana*, and *Skanda Purana*, which describe the journey of the deities to the *Gundicha Temple*.



Figure: Getting ready for the holidays



Figure: The lord surrounded by his friends and devotees

History is replete with mention of the *Rath Yatra* or the Car Festival. Some of the documented evidence gives details of the number of times the *Rath Yatra* had been disrupted and postponed due to the invasions of marauders. Table-1 below gives the major historical events recorded in the history of these gaps in the normal process of the Rath Yatra.

Table-1: Historic Evidence when the *Rath Yatra* could not take place

Sl. No.	Time period	Cause/Res possible	Details
1	1360 AD	Firoz Shah Tughlaq	Delhi Sultanate armies invaded Puri, desecrated the <i>Jagannath</i> Temple, plundered the city. Recorded in <i>Madala Panji</i> , the temple chronicle. The <i>Jagannath</i> temple was invaded and plundered 18 times, according to the records, which included the Tughlaq invasion as well.
2	1568–1577	Kala Pahad [a General under the Bengal Sultan Suleiman Kirani]. The <i>Rath Yatra</i> could not be held for nine years, from 1568 to 1577.	The <i>Madala Panji</i> records how the idols were initially hidden in various locations, including the <i>Panchamukhi Gosani</i> Temple at Kapileswar, about 13–14 km from Puri. However, after the idols were discovered and desecrated, the <i>Brahmas</i> (spiritual essences) were recovered by <i>Bishar Mohanty</i> , a <i>Vaishnavite</i> saint, and consecrated at <i>Gada Kujanga</i> in present-day Jagatsinghpur district. King <i>Gajapati Rama Chandra Deva</i> brought the <i>Brahmas</i> to Puri and reinstalled them in newly carved idols. No <i>Rath Yatra</i> for 9 years.

3	1601	Mirza Khurum Attack [Commander of the Bengal Nawab]	The priests rescued the idols by shifting them to the <i>Panchamukhi Gosani</i> Temple at Kapileswar, about 13–14 km from Puri. That year, the <i>Rath Yatra</i> could not be held.
4	1607	Qasim Khan subedar of Odisha	The idols were taken to the <i>Gopal Jew</i> Temple near <i>Khurda Gada</i> and hidden. The <i>Rath Yatra</i> could not be held in that year. The following year, the idols were reinstalled in the temple. <i>Rath Yatra</i> was suspended for 1 year.
5	1731	Mohammed Taqi Khan, the Naib Nazim (Deputy Governor) of Odisha,	When he invaded, the idols were taken to <i>Kankanasekhari Kuda</i> in the Chilika Lake. Later, they were shifted to <i>Harishwar Mandap</i> at Nairi village in <i>Chilika tehsil</i> in Khurda district. They were finally sent to Chikili village near the foothill of Chakadimbiri in Khallikote in Ganjam district. As a result, the <i>Rath Yatra</i> could not be held in 1731.
6	1733–1735	Mohammed Taqi Khan	Mohammed Taqi Khan attacked the <i>Jagannath</i> Temple for the second time in 1733. The idols were shifted to <i>Harishwar Mandap</i> and then to the <i>Marda</i> Temple near Hatibari Hill in Polasara of Ganjam district. The priests performed secret rituals for over two years. As a result, the <i>Rath Yatra</i> could not be held for three years, from 1733 to 1735.

Source: Compiled by authors

The *Rath Yatra* or the Car festival is observed as a powerful expression of devotion, unity, and the connection between the divine and humanity. The *Rath Yatra* has been drawing millions of devotees every year to *Jagannath* Puri in Odisha. It is also symbolically duplicated in various parts of the world to bring the miraculous aura of the holy festival celebrations to devotees settled all over the globe. For centuries, the *Rath Yatra* has been drawing millions of participants, scholars and observers. It transcends social barriers, allowing people belonging to various castes, creeds, and backgrounds to participate in the pomp and gaiety. The *Rath Yatra* has been equated to being an experience of closeness with the divine. There are several evidences, connotations to the resilience of cultural and religious

traditions in the observance of this magnum opus. Despite facing numerous challenges over the centuries, the festival has retained its pristine glory and holds a special place in the hearts of the true devotees of Lord *Jagannath*.

Historical Significance of Gundicha Temple

The temple gets its name from Queen *Gundicha*, who was believed to be the wife of King *Indradyumna*, the legendary ruler who established the *Jagannath* Temple. According to local folklore, she was the aunt of Lord *Jagannath*, which is why devotees affectionately call this temple the “*Mausima Ghara*” (Maternal Aunt’s House) in Odia.



Figure: Gundicha Temple-The Destination of the Rath Yatra

The temple’s significance skyrockets during the *Rath Yatra*, one of India’s most spectacular religious festivals. This connection is deeply rooted in devotional practices and spiritual beliefs that have been passed down through generations. The temple is the cynosure of all eyes, which each day brings its own set of rituals, prayers, and celebrations. The atmosphere during these nine days is electric, with devotees from around the world gathering to witness this divine spectacle. The temple becomes a virtual melting pot of cultures, languages, and traditions, all united by their devotion to Lord *Jagannath*.

The temple priests, following ancient traditions, perform elaborate ceremonies that include offerings of food, flowers, and prayers. The sound of conch shells, temple bells, and devotional songs creates an atmosphere that’s both mystical and deeply moving. It transports the entire land into a hub of spiritual energy and divine presence.

Symbolic significance of the Rath Yatra

The magnificent *Rath Yatra* procession across a specific route and for a specific, pre-ordained duration represents detachment of the human soul from the worries and miseries of worldly life and symbolizes its transition to a higher spiritual lane. There is a strong belief among the devout that the pulling of the chariots is the sure passage to cleanse the minds and souls of the devotees. This strong spiritual participation would rid them of their past sins and open the floodgates to them being showered with good fortune and liberation.

The procession of taking the three deities on a resplendent journey, assisted by millions of devotees, symbolizes the deeply held belief that the deities are not confined to the temple and are accessible to each and every devotee. It reinstates the centuries-old faith that even a glimpse of the beatifically adorned Lord *Jagannath* idol on the bedecked chariot liberates the devotees from the cycle of rebirth and leads to ‘*moksha*’ or salvation. Pulling the chariot or witnessing this festival is believed to cleanse negative karma and bring peace, health, and spiritual growth.

