

ANTHRO BULLETIN

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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, **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**.

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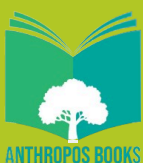
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Emerging Areas in Anthropology and Collective Responsibility

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

Most of us discover Anthropology by chance rather than by choice. Yet, once we enter the discipline, it has a remarkable way of staying with us for life. My own journey reflects this. Although I graduated in the sciences, I always had a strong inclination towards understanding people and societies. That curiosity drew me to the social sciences, eventually leading me to pursue a Master's degree in Anthropology. Since then, there has been no looking back.

Anthropology may not always promise great monetary rewards, but it offers something far more enduring—knowledge, awareness, empathy, sensitivity, and a profoundly humane understanding of the world. It teaches us to appreciate diversity, question assumptions, and engage with humanity in all its complexity. I am certain that many of my fellow anthropologists would agree that the intellectual and personal enrichment this discipline provides is limitless. One of the greatest blessings of my academic and professional journey has been the enduring relationship with my teachers. Even today, decades after I studied under them in the 1990s, they continue to encourage, support, and guide me. It is deeply fulfilling to witness four generations connected through the lineage of knowledge—my teachers, myself, my students, and now their students. Seeing all four generations together in one frame is a powerful reminder of the continuity of scholarship and mentorship. It is therefore a matter of immense pride and gratitude that this special issue features a guest editorial by my revered teacher, Professor K. K. Misra, who believed in my potential even when I was a Master's student.

Anthropology has not only provided me with a profession but has also shaped my worldview. While we all cherish the classical foundations of the discipline, anthropology itself has undergone remarkable transformations over the years. The traditional four-field approach, encompassing social-cultural anthropology, biological anthropology, archaeology, and linguistic anthropology, has expanded into numerous specialised and interdisciplinary subfields. The broad classification envisioned by Franz Boas continues to demonstrate the holistic and integrative nature of anthropology, even as the discipline evolves to address contemporary challenges.

In India, however, the growth of anthropology has been uneven. While a few institutions have established strong centres of excellence, comprehensive departments that offer balanced training across all sub-disciplines remain rare. Historically, anthropology was often housed within departments of sociology, as was the case at my alma

mater, the University of Hyderabad, where it gained independent departmental status only in 1988. Although significant progress has been made since then, there remains considerable scope to strengthen anthropology education and research across the country.



Encouragingly, anthropology is now increasingly recognised for its unique philosophical foundations, rigorous methodologies, and practical applications. The discipline has moved well beyond its traditional focus on remote tribal communities to engage with the realities of an interconnected, digital, and risk-driven world. Anthropologists today examine digital cultures, environmental crises, artificial intelligence, human-technology interactions, migration, urban transformations, and corporate innovation. Students now have access to an expanding range of emerging specialisations, provided institutions are willing to introduce and nurture these programmes. In this regard, several private universities have taken promising initiatives by incorporating new anthropological perspectives within liberal arts and anthropology curricula.

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The digital revolution has opened entirely new frontiers for anthropological inquiry. Fields such as Museum Anthropology, Digital Anthropology, Cyber Anthropology, the Anthropology of Artificial Intelligence and Algorithms, and Cyborg or Post human Anthropology are gaining prominence internationally. Researchers are examining online

communities, social media cultures, gaming environments, virtual realities, and the ways in which machine learning, automation, and big data influence identities, relationships, and social norms. Simultaneously, advances in biotechnology, prosthetics, and human-machine integration are transforming our understanding of what it means to be human. The rapidly expanding role of AI in healthcare further highlights the need for anthropological perspectives that place human values and ethics at the centre of technological innovation.

Business, design, and innovation also present exciting opportunities for anthropologists. Design Anthropology integrates ethnographic methods into product and service development, enabling organisations to create more human-centred technologies and experiences. Business and Corporate Anthropology contribute valuable insights into organisational cultures, consumer behaviour, workplace dynamics, and global labour systems, including the rapidly evolving healthcare sector. The future of anthropology undoubtedly lies in greater collaboration with economists, engineers, designers, public health experts, and digital technologists. As artificial intelligence and app-based solutions increasingly shape everyday life, anthropologists have a crucial role in ensuring that innovation remains ethical, inclusive, and centred on human well-being.

The challenges before the discipline are considerable, but so are the opportunities. It is now our collective responsibility- as teachers, researchers, practitioners, and institutions- to introduce these emerging areas into our curricula and equip the next generation of anthropologists with the knowledge and skills required to engage with an ever-changing world. By embracing innovation while remaining grounded in its holistic and humanistic foundations, anthropology can continue to make meaningful contributions to scholarship, policy, and society. The future of the discipline is not merely about keeping pace with global developments; it is about shaping them with insight, empathy, and an unwavering commitment to understanding humanity in all its diversity.



Anthropology Beyond Algorithms

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

Artificial intelligence has entered anthropology much earlier than many people realise. Nearly three decades ago, when I was at the University of Kent at Canterbury, my colleague Professor Michael Fischer drew attention to the emerging relationship between computing and anthropology through his pioneering book *Applications in Computing for Social Anthropologists* (Routledge, 1994). At a time when computers were just beginning to influence academic research, the volume explored how digital technologies could assist anthropologists in organising, managing, and analysing ethnographic materials. Looking back, it is remarkable that many of the methodological possibilities explored at that time foreshadowed the profound transformation that artificial intelligence has since ushered into the discipline.

The relationship between anthropology and AI has since the publication of Fischer's volume expanded dramatically. One of the recent volumes, *Anthropology and AI*, edited by Lora Koycheva, Angela K. Vandenbroek, and Matt Artz (Routledge, 2026), reflects how central artificial intelligence has become to contemporary anthropological inquiry. Rather than treating AI simply as a technological innovation, the contributors examine it as a social and cultural phenomenon that is reshaping everyday life while simultaneously raising new methodological, ethical, and epistemological questions for anthropology.

We all know that the twenty-first century is witnessing a technological revolution of extraordinary proportions. Artificial intelligence now influences almost every sphere of human activity, from communication and education to healthcare, governance, and creative expression. Yet amid the enthusiasm surrounding these developments, one fundamental question often receives less attention than it deserves: what does it mean to be human when machines increasingly perform tasks once regarded as uniquely human? This question has always been central to anthropology since the inception of the discipline.