Stories abound of miraculous experiences, answered prayers, and spiritual awakenings that devotees have had at this sacred place, abound as devotees chant the Lord *Jagannath*’s paeans day in and day out. The resounding chants of ‘*Jai Jagannath*’ reach the skies as the massive three chariots are pulled with the spiritual vigour and energy of the devotees. This *Rath Yatra* is encapsulated in numerous *Yatras* taken up by various communities – tribal, rural and urban entities – in a number of different ways and styles and are attended by several myths and symbols. These have been studied by a number of anthropologists and can be revisited in the current century.

Acknowledgement:

We express our gratitude to Shri Raju Sabhachandani for the photographs used in the article.



Figure: The Lord-Devotee Connection to the Rath Yatra Festival

An Anthropological account of Exploring the Celebration of Hariyali Teej in Public Space



by Chetona Bandyopadhyay

Early in the morning, I observed my mother dressed in a striking green *saree*, adorned with elegant gold jewellery and a red *bindi*.¹ It was unusual to see her so beautifully attired at such an early hour, as she is typically occupied with household tasks during the time. However, I noticed a notable contrast in her outfit: the red *bindi* clashed with her green *saree*. This was surprising, as she usually ensures her *bindi* matches her outfit. When I inquired about this uncommon choice, she explained the day was the occasion of an auspicious *Hariyali Teej* celebration. The word '*Hariyali*,' meaning 'greenery,' is embodied in the green attire worn by married women during the festival, symbolizing this vibrant theme. On further asking about the colour of her *bindi*, she answered, It has to be red for the day, since it is also the day of celebration of marital bliss. The colour red symbolically signifies marital bliss and devotion.

Being a member of a Bengali family, it was the first time I saw my mother celebrating this occasion. Intrigued, I asked her about the significance of the day, and she explained, *Hariyali Teej* is a festival that is celebrated in the month of *Shravana*² mostly in the North Indian States of India like Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Haryana and other states. My mother explained how she had seen women belonging to the Northern parts of India, celebrating the same for years. But this was the first time she wanted to celebrate it as well. The word *Hariyali Teej*, comprises two words, '*Hariyali*', which means greenery in English. It denotes lush greenery that adores the nature during *Shravana* (monsoon month). This also explains how this festival is a celebration of the beginning of the monsoon season. '*Teej*' refers to the *Tritiya Tithi* of *Shukla Paksha*, according to Hindu Lunar Calendar. This day holds immense importance as per *Sanatan Dharma*. It marks the day when Goddess *Parvati*³ united with Lord *Shiva* after her 108 births. Hence, this day is a symbol of unwavering love and marital happiness. Married Women, therefore, celebrate this day to seek blessings from Goddess *Parvati* for marital bliss and prosperity. This celebration is a blend of various occasions bringing in different emotions of love, joy and devotion.

As my mother prepared for the *puja* celebration, I gazed out the window at the lush greenery. Dark clouds released gentle raindrops, bathing nature and soothing the plants after months of summer heat. Recalling my mother's words about the significance of this day and her attire, I marveled at the beauty of both Mother Nature and my mother, united in their joy, love, and

vibrant charm. It was time for my mother to attend the *puja* dedicated to Goddess *Parvati*, and I accompanied her to the ceremony. As I stepped out of the car, I noticed a large gathering of women dressed in green *sarees*, seated in preparation for the *puja*. The air was filled with the aromatic smoke of incense sticks and the sweet fragrance of various offerings like sweets and fruits creating an atmosphere of deep devotion.

The environment was alive with sound: the ringing of temple bells, the rhythmic chanting of hymns, and the gentle pattering of raindrops on the *mandap* (pavilion) roof all contributed to a profound sense of peace and spiritual calm. The married women were engaged in organizing the community *Puja*. I glanced at my mother, beads of sweat trickling down her forehead. Nearly everyone working there appeared similarly exhausted. My mother wasn't accustomed to wearing *sarees* frequently, and I could sense her discomfort as she managed her tasks while grappling with the attire. I wondered if she could wear something more comfortable while handling these responsibilities. Following the *puja*, special arrangements had been made for the women devotees. Activities included a singing competition, a fashion show, an open mic session, dance performances, and devotional *kirtan*.

As my thoughts wandered, my gaze settled on a woman at the corner, washing utensils with quiet diligence, her green *saree* shimmering faintly. Drawn to her, I approached and invited her to join the *puja*'s celebration. She turned, her smile gentle yet weary, and said, "I have to complete my work to get the day's payment after which I have to go home to complete my household chores". I got to learn, she was there for cleaning purposes. Later, she would return home to cook again for her three children and husband, who toiled late into the night. I learned she had been working since dawn for our celebration, her day stretching long into the dark. When I asked if this day brought her joy, she replied softly, "It does for the extra coins it brings every bit helps my family's needs." Her words, woven with quiet resilience, lingered like the rain's soft hymn. It was evening now, and the day long celebration had come to an end. I walked to the car with my mother. As I gazed out of the car window, I saw groups of women, their faces lit up with joyful smiles. The leaves on the trees and the

blades of grass were wet from the rain, shimmering in the twilight. They seemed content, as if the day had fulfilled them. The image of Goddess *Parvati*, adorned with *sindoor*⁴, looked radiant like a mother pleased to be reunited with Lord *Shiva*, content with the day long worship and the devotion of her followers.

As the driver started the car, my eyes caught sight of the woman whom I had met earlier washing utensils. I saw her hurriedly crossing the road. Unlike the other women, her face showed no trace of joy. I wondered if the household chores waiting for her, the responsibility of feeding her children, weighed so heavily on her that there was little room left for celebration. Looking out through the car's window, a question crossed my mind: Are such occasions the same for all women? Probably not. For some, it is a dual burden managing the household chores and earning a livelihood, besides observing the festivities. The term 'dual burden', as popularised by Arlie Hochschild in her book '*Second Shift*', explains how women are engaged in paid and unpaid work, often leading to an extra burden on the part of women. Women observing rituals and community work alongside their daily chores and paid work can also be looked through the lens of 'triple role framework' as used by Caroline Moser, where women juggle between reproductive role of caring for husband and children, maintain the labour force, the productive role of doing work in exchange of payment in cash or kind and third the responsibilities and roles performed by women in community settings which is voluntarily free work as mentioned by Moser.

Celebrating this festival in public spaces can be understood as providing a space that reinforces solidarity among married women, as they get a space to discuss their problems and happiness creating a sense of collective effervescence, which in Durkheimian sense, can be said as emotional intensity and a sense of shared identity creating collective consciousness that transcends the individual consciousness which is experienced as a result of participating in gatherings collectively. However, this festival reinforces the traditional gender roles in patriarchal family structures. Even in community setting, it places a burden on women in fulfilling the ritual and community obligations. Celebrating *Hariyali Teej* in such spaces, therefore, offers a unique experience where gender roles are performed but also negotiated through collective endeavour, where, through informal support, patriarchal traditions are also subverted. But this space does not hold homogenous experience for all women. As Kimberley Crenshaw, through her concept of 'intersectionality', highlights, women have multiple identities and two or more identities can converge to form different levels of oppression in different spaces. The experience of *Hariyali Teej* also varies as per the various identities and roles that women carry. Overall, *Hariyali Teej* bounds people

culturally but at the same time creates differential experience for women subject to their differential identities.



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According to Cambridge Dictionary, ¹ A bindi is a small, decorative mark or jewel placed between the eyebrows, often worn by Hindu women to signify their marital status.

<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/bindi>

² Shravana is the fifth month of Hindu calendar. It is generally the monsoon season.

³ Goddesses Parvati is a Hindu Goddesses of divine feminine energy and wife of Lord Shiva, one of the deities of Hinduism

⁴ sindoor is a red or orange coloured powder worn by Indian women on their head signifying their married identity.

SHAYANI EKADASHI – The Divine Slumber



By Priyanshu Banerjee

Dev Shayani Ekadashi or *Hari Shayani Ekadashi* is the time when Lord *Shri Hari Narayana Vishnu* goes into *Yog Nidra* (spiritual sleep). This *Ekadashi* is termed as *Maha Ekadashi*; it is the greatest among the 24 *Ekadashi*'s.

The *Vrata Katha* (story) of *Dev Shayani Ekadashi* can be found in many ancient scriptures. The most entrusted stories are found in *Padma Puran* and *Bhavisya Puran*. Also, in the *Uttara Parva* of the *Mahabharat*, *Shri Krishna* foretells the story of *Ekadashi* to *Yudhisthir*. The story goes like this: one day, *Narda* asked his father, *Prajapati Brahma* (creator god), about the significance of *Ashadhi Ekadashi* (*Shayani Ekadashi*), and his father later told him the story. The story of King *Mandata* was narrated in this context. The pious *Suryavanshi Samrat* (Solar dynasty) had a beautiful and prosperous country. However, his country faced a severe drought for three consecutive years.

Eventually, unable to find a solution, the king went to sage *Angiras*, who presided over Mount *Garvagiri*. He, with his divine powers, told the king that an impious person is doing meditation in the country, which is leading to its degradation. Sage *Angiras* advised him to observe the vow (*vrata*) of *Dev Shayani Ekadashi*. Hence, after the penance of King *Mandata*, *Shri Vishnu* graced his kingdom with rain and abundance. *Dev Shyani Ekadashi* is celebrated in various ways in different regions of the country. After the *Ekadashi*, the month of *Sawan* starts, which is the onset of monsoons in India.

In Bengal, during this period, the *Khuti puja* or *Kathamo puja* is performed. It is a customary ritual or ceremony performed to initiate the construction of the *pandal* (a temporary temple structure) that houses the *Durga Devi* idol during *Sharadiya Navaratri*. It involves setting up a *Khuti* (a bamboo pole), which represents the foundation of the *pandal*. Also, people worship the *Kathamo* (wooden frame of Goddess *Durga*) offering prayers to it for a successful, harmonious and peaceful celebration. It is a traditional Bengali ceremony that has been performed for centuries. The ritual of *Khuti puja* is much rooted in the older tradition of *Kaathamo puja*, which was mainly practiced in the traditional Bengali households (*Bonedi Bari*) or *Rajbari* (Palaces of *Zamindars*). It marks the beginning of festivities. The *Khuti puja* is much prevalent in clubs and societies. However, the origin of *Khuti puja* is in Midnapore (a district of West Bengal) where it is represented as the symbol of *Devraj Indra* (Lord of Rain). It signifies the onset of monsoon and the lord may have his grace on the people and occasion. Hence, the *Khuti puja* is mainly done during the month of *Sawan*, which is the first month of *Chaturmaas*.

The *khuti puja* dates back to around approximately 290 – 250 years. While the *Kathamo puja* dates back to around approximately 420 – 400 years. The first ever *Kathamo puja* was done in the *Zamindari Rajbari* of Halishar (earlier Haveli Sahar) in 1610 AD, then ruled by Lakshmikanta Gangopadhyay, who later assumed the title of Roy Choudhury. He was the Chief Revenue Officer of Pratapaditya of Bengal. In 1613 AD, Lakshmikanta joined hands with the Mughals and gained the *Jagirdari* rights of 85 villages in Bengal. Sabarna Roy Choudhury, heir of the house, later gave the *zamindari* rights of Govindpur, Sutanuti and Kalikata to Job Charnock in 1698 AD. They later shifted to Barisha, the *Kathamo* prepared by mud has been done by the generational *Kumars* (potters) for 25 generations.

The *Dev Shayani Ekadashi* is followed by the beginning of *Chaturmaas*. The concept of *Chaturmaas* is also found in the *Shamanic* traditions such as *Buddhism* and *Jainism*. It is called the *Varshavarsh* months. During this period, they rested in their *viharas* (monasteries) and practiced meditation. The *Ayurveda* (Indian traditional knowledge of Health), states that the *Chaturmaas* falls in the *Visarga Kaal* of *Dakshinayan*, when our immunity is less and diseases spread rapidly. Hence, it is advised to take rest and gatherings like marriages are also avoided. In Hinduism, the *Chaturmaas* is not merely a ritual period but a spiritual invitation. It is a time when the universe resets itself. Hence, during this duration energy absorption, sadhana, inner transformation, spiritual introspection and retrospection becomes significant in one's life. This is a period of fasting and austerities designed to let mother nature restore itself. In many places, non-veg food production is stopped as it is the time for the breeding season of many animals. This is the time of spiritual awakening (*Bhakti*). As though *Shri Hari Narayan Vishnu* rests, his Grace over people never does.



Figure: Dev Shayani Ekadashi Puja; Khuti Puja at Pandal ; Kathamo Puja at Rajbari

Barefoot Devotion and Bells of Faith: Field Reflections on the Kanwar Yatra



By Vasundhra Sharma

Introduction

'*Kanwar Yatra*' is a pilgrimage which takes place during the Hindu Calendar month of '*Shravan*' or '*Saavan*' (July-August). *Kanwar Yatra* is an annual affair wherein the devotees of Lord *Shiva* travel a long distance barefoot, collect sacred water from the river *Ganga* and finally travel back to the sacred shrines of Lord *Shiva* near their homes, offering the water to his idol (*Shivalinga*), marking the end of their journey.