From its beginning anthropology has been concerned with understanding how people create meaning, organise social life, transmit cultural knowledge across generations, negotiate identities, and adapt to changing environments. Technology has always shaped human societies, but AI presents a challenge of an altogether different order because of its speed, scale, and reach. As intelligent systems become more deeply embedded in everyday life, anthropology becomes even more important, not because it competes with technology, but because it helps us understand its human consequences.

I was reminded of this phenomenon only a few months ago while attending a presentation in Delhi by a Lepcha colleague from Sikkim. She demonstrated an AI-based initiative designed to preserve traditional Lepcha children's stories through animated digital presentations.

The project was innovative and well-intentioned, offering exciting possibilities for documenting an endangered language and a declining oral tradition. Yet it also revealed the limitations of current AI systems. The stories were narrated using an artificial voice that consistently mispronounced Lepcha names, places, and expressions with a distinctly non-native accent.

The result was subtle but significant. A technology intended to safeguard cultural heritage had inadvertently altered some of the very linguistic and cultural nuances that give the tradition its authenticity. It was a telling reminder that preservation is not merely about recording words; it is equally about preserving voice, rhythm, pronunciation, and cultural context. This experience illustrates one of anthropology's enduring contributions to the contemporary debate on AI. Human beings cannot be reduced to datasets, algorithms, or statistical probabilities. Artificial intelligence excels at detecting patterns across enormous quantities of information, but human societies are shaped by far more than observable patterns. Memory, emotion, symbolism, history, morality, and lived experience all influence the ways people think and act. Culture cannot be fully quantified, nor can human experience be completely translated into computational models.

Anthropologists have long maintained that meaning is inseparable from context. The significance of a gesture, a ritual, or even a single word depends on the cultural world within which it is embedded. Clifford Geertz, in *The Interpretation of Cultures* (1973), described this as "thick description", arguing that cultural practices acquire meaning through multiple layers of interpretation. His celebrated analysis of the Balinese cockfight remains one of the clearest demonstrations that what may appear trivial to an

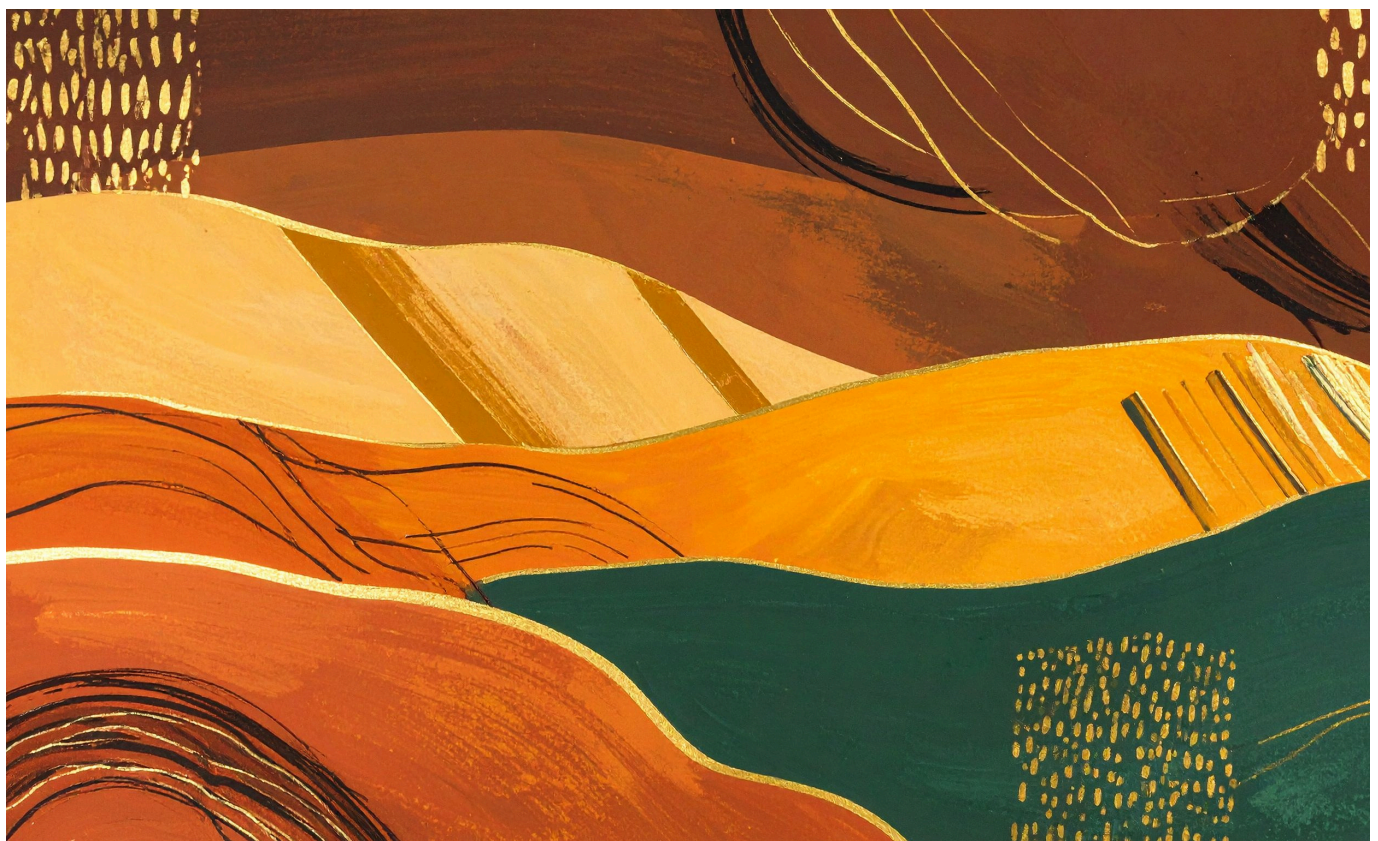


outsider often expresses profound cultural values for those who participate in it. Such layers of meaning cannot easily be captured by systems that rely primarily on statistical regularities and generalised patterns. Anthropology reminds us that genuine understanding requires immersion, interpretation, and empathy. These concerns become even more pressing when viewed against the backdrop of the digital age. Much of the world's technological infrastructure is built around a relatively small number of dominant languages and cultural traditions. Thousands of Indigenous and minority languages remain poorly represented in digital environments, placing them at risk of further marginalisation. As AI increasingly mediates communication, education, and access to knowledge, questions about whose voices are heard, whose knowledge is preserved, and whose cultural traditions are excluded assume profound importance.