Myths associated with the inception of the *Kanwar Yatra* are not one, but many—be it the myth of "*Samudra Manthan*" or that of the story of *Ravana* being the first one to ever partake in the journey—the *Yatra's* modern manifestation testifies to how traditional practices are being reconfigured by changing cultural, political, and infrastructural forces.

In my role as an independent researcher, I undertook ethnographic fieldwork in *Kanwar Shivirs* in Delhi. I observed, watched, and spoke with *Kanwariyas*, volunteers, and organizers to document the secularization of this sacred pilgrimage into a ritual that is simultaneously devotional, performative, and firmly rooted in modern state and civil society frameworks. The observations that follow are a composite of these lived experiences.

The Contemporary Kanwar Yatra: Observations from the Field

The contemporary *Kanwar Yatra* speaks of coming together of devotion, spectacle, and changing ritual practice. Although most *Kanwariyas* know little about the mythological origins of the ritual, they adhere to *Shravan* as a month for *Shiva*, performing acts of penance like walking barefoot over many miles. But over the past few decades, that penance has been augmented—or replaced—by trucks, cars, and motorcycles for both devotees and their lavish *Kanwars*. This modernisation has not diluted the emotional intensity of the journey but has introduced a new dimension to its visual and material culture.

The iconography is striking. Classic bamboo *Kanwars* have evolved into elaborate structures equipped with LED lights, mirrors, artificial flowers, national flags, and amplified devotional music. The saffron dress, ankle bells, *Shiva*-themed headbands, and chanting of unity mark a space in which the distinction between religious procession and cultural assertion dissolves. Modern infrastructure and institutions can be identified as two prominent reasons for the sustenance of the *Yatra*. Along the routes, makeshift *Shivirs* provide *bhojanalayas* (free food services), medical aid stations, water points, and sanitation facilities.



Figure: Kanwar Yatra on a tempo with speakers



Figure: Bhojanalaya (Free Food Service) at a Shivar



Figure: Medical Aid Stand at a Shivar

Volunteers, both locals and those affiliated with spiritual organizations help in managing the inflow of participants. Policemen maintain traffic flow and safety, while religious supervisors ensure that protocols are followed. The institutionalisation of such support systems has helped expand participation across caste, class, and regional divides. In fact, one of the key attributes of the *Yatra* is the suspension of such social hierarchies the only distinctions that emerge are symbolic: *Bhola* for male pilgrims and *Bholi* for female participants.

Despite its inclusive overtones, the *Yatra* is not without contradictions. It is increasingly entangled in politics, where religious identity becomes a vehicle for nationalistic performance. The appropriation of the tricolour and Hindu unity slogans, marks the departure from traditional practices, showcasing the metamorphic nature of this pilgrimage. Furthermore, whereas most participants preserve the ritual's sanctity, others appropriate it as a locale for wild conduct, loud music, or even drug use. Such behaviour tests the limits of sacred expression and performative religiosity.

Borrowing from Victor Turner's theory of liminality, the *Kanwar Yatra* thereby operates in a realm in which identities are temporarily suspended or redefined. Pilgrims abandon mundane roles to adopt the pious *Kanwariya* identity. This performative selfmarked by dress uniformity, ritualistic gesture, and chanting in groups, creating a fleeting sacred order, one that is regulated internally and supported communally. Whether one is a vegetable vendor, a student, or a mundane wage laborer, all march together with a homogeneous beat, erasing such overt markers of socio-economic difference.

Conclusion

Before navigating into the field, I had hypothesised that the pilgrimage of *Kanwar Yatra* consistently draws a profusion of devotees from all over India merely because of infrastructural and institutional improvements; however, venturing into the field made me realise that it is so much more than that. I initially kept to formal methods of observation, doing everything by the book, but with time, I adapted, sandals removed, my interview questionnaires in the bag, and was affectionately called *Bholi* by fellow participants.

The ease with which my role on the field transmuted from being a researcher to being a part of the collective whole made me realise that the *Kanwar Yatra* is not a pilgrimage in itself; it is a passage of becoming a part of a collective consciousness, which is something we don't witness in our everyday lives.

In the *Shivirs* of Delhi, amidst the swarm of ankle bells and saffron-clad bodies, I walked not merely as an observer, but as one who briefly became part of a cultural whole, one of many barefoot believers carrying both water and faith.



Figure: Kanwar 'Parking' Stand



Figure: Kanwar Representing the National Flag



Figure: Ankle Bells on the Feet of Kanwariya

Prof. P. Venkata Rao

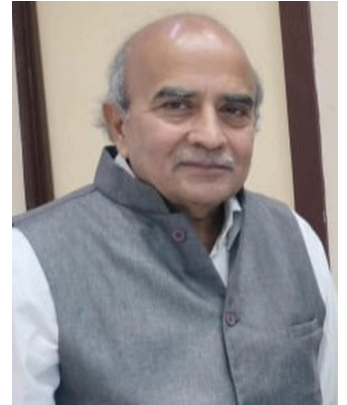


Interview by Saba Farhin

Prof. P. Venkata Rao is a distinguished Indian anthropologist, holding a Ph.D. from Andhra University. He devoted nearly four decades to academic service at the University of Hyderabad, where he retired as a Senior Professor in the Department of Anthropology. His scholarly interests span development anthropology, tribal studies, and participatory methodologies. Over the years, Prof. Rao has made significant contributions through teaching, research, publications, and policy advisory roles. Deeply engaged in interdisciplinary fieldwork, he has explored the socio-cultural dynamics of marginalized communities across India. A dedicated teacher and mentor, he has shaped generations of students and continues to guide young scholars even after retirement. His work has enriched academic discourse and influenced both government and non-governmental initiatives in tribal welfare and rural development.

Interestingly, like many others who eventually find their way to anthropology, Prof. Rao refers to himself as an “accidental anthropologist.” Growing up in a rural Telugu-medium background, he was always fascinated by science. As a young student, he imagined becoming a scientist, drawn to stories of invention and discovery. He pursued Zoology during his undergraduate studies, and it was during a lesson on biological evolution that he first encountered the term “anthropology.” He recalls being struck by the idea that anthropology begins where organic evolution ends, that human evolution is not just biological but also cultural and social. That realization planted the seed for a lifelong pursuit. Anthropology became a serious focus only during his postgraduate studies, where he was introduced to its various subfields - archaeological, biological, and cultural. Initially unsure of where he belonged, he gravitated towards social anthropology in his second year, inspired by teachers who helped channel his scientific curiosity into understanding the complexities of human society. One moment stands out clearly in his memory: the first day of his M.A. classes. While most professors used the time to get to know their students, Dr. D.L. Prasada Rao, his mentor and a student of stalwarts like Prof. Aiyappan and Prof. N. Subba Reddy, simply walked in and began a lecture without any formalities. That content-first approach left a deep impression, and years later, Prof. Rao adopted the same method in his own teaching.

Under Dr. D.L. Prasada Rao’s mentorship, he pursued his Ph.D. and embraced a way of thinking that combined academic rigor with grounded realism. Under Dr. D.L. Prasada Rao’s mentorship, he pursued his Ph.D. and embraced a way of thinking that combined academic rigor with grounded realism. He conducted ethnographic research among the Koya Dora in the Eastern Ghats and later joined a socio-economic survey in the slums of Visakhapatnam. These experiences tied anthropology to real-world development issues and taught him a lesson he never forgot: when an informant is ready to talk, you don’t postpone as the moment may never come again. His early scholarly years coincided with the political turbulence of the National Emergency in the mid-1970s. Campus life during that charged period shaped his view of anthropology not just as an academic discipline, but as a tool for critically engaging with society. Andhra University’s collaborative learning culture further nurtured his growth, students from different subfields often shared field sites and critiqued each other’s work. In that spirit, Prof. Rao supported senior researchers and participated in a variety of projects, from kinship studies under Canadian-trained anthropologist Ajit Kishor Ray to writing his first seminar paper while sitting in a university jeep outside Waltair Railway Station.



Although his early research focused on kinship and ethnic identity, a Junior Research Fellowship from the UGC and the launch of Andhra Pradesh’s Integrated Tribal Development Projects (ITDPs) drew him toward tribal development. Following his mentor’s advice to enter the field without preconceived notions, Prof. Rao let the field shape his research. His doctoral thesis emerged from this immersive approach: a study of the institutional framework for tribal development in Andhra Pradesh. The path to his degree wasn’t smooth, one examiner, Prof. Gerald Berreman, refused to review the thesis due to political objections, and another delayed it, leaving Prof. Rao in limbo for over a year and half. During this uncertain time, he even considered civil services, clearing the exam with a strong rank. But before joining, a teaching opportunity arose at the

newly founded University of Hyderabad. For Prof. Rao, the decision was easy, his heart was in the classroom and the field, not bureaucracy. At the University of Hyderabad, he initially taught both sociology and anthropology in the combined department. Once the Anthropology Department gained independence, he devoted himself fully to building its curriculum, mentoring students, and expanding its research. Even in the early years, he published on topics like tribal education, Panchayati Raj, cooperatives, and resource management. His research style blended grounded fieldwork with creative use of cultural materials like folktales, proverbs, popular films, and matrimonial ads etc. to explore themes of identity, development, and social change.

Prof. Rao remained active in the field, often collecting data alongside his students. During M.A. fieldwork among the Chenchus of Nallamalai, he developed a paper on ageing. While accompanying students to Lambada settlements in Telangana, he studied shifts in agriculture from dry to irrigated farming. These experiences became conference papers and journal articles. His broader research explored development through the lens of constitutional promises and tribal policies. He critically analyzed the implementation of schemes for Scheduled Tribes and Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups. In Andhra Pradesh and Telangana, he examined how colonial and postcolonial systems that rigidly separated tribes and castes, and instead offered a more fluid understanding of identity shaped by history, belief, and social practice. Since his doctoral years, Prof. Rao has been committed to understanding developmental dynamics in tribal regions of India, especially how constitutional provisions and state interventions impact the lives of Scheduled Tribes and PVTGs. His work consistently interrogates whether these policies truly address community-specific realities or simply reproduce top-down frameworks. He has critically engaged with landmark legislations such as PESA, the Forest Rights Act, and the Land Acquisition Act, highlighting both their potential and limitations.

A central focus of Prof. Rao's research has been the prolonged contact between tribal and non-tribal populations. His edited volume *Tribal Development: Policy and Practice* compiled regional studies from across India, shedding light on the nuanced trajectories of tribal policy and their local impacts. His own fieldwork in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana challenged colonial binaries separating "tribes" and "castes." He documented cases where tribal groups adopted caste titles, shared rituals with Hindu communities, and preserved oral histories that questioned official classifications. Through this, he emphasized the fluid and intertwined nature of social identities. Prof. Rao has become a leading voice in the anthropology of development, tribal policy, and identity formation. His contributions were formally recognized in 1999 with the prestigious UGC Research Award. This allowed him to conduct a wide-ranging review of anthropological studies on tribal communities in Andhra Pradesh, resulting in his influential book *Dimensions of Transformation in Tribal Societies*. The book explored inter-tribal relations, land alienation, forest governance, credit systems, and state policy impacts; grounded in regional

research but resonant with national development debates. He has also advanced methodological innovation in Indian anthropology.

One example is his restudy of a village near Hyderabad, originally studied by Dr. M.V.T. Raju during ISRO's SITE project. This effort, in collaboration with Dr. Binod C. Agrawal and others, rekindled his interest in the work of Scarlett T. Epstein. His reflections on her contributions were published in *The Eastern Anthropologist*, a piece that Epstein appreciated. Plans for an edited volume of her writings, jointly with Prof. M. N. Panini of JNU, were unfortunately shelved after Prof. Epstein's demise.

Beyond original research, Prof. Rao has made important archival and historiographic contributions to Indian anthropology. Apart from Scarlett T. Epstein, he has written reflective essays on the intellectual legacies of scholars like C.V.F. Haimendorf and N. Subba Reddy, offering insight into the evolution of anthropological thought in India. These writings, published in *The Eastern Anthropologist*, underscore his commitment to preserving the discipline's academic heritage. At the University of Hyderabad, he also explored new themes. A significant shift came with his work on ageing in rural and tribal areas. Supported by ICSSR, he led a pioneering study on ageing populations in these contexts, which are often overlooked in urban-centric research. This led to his association as adjunct faculty at the Centre for Research and Education in Ageing, where he continued to explore the topic, even though only one of his students pursued it academically. His commitment to economic anthropology also persisted. Despite limited student interest, he consistently highlighted transformations in tribal economies under liberalization and globalization, particularly the shift from subsistence to commercial agriculture. His long engagement with the field was honored with the Dr. K.S. Mathur Memorial Lecture, organized by the Ethnographic and Folk Culture Society, where he spoke on "The Status of Economic Anthropology in India."