The same critical perspective applies to algorithms themselves. Algorithms are often portrayed as objective and impartial, yet they are created, trained, and deployed within particular social, economic, and political contexts. Inevitably, they reflect the assumptions and biases embedded in the data from which they learn. As a consequence, technologies designed to improve efficiency may unintentionally reproduce or even amplify inequalities based on ethnicity, gender, language, class, or geography. Anthropology, with its longstanding concern for power, representation, and social justice, provides

valuable tools for recognising and questioning these hidden biases. Anthropology also encourages us to rethink the very idea of intelligence. Much of the current discourse treats intelligence primarily as the capacity to process information or solve problems efficiently. Anthropological research, however, suggests a far richer understanding. Human intelligence is fundamentally relational. It is expressed in storytelling, caregiving, ethical judgement, humour, imagination, artistic creativity, and the capacity to sustain meaningful social relationships. These are not merely cognitive abilities; they are deeply cultural accomplishments developed through participation in society. Machines may process information with extraordinary speed, but they do not experience kinship, empathy, moral responsibility, or belonging in the ways human beings do.

Artificial intelligence will undoubtedly continue to transform human societies in ways that we are only beginning to understand. Yet it cannot decide what values societies ought to uphold, what cultural traditions deserve preservation, or what kind of future humanity wishes to create. These are not technological questions; they are cultural and ethical ones. At a time when algorithms increasingly shape everyday life, anthropology reminds us that our greatest challenge is not simply to build more intelligent machines, but to deepen our understanding of ourselves. The future will depend not only on advances in artificial intelligence but also on our capacity to preserve the wisdom, diversity, and humanity that define us.



From Sacred Bath to the Chariot of Humanity: An Anthropological Understanding of Lord Jagannath's Journey



By Debjyoti Das

Every year, millions of devotees gather in Puri, Odisha, to witness one of the world's largest religious gatherings—the annual Rath Yatra of Lord Jagannath. To many, it is a grand religious festival marked by enormous wooden chariots, devotional songs, and overwhelming faith. Yet, for an anthropologist, the journey of Lord Jagannath from Snana Yatra (the ceremonial bath) to Bahuda Yatra (the return journey) represents much more than a religious procession. It is a living cultural institution that preserves centuries of indigenous traditions, social values, ritual symbolism, and the remarkable diversity of Indian civilization.

The annual cycle begins with Snana Yatra, celebrated on the full moon of the Hindu month of Jyeshtha. On this day, Lord Jagannath, along with his elder brother Balabhadra and sister Subhadra, is brought out of the sanctum and bathed with 108 pitchers of sacred water. Unlike many Hindu temples where deities remain inside the sanctum throughout the year, Jagannath is publicly displayed, allowing everyone to participate in the ritual. Anthropologically, this public visibility symbolizes inclusiveness, dissolving the barriers between the sacred and the ordinary.

Following the ceremonial bath, the deities are believed to develop a fever and remain hidden from public view for about fifteen days in a period known as Anasara. During this time, they are treated with traditional herbal medicines by temple physicians. From a biomedical perspective, gods do not become ill. However, anthropology teaches us that rituals often humanize divine beings, making them emotionally accessible to devotees. Jagannath laughs, travels, falls ill, recovers, and reunites with his family just as human beings do. This process strengthens emotional bonds between worshippers and the deity, transforming faith into lived experience rather than distant worship.

One of the most fascinating aspects of Jagannath worship is its deep connection with indigenous communities. Several scholars have argued that the origin of Jagannath lies in the worship traditions of the Savara (Sora) tribe of eastern India. According to popular tradition, the tribal chief Visvavasu worshipped a wooden deity known as Nilamadhava in the forest before the deity became associated with mainstream



By Dr. Subhrajyoti Das

Hindu traditions. Even today, members of the Daitapati servitor community, who trace their ancestry to these indigenous groups, perform many important rituals during Anasara and Nabakalebara. Their continued ritual authority demonstrates that tribal knowledge and cultural memory remain central to one of Hinduism's most celebrated religious traditions.

The Rath Yatra, celebrated on the second day of the bright fortnight of Ashadha, marks the public journey of the three siblings from the Jagannath Temple to the Gundicha Temple. Unlike most religious processions where devotees visit the deity, here the deity visits the people. Anthropologically, this reversal is profoundly significant. The divine leaves the temple and enters public space, symbolically making spirituality accessible to everyone irrespective of caste, class, gender, ethnicity, or nationality.

Equally remarkable is the ritual known as Chhera Pahanra, during which the Gajapati Maharaja of Puri ceremonially sweeps the chariots with a golden broom. Although he is the traditional king, he performs the role of a humble servant before the deity. This ritual challenges conventional ideas of hierarchy and power. From an anthropological perspective, it reinforces the principle that social authority derives from service rather than privilege. It is a powerful reminder that ritual can redefine political identity and promote social equality.

The three massive wooden chariots constructed every year further demonstrate the richness of India's traditional ecological knowledge. Thousands of artisans, carpenters, blacksmiths, painters, and textile workers collaborate using hereditary skills passed down through generations. Every measurement, colour, carving, and material follows established ritual prescriptions.



Jagannath Puri Temple

The annual reconstruction of the chariots illustrates how intangible cultural heritage survives through collective participation rather than written manuals alone. Knowledge is transmitted through observation, apprenticeship, memory, and practice.

During the stay at the Gundicha Temple, another charming ritual unfolds. Goddess Lakshmi, upset that Jagannath left without informing her, symbolically visits the temple in the festival of Hera Panchami. On the return journey, Jagannath offers her Rasagola before re-entering the temple during Niladri Bijē. These rituals portray divine relationships using familiar human emotions such as affection, misunderstanding, reconciliation, and forgiveness. Such narratives reduce the psychological distance between gods and humans, making religious beliefs socially meaningful and emotionally relatable.

From a broader anthropological perspective, the Jagannath tradition exemplifies how rituals strengthen community identity. The festival mobilizes priests, artisans, musicians, cooks, administrators, volunteers, pilgrims, and local residents into a single cultural enterprise. It transforms religious belief into collective action, reinforcing social solidarity across generations. Participation itself becomes an expression of cultural identity. For contemporary society, the Jagannath tradition also offers important lessons. In an age marked by rapid urbanization, technological dependence, and increasing social isolation, the festival reminds us of the value of community participation, respect for traditional knowledge, environmental sustainability through biodegradable materials, and

coexistence among diverse cultural traditions.