Even as his career progressed, Prof. Rao remained concerned about the internal challenges facing anthropology. He often voiced his disappointment about its decline in Indian universities, involving himself on the issue of future of anthropology in India. An area in which he developed interest is the decolonization of anthropology. He presented his ideas in Prof. N.K Bose Memorial lecture organized by Indira Gandhi National Centre for Arts, New Delhi. As a mentor, Prof. Rao has always encouraged independent thinking and intellectual curiosity. He allowed his Ph.D. students the freedom to pursue diverse research interests on marginalized castes, religion, agrarian change, or ethnic identity; rather than enforcing a fixed agenda. This openness enriched both his students' work and his own perspectives, keeping him intellectually engaged across disciplines and themes. His message to young anthropologists is simple but profound: resist the urge to follow trends blindly; instead, pursue questions that truly move you and remain open to the insights that emerge from deep engagement with the field.

Tribe in Transition, Bodies in Peril: Metabolic Risks Along the Tribe-Caste Continuum



By Chandra Shekher Upadhyay

Introduction

The dramatic increase in epidemiological conditions in India pinpoints a problematic paradox: the uprising metabolic abnormalities accounted by a rapid shift in unhealthy lifestyle from healthy traditional and lifestyle behaviours. These metabolic abnormalities, which consist of, raised blood pressure, obesity, and increased blood glucose, have increased among ethnic populations, leading to CVD (cardiovascular disease). Both lifestyle behaviours and ethnic attributes play a vital role in the cardiovascular health conundrum. The health concern is about traditional and tribal communities, which were previously guarded by geography and self-sustaining livelihoods, are now facing an upsurge in unwanted and non-communicable diseases (NCDs). Anthropology provides “*Anthroposcopic*” lenses to examine this transition, and it is the “tribe-caste continuum”. This article explores how transitional communities, especially the Bhumij of Munsigherei (Haroa Subdivision), North 24 Parganas, West Bengal, are stepping towards metabolic risk factors through the cultural adaptation resembling the dominant caste group of Bengali Hindus.

The Tribe-Caste Continuum: Cultural Mobility, Structural Vulnerability

F.G. Bailey in 1960, had shed light on tribe-caste continuum, explaining the evolving phenomenon of tribal groups gradually assimilating into a caste society; their holistic approach of adapting to ritual and social status, and furthermore merging into livelihood, food systems, and settlement structures helps them to stand with neighbouring communities. In regions like Eastern India, the transition among *Bhumij* as well as other tribes like *Oraon*, *Munda*, *Mahato* and etc. accelerated due to numerical strength, and economic aspirations from Bengali Hindus in North 24 Parganas.

History of Bhumij in North 24 Parganas of West Bengal

A verbal account included by Maggard and Bailey (2015) suggests that during British rule, the *Bhumij* were appointed as tax collectors due to their assertive nature. To gain respect and authority, they gradually adopted the Bengali language and upper-caste practices. This cultural shift contributed to their migration from Chotanagpur to areas like North and South 24 Parganas, where they eventually assimilated with lower-caste Hindus, offering a plausible explanation for their sociocultural transition and present-day positioning along the tribe-caste continuum.

The *Bhumij* community, a known scheduled tribe of India, is especially addressed through their historical connection with soil and agriculture, forest dependence, and semi-nomadism, but nowadays, they find themselves in a state

of cultural liminality. Once, highly engaged in agriculture, daily labour, and public sector jobs, the Bhumij tribes adopt many lifestyle practices of neighbouring Bengali Hindu populations to cope with the current situation. Although this cultural assimilation helps them to blend in, at the same time, they are moving away from ecological self-sufficiency and traditional health practices.

Bodies in Peril: The Cost of Lifestyle Convergence

This transformation from tribes to castes has important biological consequences. As the Bhumij and similar communities shift toward sedentary occupations and adopt an urban lifestyle (unhealthy diet, physical inactivity, sugar- and oil-based food, consuming non-traditional beverages, and substance abuse), they begin to resemble the metabolic (lipid) profiles of caste populations in urban and peri-urban settings. Diets that were once rich in cereals, leafy green vegetables, and millets, and low in fat, were increasingly replaced by white rice, packaged snacks, and saturated fats. Once a highly active phase in livelihood, it has given way to inactivity supported by mechanization and digital media use, especially among the youth.

The biological results indicate an increase in the rates of risk factors, such as abdominal obesity, blood pressure, impaired glucose tolerance, and aberrant lipid profiles. The “thrifty gene hypothesis” by James V. Neel offers a sombre explanation: once helped by a specific gene to store energy in food scarcity, it is now responsible for catering to obesity and abnormal lipid conditions, particularly in calorie-rich environments. Interestingly, what was once an evolutionary shield has become a health enemy due to the excess availability of diet coupled with physical inactivity.

Liminal Identities and Policy Gaps

Presently, the transitional phase of the tribe indicates their in-between position in neither fully tribal communities nor caste groups. This whole shift creates a systematic loophole in the public health system. Though *Bhumij* is qualified as a scheduled tribe under the Indian Scheduled Tribes Act, it had to face social stigma in Hindu society due to the unavailability of proper documentation. In fact, they are stuck between respect and acceptance by the dominant caste group/ society and between reservation and privileges of the scheduled tribes.

Social perception influences health-seeking behaviour. Their dilemma of accepting and trusting modern medicine goes on parallel with their declining traditional health and ethnomedicine practices. These conditions keep their metabolic health unchecked and untreated over time.

Redefining Public Health Through the Continuum Lens

Though numerous government plans are working for both caste and tribes' health but their rigid system puts physical and social boundaries on a flexible approach. The whole concept of continuum wide opens a vital key to explore different levels of vulnerability rather than identifying it as a cultural concept. Tailored intervention specific to regional and ethnic diet coupled with physical activity, communities-based health programmes will help, because of the blending cultures (syncretism) of both modern medicine and traditional health practices.

The longitudinal and community-based study will address the complexity of the problem across any given communities among tribe and caste groups. The dynamic nature of the caste continuum will help us to explore the cultural shifts and their effect on metabolic health profiles.