The annual rebuilding of the wooden chariots reflects the cyclical philosophy of renewal, while the Lord's temporary illness during Anasara teaches that rest and recovery are natural aspects of life.

Ultimately, the journey from Snana Yatra Bahuda Yatra is not merely the movement of three wooden idols. It is a symbolic journey through the history of Indian civilization itself—a journey that celebrates indigenous heritage, religious pluralism, craftsmanship, ecological wisdom, humility, family relationships, and social equality. For anthropologists, Lord Jagannath is not only a deity but also a cultural text through which one can understand how traditions evolve, identities are negotiated, and communities preserve their heritage across centuries.

In the rolling wheels of the Rath, one witnesses more than a festival; one witnesses the living anthropology of India—where diversity is not a slogan but a tradition continuously pulled forward by millions of hands, united in faith, culture, and shared humanity.

The greatest lesson of Jagannath is profoundly anthropological: humanity itself is a chariot moving through time. Our biological diversity provides the wheels, our cultural traditions provide the direction, and our collective cooperation becomes the force that moves civilization forward. In celebrating Lord Jagannath, we celebrate not only a deity but also the remarkable biological and cultural journey of humankind.



Janeu Sanskar: The birth of Brahmin



By Nimmi Jaiswal

To most of us in the world we take birth only once. This is a general understanding of birth but the cultural meaning behind birth varies in different part of the world in different cultures. Among the Brahmin a person especially a male is born twice. Once at their birth and once after their spiritual rebirth that is after Janeu Sanskar.

Janeu Sanskar is very significant ritual among the Brahmin community. Especially for males, as it marks an important transition phase in their lives. This is also known as the “Upnayan Sanskar” I visited Baima Nagoi in Bilaspur Chhattisgarh in March 2026 as a part of my graduation dissertation. This was based on the experience of the birth rituals, their significance and practiced among the Brahmin community of Nagoi.

The Janeu Sanskar (sacred thread ceremony) is performed for boys generally between the ages of 11 to 20 years. This ritual start with the boys getting their hair cut in the three circular pattern, which symbolize Brahma (lord who create the world and humans in Hinduism), Vishnu (the preserver and protector of the universe), and Mahesh (Shiva the destroyer or transformer).

The next step, in this ritual, proceeds with a knot which is made using turmeric and a sacred thread (mauli), which symbolize purity. It is said that just as the turmeric and the thread are tied together, the child should remain bound to a path of good and righteous deeds throughout life. The sacred thread with which the boy is invested on the holy occasion of Upanayanam, must be kept from association of any other object.

Along with the mauli the child is also given a coconut, which considered a sacred offering known as Shriphal.



This ceremony is performed either at the home or in temple. It is celebrated much like a wedding ceremony—there are rituals such as oil and turmeric application (tel haldi), on the individual who undergoes the process of transition. Chool matti (digging of soil by unmarried girls), devtala (giving invitations to all the gods and temple in villages), and other traditional practices. The only difference is that there is no bride involved.

The spiritual Rebirth:

After the Upnayanam the boy becomes a Dvija or a “twice born”. Additionally, purification of the ear is performed, and the boy is given a “Guru Mangtra”. Often, this mantra is the Gayatri Mantra, through it can also be another spiritual mantra. Gayatri Mantra when chanted with devotion takes the chanter to the knowledge of the “supreme truth” called the “Brahman”.

The Gayatri Mantra is prayer asking for divine guidance to inspire the intellect so that the person may know his real self or the "Atama". Another ritual is that of Biksha. Boys take Biksha from their family. In the olden days the boys or "Brahmachari" went out into the streets to beg for alms from various houses. The ritual is being done only symbolically in the present day. According to the people of Nagoi this process of imbibing the values of humanity and to quell the ego.

The Janeu Sanskar is not just a religious ritual; it is a beautiful journey of learning, discipline, and responsibility. It marks the beginning of a new phase in life where a child is guided toward knowledge, good values, and spiritual awareness. This sacred ceremony strengthens the bond between tradition and family while teaching respect for culture and elders. In today's modern world, the Janeu Sanskar continues to remind people of the importance of self-control, education, and moral living. It is a symbol of cultural identity and a meaningful step toward becoming a responsible and wise human being. Thus the ceremony opens for the young Brahmachari, a succession of gates, leading to the ultimate goal of human existence the realisation of God. The panayanam ceremony signifies the boy's entry into the Brahmacharya Ashrama.



Tirupati Gangamma: Protector, Healer and Goddess of Abundance



By V.S.Pravallika

Andhra Pradesh (AP) is abode to several Puranic Deity temples, such as the Pancharamas dedicated to Lord Shiva; the Tirumala temple, the Simhachalam temple exclusively to the Lord Vishnu avatars; the Arasavalli temple to the Sun god, etc. The state is also known for the worship of the Local deities, particularly the Grama Devathas (Village Goddesses). Tirupati, located in the southeastern part of AP, often synonymous to be the abode of Lord Sri Venkateswara, hosts one such local festival, the Gangamma Jatara. Jatara, are also known as Parasu, Tirunaalu, etc.,. It is a Telugu term derived from the word 'Yatara' (journey), refers to a congregation of people at a single place to celebrate festivals dedicated to the Grama Devata (Village Goddess) of that particular village.

Gangamma, revered throughout the Rayalaseema region of AP, is also believed to be the sister of Lord Venkateswara. The word Gangamma has its derivation from the name 'Ganga', the lifeline river of the northern parts of the Indian subcontinent. As water is the source of bountiful crops and the survival of other forms of life, the goddess has been named as such. According to the Lord Krishna's epic, it is believed that Yogamaya, the child secretly exchanged for the newborn Krishna, took rebirth as Ganga, with the Lord's blessings. While this connection with Hindu Mythology proves significant, her importance as a Grama Devatha of Tirupati is shaped by the local beliefs.

According to the Local Oral tradition, the Tirupati region was under the rule of Palegadu (Local Chieftain), who was known for oppressing and harassing young women. When he comes across Gangamma, a beautiful woman from Avilala village, he makes her a target of his unwanted advances. Gangamma then vowed to put an end to his tyranny within a week. Fearing her wrath, Palegadu hides from Gangamma. To lure him out from his hiding spot, she assumes different guises for 7 days. For the first 3 days, the Palegadu remained concealed. On the 4th day, dressed up as Dora (Lord), she searches the streets. As the Palegadu is in the service of Dora (Lord), he comes out and falls directly into the clutches of Gangamma, who beheads him, for the Lokakalyanam (Well-being of the people). The next day, Gangamma consoles the wife of Palegadu in Mathangi Vesham. (Reddy, 1995)



Gangamma's Moolavirat in the Sanctum sanctorum

The Gangamma Jatara, also known as Tattaiahgunta Gangamma Jatara, is celebrated annually in the month of May. Men beat the Dappu (A Percussion Instrument) while making Chatimpu, the official announcement of jatara, notifying the entire town that the festival has begun. As she is believed to be the sister of Lord Venkateswara, she is ceremonially offered a Gampa with Pattu- Vastram, pasupu & Kumkum as a Sare (A gift) by the TTD during the Jatara. Post Chatimpu, residents refrain from travelling outside the town. The Pilgrims adorn the following guises for the next 7 days, as was done by Gangamma, in the sequence mentioned below (Reddy, 1995):

Day 1: Bairagi Vesham- The Devotees smear the Sacred Ash (Vibudhi) or extract from NamamKommu (A root) on their bodies, and a Garland made with Rella Kaya (Fruit) around their neck.

Day 2: Banda Vesham- Kumkum paste is applied to the body; While Woman drape a white saree and ornaments; Men wear pyjamas with a red head-gear.

Day 3 : Thoti Vesham- The bodies are covered with Charcoal paste, and neem leaves garlands are worn by the devotees.

Day 4: Dora Vesham- Chandanam (Sandal Wood paste) is smeared. This day marks the death of Palegadu.

Day 5: Mathangi Vesham- Devotees drape a White checked saree/ Yellow saree, and a yellow cloth is braided and knotted just like hair. As Mathangi is believed to possess 1000 eyes, devotees paint their bodies with black and red dots.

Day 6: Sunnapu Kondalu- Devotees anoint their bodies with white paste and charcoal, while their foreheads are smeared with Pasupu. They carry a pot on their heads known as Veyyi Kalla Duta. And after circumambulating the temple 3 times, they leave the pot in the temple premises and go for the Darshan.

Day 7: Sapparalu (Special Gopuram structure made with Bamboo) is placed on the heads of devotees. Pongal and Saree are offered to the goddess. While Ragi Ambali (A Dish made with Finger Millet, Rice, Curd) is distributed to the devotees.

A clay model of the Gangamma in her Viswaroopam is placed in front of the Sanctum Sanctorum. Post midnight, her left cheek is removed, known as Chempa Tholagimpu, later the clay is distributed among devotees, which is believed to possess medicinal and healing properties. While some devotees consume the clay by mixing it with water, the rest place the mixture in their 'Puja' rooms. This 200- year-old festival has been marked by the arrival of rainfall within the



Gangamma Viswaroopam Clay Model

festival's week, strengthening a strong belief in Gangamma among the residents of Tirupati City. While the festival continues to hold a significant place in the hearts and minds of the Tirupati residents, it has undergone noticeable changes in recent times. For Instance, the women from the Tamil Mudaliar caste, who were responsible for conducting temple rituals, were replaced by the Brahmanical priests in 1993. These priests, who have undergone training at Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanam's (TTD) Veda Pathashala, introduced daily, weekly and annual ritualistic practices such as Homam, recitation of Sanskrit shlokas similar to Puranic deities (Flueckiger, 2013). In addition to that, architectural changes were introduced from the mid-1990s by the Tataiahgunta Devasthanam Board, like Vimanam, Gopuram, etc., have altered the perception about the deity being housed within the temple.

Regardless of these changes, the sanctity of the folk festival and deep devotion towards the Goddess Gangamma ensured its sustenance and relevance among the residents of Tirupati.

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Raja Parba: Gender, Ecology, and Cultural Memory in Odisha's Festival of Menstruation and Earth's Rejuvenation.



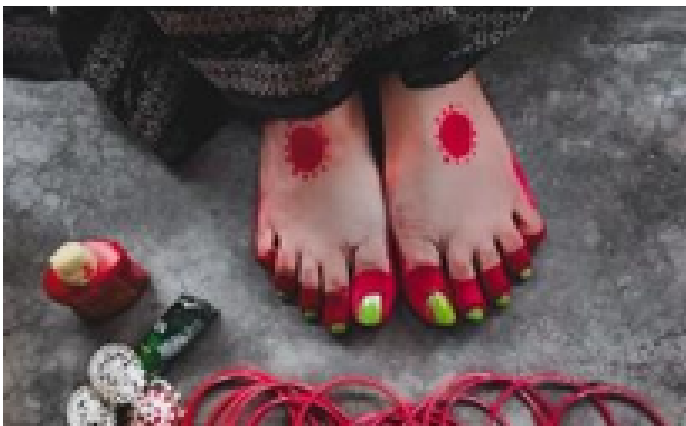
By Swetalina Priyadarshini

The agrarian festival of Raja Parba, celebrated across Odisha, India, in mid-June, represents a profound intersection of cultural mythology, ecological wisdom, and societal paradigms. Marking the transition from the scorching summer to the life-giving monsoon, the festival is anchored in the belief that Mother Earth (Bhudevi) undergoes a three-day menstrual cycle, requiring absolute rest before crop sowing. During this period, agricultural work and women's domestic labour are entirely suspended. This report examines Raja Parba through anthropological, ecological, and societal lenses, unpacking an ancient tradition that reveres what modern society often stigmatizes.

Anthropological Perspective: Cultural and Mythological Foundations

Raja Parba's roots lie deeply in the Shākta-Hindu tradition, which sacralizes the female body as a direct extension of the cosmos. The term Raja derives from the Sanskrit *rajas* (menstruation or passion), linking the biological realities of women to the natural environment. Regional mythology dictates that Bhudevi, the divine consort of Lord Jagannath, menstruates during the first three days of the solar month of Mithuna. To disturb the earth during this regenerative, highly potent state is believed to invite cosmic chaos and agricultural ruin.

The festival follows a four-day ritual trajectory mirroring a human menstrual cycle. It begins with Sajabaja (a day of preparation), followed by Pahili Raja (commencement and purificatory bathing) and Mithuna Sankranti (the central day of festivity and monsoon arrival). The third day, Basi Raja, continues the period of rest, culminating in Vasumati Snana, the ceremonial purification bath of the Earth, symbolized by washing a household grinding stone with turmeric and vermillion.