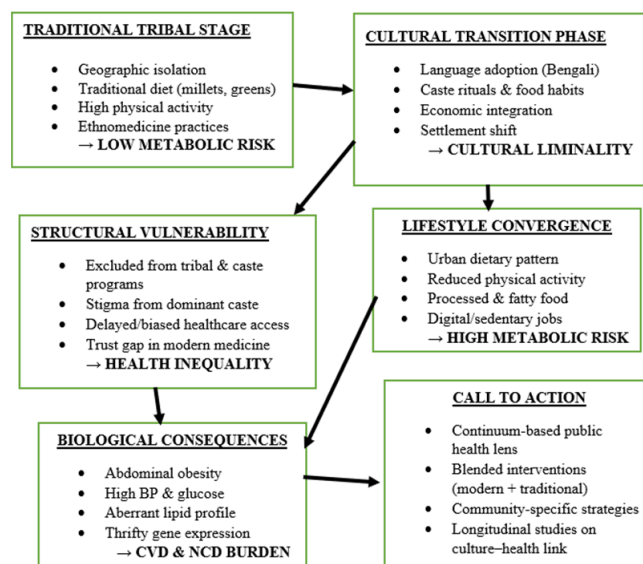
Conclusion

Continuum as a Critical Lens for Metabolic Vulnerability points to the rising metabolic risks among tribal and transitional communities like the *Bhumij* are not merely due to lifestyle changes but reflect a deeper sociocultural transformation. Their shift along the tribe-caste continuum has brought both social mobility and health vulnerability. Recognising this transition is key to developing inclusive public health strategies that consider both cultural identity and biological risk.

Acknowledgement:

My special thanks go to all the Bhumij participants. Last but not least, my heartiest thanks go to my supervisor, "Dr. Mithun Das (Associate Professor, Department of Anthropology & Tribal Studies, Sidho-Kanho-Birsha University, WB, India 723104)" for being the spine of my study.

Compact design of Tribe–Caste Continuum and Metabolic Risks



THROUGH THE LENS

The Gugudu Kullaiswamy Jathara



by Dr. Doraboina Udaya Kumar

Introduction Note:

I am Dr. Doraboina Udaya Kumar, an anthropologist with 17 years of research and nearly 4 years of teaching experience. I hold a Ph.D. and a Post-Doctoral Fellowship from Sri Venkateswara University, Tirupati. My work spans tribal studies, gender, urban poverty, and social impact assessments. I have authored 2 books, published 10 research papers in reputed journals, and conducted ethnographic fieldwork across India. I am a member of various national and international anthropological associations.

During the *Jathara*, I conducted an ethnographic study in July 2025. The *Gugudu Kullaiswamy Jathara* is a significant folk religious festival celebrated during the *Mohram* in and around the village of Googudu, Anantapur district of Andhra Pradesh. This *Jathara* is a vibrant example of how religious pluralism, folklore, and Hindu and Muslim communities intertwine in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana states. From an anthropological perspective, this festival reflects the fusion of sacred mythology, social cohesion, and communal harmony. Most curious of all, the principal

attraction of the feast is a fire-walking ceremony twice during its course, at sunset and sunrise. Sugar offered by the devotees, goat/sheep/chicken sacrifice, *Panakaalu* (jaggery-mixed water), and coconut are prominent. This *Jathara* is also a site for healing rituals and fertility worship, as devotees believe *Kullaiswamy* blesses the childless and cures ailments. This aligns with anthropological interpretations of folk deities as functional spirits serving immediate community needs.



The Idol/Pir represents the village deity '*Gugudu Kullaisamy*', enshrined in the temple in Gugudu village, Narpala Mandal, Anantapur district. The idol is closely associated with the *Mohammadan Pirs*, reflecting Islamic influences in its appearance and ritual significance. Despite its Muslim associations, the idol is venerated by devotees of all castes and religions, particularly Hindus, who manage the temple and perform the rituals. Offerings such as sugar and animal sacrifices are made to the idol, especially during the annual *Jathara*, symbolizing a rare and harmonious blend of folk, Hindu, and Islamic traditions.



Inside, the Idol/*Pir* represents the deity '*Gugudu Kullaisamy*'. The *Mohammadan Pirs* in Gugudu are held in high reverence, with people of all castes making vows to them. If their wishes are fulfilled, devotees offer sugar to the god. Although the tradition reflects Muslim influences, the temple and its rituals are entirely managed by Hindu devotees, showcasing a unique blend of religious harmony.



A Scheduled Caste devotee plays the *Thappeta* drum throughout the night in the presence of the deity *Kullaisami*, while devotees offer Sugar to the God. During the festival, numerous shops emerge, selling sugar to devotees for offering to the deity.



Devotees prepare for the sacred fire-walking during the *Gugudu Kullaisamy Jathara*, held at night as a profound expression of faith and spiritual devotion, symbolizing endurance, purity, and connection with the divine.



Devotees perform the traditional fire-walking ceremony in the early hours after sunrise, making a solemn religious observance and a deep expression of faith and spiritual commitment.

Devotees from diverse castes and religions participate in the *Jathara* with deep devotion – women offering sugar to God *Kullaisamy*, and vibrant music by *Nayi Bramhana- Sannai and Tappeta* – reflecting unity in faith and celebration.



Child beggars from the Scheduled Caste (*Jangama*) community were seen during the *Jathara*, highlighting the ongoing socio-economic challenges amid the religious celebrations. I observed around 20 child beggars from this community, who had travelled

approximately 190 km from Giddalur to Gugudu village. They stayed for ten days, begging for sugar, dry coconut, money and other offerings. Most of these children had dropped out of school.



After the completion of the fire-walking, children stand in the fire pit and search for coins. If they get the coin, they preserve it in their homes in their prayer room, so that they will get more benefit financially. Some children will sell them to the devotees in exchange for one rupee to 100 or 200, likewise.



The researcher stayed near Gugudu village for 4 days, observed the *Jathara* closely, interviewed a local old man and collected qualitative data through direct field observations.



Acknowledgement:

My special thanks to Mr. Naresh for his significant support, enabling the successful completion of Gugudu Kullaisamy Jathara's field work.

BOOK REVIEW

How Forests Think: Toward an Anthropology Beyond the Human by Eduardo Kohn



Book reviewed by R. Harini

Eduardo Kohn's "How Forests Think: Toward an Anthropology Beyond the Human" (2013) interrogates anthropological theories, perceptions and structures by critiquing the discipline's cartesian characterization of humanhood as elementally distinctive from other "forms of life" and deconstructing human exceptionalism through the recognition that "*seeing, representing and perhaps knowing, even thinking*" are not exclusively human experiences. Rooted in Kohn's four-year-fieldwork amongst the Runa of Ecuador's Upper Amazon and organized across 6 chapters, the book advocates for the establishment of new conceptual tools emergent from the undiscovered properties of the otherwise estranged living world, demonstrating an egalitarian phenomenology where "*all living beings are signs*" and thus, the "*opened human*" is infinitely united with all other beings through an ecological network of "*signifying relations*".^[1]

In the introduction of the book, Kohn describes how he was warned of his corporeal representation towards the "*other*"; if the jaguar recognizes a human as akin to oneself ("*himself*") because the human sleeps facing the sky, it

refuses to reduce this entity to a "*prey*" (*aicha*). On the other hand, the act of "*hiding one's form*" by sleeping facedown causes the jaguar to perceive the corpus as mere "*meat*"; othered, consumable and perishable. By centering the jaguar's "*gaze*", Kohn both advocates for a reordination of the human collective or "*we*" and begins to gaze

at the world through the Quichuan construction of a runa-pama, or a were-jaguar. Both human and subjectively "*other-than-human*"; these entities perceived "*humans the way jaguars do*" and thus, were feared by Runa Shamans in Rio Blanco who entered *aya-huasca* induced visions. As chapters progress, Kohn debates representation's contradictory nature contested between the notions of "*self*" and "*other*".



HOW FORESTS THINK
Toward an Anthropology Beyond the Human

Eduardo Kohn

Chapter 1, “*The Open Whole*”, rethinks human lexicon and alternative forms of nonhuman representation; seeking to “defamiliarize” conventional communication by identifying it as one amongst multiple modalities. The semiotic constitution established in Chapter 1 is further explored in “*The Living Thought*”, the 2nd chapter where the “self” and the notion of “we” is viewed as a product of semiosis, culminating in what is termed as an “ecology of selves”. Chapter 3, “*Soul Blindness*” and Chapter 4, “*Trans-Species Pidgins*” interrogate the scales and kinds of death by recognizing the existence of multiple modalities of disenchantment as well as how one exists as a self in relation to the vast number of entities present in the intertwined ecology of selves. The anthropological significance of form is fleshed out in Chapter 5, “*Form’s Effortless Efficacy*”

with the final chapter entitled “*The Living Future (and the Imponderable Weight of the Dead)*” examines the relation of continuity and absence when concerned with the enigma of survival. In understanding the dichotomous relationship between the humans of Avila and the jaguars they were both ravenously hunted by and offered half-eaten carcasses as gifts, Kohn approaches “**posthumanities**” through a critique of anthropocentrism by drawing in the work of Charles Pierce to investigate a broader nonhuman universe, explicated through the intimacy woven by consuming food obtained through interactions with ecological assemblages and emerging as “*interactive and mutually constitutive beings*.”

1 <https://www.kth.se/blogs/hist/2018/01/how-forests-think-toward-a-beyond-the-human-anthropology-eduardo-koch/>

REFLECTIONS ON ANTHRO BULLETIN

A Note in Reflection on Prof. Mehta’s Editorial



By Mithun Sikdar

I must begin with a sincere acknowledgement that Prof. Mehta had graciously invited me to respond to her insightful editorial in **Anthro Bulletin-Vol 4, Issue-5**, and I regret that my words have been delayed far longer than they should have been. But perhaps reflection, especially on something as layered and profound as her message, demands its own time. Her editorial, “*Missing Tagore in the Texts of Indian Anthropology*”, does more than fill a scholarly gap; it calls attention to an intellectual silence that has shaped the field for generations. It seems from her editorial that Tagore’s absence in the Indian anthropological canon is not an oversight. It is a reflection of how deeply colonial epistemologies still inform our discipline. Reading her words, I was reminded of how anthropology in India must move from being a practice of looking outward, often through borrowed lenses from Western Philosophy, to one of introspective reconstruction rooted in indigenous thought, ethics, and creativity. From her writings, it appears that Calcutta University, led by stalwarts like L.K. Anantakrishnan Iyer and others, failed to meaningfully engage with Tagore’s philosophy within the development of Indian Anthropology. However, at the same time, I would urge scholars and colleagues from Calcutta University to corroborate or critically reflect on this observation, offering their perspectives and institutional insights.

Here I must admit that I was unaware of the contributions made by Prof. T.C. Das to the Bengal famine. It was only through the provocative academic writings of Prof. Abhijit Guha across various platforms, academic WhatsApp groups like Aspire, that I

became acquainted with Prof. Das and his pioneering work.

This experience also made me wonder how important scholarly works often remain unrecognized within the mainstream anthropological domain. A parallel example that Prof. Mehta cited is Dr. Ashta Singh’s critical analysis of Rabindranath Tagore’s *Chokher Bali*. Despite its relevance, her work went largely unnoticed, perhaps due to the limited visibility of the journal where it was published or because she is not formally trained as an anthropologist. It was only when Prof. Shalina Mehta, in her editorial, brought attention to Dr. Singh’s work that many of us became aware of its anthropological depth. Dr. Singh’s article also led me to explore the reference where one can find Nandini Sen’s insightful article on “*Women and Gender in Short Stories by Rabindranath Tagore: An Anthropological Introspection*”. These academic discoveries and rediscoveries highlight how many anthropological treasures remain unnoticed. These are waiting to be revived through interdisciplinary readings, and editorial interventions like what Prof. Mehta did. It reminds us that anthropology is not just about data, but about revisiting overlooked voices, forgotten contributions, and reinterpreting them within contemporary frameworks. In this, she offers more than an editorial; she offers a quiet provocation. And for that, I remain both grateful and inspired.



FORTHCOMING EVENT

An online lecture will be organised as a part of our **Distinguished Guest lecture series**.

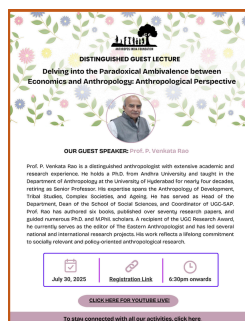
For updates please follow our website's events page--
<https://events.anthroposindiafoundation.com/>

PAST EVENT

For our Distinguished Guest lecture series, an online lecture was organised and delivered by **Prof. P Venkata Rao** on July 30, 2025, 6:30 pm onwards.

For more details about the lecture - **Click here**

YouTube live Link - **Click here**



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4. Exhibit Coordinator at McClung Museum of Natural History & Culture - UTK, Knoxville, TN, United States
Last Date to Apply: Rolling basis
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We're thrilled to announce a brand-new column in our **Anthro Bulletin**, starting this month - **'Through the Lens'** - a visual journey through photo essays capturing the richness of human experiences, cultures, and everyday life.

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