Source: Raja Sajabaja, Google Images.

During Raja Parba, customary prohibitions are enforced to permit women to rest. Women and girls are explicitly forbidden from cooking, sweeping, cutting, or engaging in heavy domestic labor. To avoid harming the Earth, participants refrain from walking barefoot and sometimes craft soft slippers from banana bark. Freed from domestic burdens, women reclaim public spaces, dressing in vibrant new clothes and decorating their feet with *alta* (red dye).

The visual centerpiece of the festival is the Raja Doli (rope swings), where women sing impromptu folk songs like "Banaste Dakila Gaja," celebrating female solidarity and the onset of the rains. Culinary traditions also reflect this pause, featuring slow-cooked delicacies like Poda Pitha, a rice-and-jaggery cake baked overnight over dying embers. Similar indigenous veneration of the Earth's menses exist elsewhere in the subcontinent, such as the Ambubachi Mela in Assam and the Keddaso festival in Karnataka.



Source: Poda Pitha, Google Images.



Source: Pan, Self Clicked by Swetalina.

Ecological Perspective: Agrarian Rhythms and Soil Rejuvenation

Beyond mythology, Raja Parba operates as an advanced ecological strategy tailored to the Indian monsoon. By enforcing a strict three-day ban on agricultural activities—preventing any ploughing, digging, or sowing—the agrarian society unconsciously practices sophisticated soil conservation.

This ecological necessity is explained by the "Birch effect." Discovered in the 1950s by H.F. Birch, this phenomenon describes the massive pulse of carbon dioxide respiration and nitrogen mineralization that occurs when intensely dry soils are rapidly rewetted by precipitation. During the pre-monsoon summer, soil microbes suffer extreme osmotic stress, accumulating intracellular solutes to survive the drought. When the first monsoon rains arrive, the sudden rewetting causes microbes to rapidly release these solutes and begin mineralizing accumulated dead biomass. This explosive metabolic activity effectively self-fertilizes the soil, creating a massive flush of highly bioavailable inorganic nitrogen.

Tilling the soil precisely during this fragile 72-hour window would be ecologically disastrous. Mechanical disturbance would destroy newly forming soil aggregates, exacerbating the loss of soil carbon and rendering the newly mineralized topsoil highly vulnerable to severe water erosion from heavy monsoon raindrops. The cultural mandate to grant the Earth "rest" ensures that the soil microbiome undergoes this violent biogeochemical transition undisturbed, leaving the land fertile, stable, and ready for subsequent Kharif crop sowing.

This reality counters Western biomedical narratives that often describe human menstruation through metaphors of failure or "disintegration," a bias noted by anthropologist Emily Martin. Instead, the Odia perspective embraces a multi-species paradigm where both the Earth's soil transition and human menstruation are recognized as powerful, essential mechanisms of regeneration.



Source: Google Images.

Societal Perspective: Menstrual Taboos and Cultural Revolution

Despite Raja Parba's profound reverence for the menstruating Earth, it serves as a stark mirror reflecting modern India's contradictions regarding female biology. In a nation where menstruation is often shrouded in shame, the festival emerges as a radical counter-narrative.

A deep hypocrisy persists in many communities: the same society that reveres female goddesses frequently ostracizes living menstruating women. Menstruating women are often deemed impure (*ashaucha*), barred from kitchens and temples, and subjected to physical segregation. This stigma leads to severe period poverty. Data indicates that approximately 71% of girls in India lack knowledge about menstruation before menarche, and nearly 30% of girls in rural northern India drop out of school once their periods begin. While the National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5) shows improvements—with Odisha reporting an 81.5% overall usage of hygienic menstrual protection—significant urban-rural disparities remain, and many rural women still rely on unhygienic cloth alternatives. Even in Odisha, many observe Raja Parba purely as an agricultural holiday without embracing its feminist core, continuing to impose taboos on women.

This systemic stigma is largely a product of historical shifts. While indigenous traditions viewed menstrual blood as an auspicious life force, the imposition of Victorian morality during British colonialism fundamentally pathologized the female body. The British imperial project, armed with strict obscenity laws, viewed indigenous celebrations of fertility as barbaric. When this puritanical gaze intersected with orthodox Brahmanical purity codes, the resulting dominant narrative erased the sacred meanings of menstruation, reducing it to a source of contamination.

Raja Parba offers a blueprint for a cultural revolution. By utilizing the vernacular and mythological framework of a bleeding Earth, educators and health advocates can initiate dialogues about menstrual biology without inducing cultural friction. The festival inherently challenges the narrative of impurity, demonstrating that the female body is not toxic, but divine.

Conclusion

Raja Parba is far more than a regional agrarian holiday; it is an integrated socio-ecological system. Anthropologically, it preserves a relational ontology that unites women and the Earth in their divine capacity for regeneration. Ecologically, it demonstrates a profound understanding of soil biogeochemistry, protecting the earth during the critical "Birch effect" mineralization phase. Societally, it stands in bold defiance of the enduring legacies of Victorian morality and widespread period poverty. By celebrating Raja Parba, society is offered an opportunity to dismantle the taboos surrounding menstruation and reclaim the female body, proving that to honor the Earth is to honor the women who walk upon it.

Prof. Dr. Shree Bhagwan Roy



Interview by Saba Farhin

Prof. Dr. Shree Bhagwan Roy (Prof. S. B. Roy) is a distinguished Indian ecological anthropologist, trainer, and institutional leader renowned for his groundbreaking work in applied anthropology and sustainable tribal development. He is the Founder Chairman of the Indian Institute of Bio-social Research and Development (IBRAD), Kolkata - a Centre of Excellence recognized by the Ministry of Tribal Affairs, Government of India.

He completed his M.Sc. in Anthropology and Biological Science from the University of Calcutta, followed by a Ph.D. in Sociology, and later studied Social Forestry at the East-West Centre, University of Hawaii. He spent nearly 20 years as a scientist at the Anthropological Survey of India, and later served as a professor at the Vinod Gupta School of Management (VGSOM), IIT Kharagpur, where he led research on Joint Forest Management. His global exposure includes visiting professorships at the University of Manchester, University of Wales, University of Helsinki, and Gadjah Mada University, Indonesia.

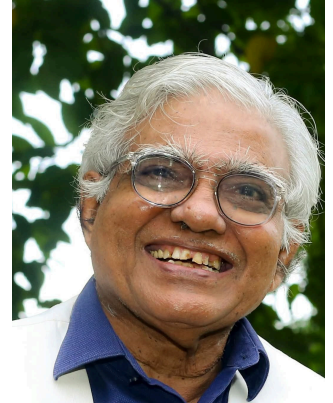
For over four decades, Prof. Roy has pioneered socio-ecological approaches integrating Indigenous knowledge, tribal culture, biodiversity conservation, climate-resilient livelihoods, and One Health. He pioneered digital ethnography methodologies for sustainable tribal development, and has advised national institutions on tribal development, biodiversity, and sustainable natural resource management, including consultancies for the DFID British High Commission and World Bank forestry projects. His current work focuses on community-based climate resilience, Urban Heat Island mitigation, and participatory frameworks linking science with traditional knowledge.

He received a Lifetime Achievement Award from the United Indian Anthropology Forum (UIAF) and KISS Deemed to be University at the World Anthropology Congress (WAC) 2023, and is an elected Fellow of the Society for Applied Anthropology (SfAA), USA, and the West Bengal Academy of Science and Technology.

What first drew you to anthropology, and was there a defining moment early on that shaped your career?

My journey into anthropology was almost accidental, but looking back, I feel it was one of the best

decisions of my life. After passing my Pre-University Examination in 1962, I had to choose a three-year degree course. I secured admission to Bangabasi College, Kolkata. While exploring the available subjects, I came across Anthropology. What attracted me immediately was that it was not confined to classroom teaching. It



offered opportunities for extensive fieldwork, direct interaction with people, and the chance to understand human life in its natural setting. At that time, I had a strong desire to visit the Andaman Islands, which fascinated me because of their unique tribal communities and natural environment. When I realised that anthropology could provide such opportunities, I decided to choose it as my subject. That single decision shaped my entire professional life.

After completing my B.Sc. with Anthropology, I joined the Department of Anthropology at the University of Calcutta for my M.Sc. Soon after completing my postgraduate studies, I was fortunate to be selected by the Anthropological Survey of India. My first major posting took me to the Andaman Islands—the very place I had dreamed of visiting as a student. Between 1973 and 1975, I conducted an intensive study of the Karen community, a Burmese tribe that had been brought to the Andaman Islands during 1920-22 to work in the Forest Department. I studied nearly 100 Karen families to understand the processes of biological, social and cultural change taking place within the community. This research became the basis of my PhD dissertation, Bio-Social Change among the Karens of the Andaman Islands. Those years of living and working closely with tribal communities transformed my understanding of development. I realised that indigenous knowledge, social institutions, cultural values and ecological relationships are deeply interconnected. Communities survive not merely because of economic resources but because of coherent socio-ecological systems that have evolved over generations. This insight has guided my work throughout my career. After several years in research and teaching, I founded the Indian Institute of Bio-Social Research and Development (IBRAD) in 1985 to translate anthropological knowledge into practical action. Through IBRAD, I have worked on tribal

development, biodiversity conservation, climate resilience, Indigenous Knowledge systems, One Health, Digital Ethnography and community-based sustainable livelihoods. Today, more than five decades after my first fieldwork in the Andaman Islands, my work has evolved into developing socio-ecological approaches to sustainable development. It gives me immense satisfaction that many of the ideas we began exploring in the early 1970s—particularly the integration of ecology, culture, community institutions and human well-being—have now become central themes in global discussions on climate change, sustainable development and One Health. What began as a young student's curiosity to visit the Andaman Islands has become a lifelong journey of learning from communities and applying anthropology to solve real-world problems.

Looking back over four decades, which contribution do you consider most significant, and why?

Looking back over more than four decades of research, teaching and field practice, I believe my most significant contribution has been promoting a holistic, systems-based understanding of human problems and translating that understanding into practical action. Throughout my career, I have consistently argued that social, economic, cultural and environmental issues cannot be understood or solved in isolation. They are interconnected parts of a larger socio-ecological system. This thinking has gradually evolved into what I now describe as the Socio-Ecological Approach to Climate-Resilient Sustainable Development. The approach recognises that human well-being depends on the dynamic relationships among people, their culture, social institutions, natural resources, biodiversity, livelihoods and governance systems. Sustainable development is therefore not simply about introducing new technologies or implementing isolated projects; it is about strengthening the relationships that make communities resilient.

Another contribution that I value greatly is promoting Participatory Action Research as the foundation of community development. I have always believed that researchers should not merely diagnose problems and prescribe solutions from outside. Communities themselves possess valuable knowledge, experience and the capacity to analyse their own situations. The role of the anthropologist is to facilitate this process by helping people identify issues, analyse their causes, explore alternatives and work collectively towards solutions. When communities become active participants rather than passive beneficiaries, development becomes more sustainable and more meaningful. Equally important is the principle of building partnerships between communities and

institutions. Development cannot succeed through community efforts alone, nor can government programmes achieve lasting results without community ownership. Effective development requires a bilateral matching of institutions—bringing together local communities, government departments, academic institutions, civil society organisations and technical experts. Each has distinct strengths, and meaningful progress occurs when these strengths are integrated around shared objectives.

Over the years, I have also learned that anthropological research must remain closely aligned with public policy. Research should not end with publications or academic discussions. It should generate evidence that informs policy, strengthens public programmes and improves implementation on the ground. Public functionaries play a crucial role in translating knowledge into action, and anthropologists should work with them as partners rather than remaining detached observers. The Indian Institute of Bio-Social Research and Development (IBRAD), which I founded in 1985, has been my laboratory for putting these ideas into practice. Whether working on tribal development, biodiversity conservation, climate resilience, Indigenous Knowledge, One Health or urban climate challenges, the underlying philosophy has remained the same: understand the whole system, involve communities as equal partners, build institutional collaboration and transform research into action. I have made any lasting contribution, it is not a single project or publication. It is demonstrating that anthropology can move beyond the study of people to become a science of partnership, participation and socio-ecological transformation for sustainable development.

Where do you see Indian anthropology heading in the next decade, especially amid challenges like climate change and digitalization?

Indian anthropology is entering a new era. It must move beyond documenting communities to actively contributing to solutions for national and global challenges. Climate change, biodiversity loss, rapid urbanisation, migration and digital transformation require anthropologists to adopt socio-ecological and systems approaches. Indigenous Knowledge should be scientifically validated and integrated with contemporary science to strengthen climate resilience, sustainable livelihoods and One Health. At the same time, digital technologies, artificial intelligence, GIS and Digital Ethnography will transform field research and policy planning. The future of Indian anthropology lies in interdisciplinary, action-oriented research that directly benefits communities and informs public policy.

What advice would you give young anthropologists building a career in applied, community-based work?

My advice to young anthropologists is simple: do not remain only an observer of society—become a facilitator of positive change. Anthropology has always been strongest when it combines rigorous research with practical action. The tradition of Action Anthropology advocated by Sol Tax and the participatory approaches developed by Robert Chambers remind us that communities are not merely subjects of research; they are equal partners in creating knowledge and solutions. Learn to think beyond disciplinary boundaries. Today's challenges—climate change, public health, biodiversity conservation, migration and sustainable livelihoods—cannot be addressed by anthropology alone. They require transdisciplinary collaboration among anthropologists, ecologists, health professionals, engineers, economists, planners and public administrators.

Throughout my own work, I have found that lasting development begins by helping communities understand their own socio-ecological systems, identify problems collectively and participate in designing solutions. This is the essence of Participatory Action Research. Never impose solutions from outside. Listen carefully, respect Indigenous Knowledge, and combine it with appropriate scientific methods. Finally, remember that good anthropology should influence public policy as well as academic debate. Work closely with government institutions, civil society and local communities. When research becomes action and communities become partners, anthropology fulfils its highest purpose—improving human well-being while strengthening the resilience of both society and nature.

Anthropology cannot grow in isolation. No discipline can flourish unless it collaborates with other disciplines. Today's problems require anthropologists to work with ecologists, health professionals, engineers, economists, planners and policy-makers. Equally important is understanding the changing priorities of governments, funding agencies and philanthropic organisations. Good ideas need financial support to become action. Keep yourself informed about emerging national and global priorities, align your research with real societal needs, and develop proposals that demonstrate measurable outcomes. Be scientifically rigorous, socially relevant and institutionally connected. That is how anthropology can make a lasting contribution to society.



Returning to a World Once Familiar: Reflections on Fieldwork, Memory and Positionality

By Dr Rishma Basumatary

During the summer of 2021, I conducted ethnographic fieldwork in Sundrihghora, a handloom village in the Kokrajhar district of Assam. Like many Bodo villages, Sundrihghora is situated within a landscape where ecological surroundings and social life are deeply intertwined. Lush paddy fields stretch across the village, bamboo groves line pathways and homesteads and streams flow through the settlement. Household gardens filled with seasonal vegetables and fruit trees contribute to everyday subsistence. Almost every household possesses a loom, making weaving a visible and enduring feature of village life. The rhythmic sounds of weaving, the movement of people between households and the seasonal cycles of agricultural activity together shape the everyday rhythms of the community.



Figure 1: Agricultural activities (Fieldwork, 2021)



Figure 2: Village life, traditional fishing in a village stream (Fieldwork, 2021)

Although, I entered the field as a member of the broader Bodo community, the research experience revealed the complexities of conducting ethnography "at home," demonstrating that cultural proximity does not necessarily translate into unmediated understanding. While cultural familiarity certainly facilitated entry into the field, my experiences demonstrated that belonging is neither fixed nor unproblematic. Rather, it is continually negotiated through social interactions, life histories, and changing relationships to place.

Having grown up in a rural environment characterised by agriculture, domestic labour, and the presence of handloom weaving, I possessed a degree of familiarity with the social world under study. However, years spent away from village life due to formal education and higher studies had gradually altered my relationship with this environment. The field therefore represented both a familiar and unfamiliar space. It was familiar because of shared language, cultural practices and collective histories; yet it was also unfamiliar because I no longer occupied the same social position as many of the individuals whose lives and experiences formed the focus of my research.

This tension between familiarity and distance shaped my engagement with the field in significant ways. Many practices that had once appeared ordinary during childhood acquired new meanings when encountered through ethnographic observation. Activities that had previously been taken for granted emerged as important sites through which social relations, cultural values and community identities were reproduced. In this sense, fieldwork became more than a process of collecting empirical data. It became an opportunity to critically examine the assumptions embedded in my own cultural knowledge and to reflect upon the ways in which familiarity can simultaneously illuminate and obscure ethnographic understanding.

The six months of fieldwork unfolded as a process of both relearning and recognition. Through conversations with weavers, participation in everyday activities and sustained observation of village life, I became increasingly aware of the distinction between cultural familiarity and experiential knowledge. Although weaving had always been present in my childhood environment, my engagement with it had largely been that of an observer. I was familiar with the presence of looms in household courtyards, the textiles produced by women, and the cultural significance attached to weaving. Yet I had little understanding of the labour, discipline, technical expertise, and social commitments required to sustain the practice across generations.



Figure 3. Traditional loom (Fieldwork, 2021)

Furthermore, fieldwork revealed weaving to be far more than a cultural tradition or an economic activity. It emerged as a complex social practice through which gendered responsibilities, intergenerational knowledge, kinship relations and cultural identities were continually negotiated. Conversations with weavers highlighted the challenges involved in maintaining the craft amid changing economic conditions, shifting aspirations and transformations in rural life. These encounters challenged romanticised understandings of tradition and directed attention towards the everyday labour that sustains cultural continuity.



Figure 4. The labour of preparation, many hands behind a single weave (Fieldwork, 2021)

One practice that particularly illuminated the social dimensions of weaving was *si thwrnai* (warping) *saori*, a form of reciprocal labour exchange associated with the preparation of warp yarn. The process required collective effort and women from neighbouring households often gathered to assist one another in untangling yarn, arranging threads, and preparing the loom.

These gatherings were simultaneously productive and social. While working, women exchanged stories, discussed family matters, shared local news and reflected upon changes occurring within the village.

From an anthropological perspective, *si thwrnai saori* functioned as more than a practical arrangement for completing labour-intensive tasks. It constituted an important mechanism through which reciprocity, cooperation, and social cohesion were maintained. The practice created opportunities for the circulation of knowledge, the strengthening of interpersonal relationships, and the reproduction of community ties. Labour and sociality were not separate domains but mutually constitutive aspects of everyday life. Through such collective activities, weaving became embedded within broader networks of kinship, obligation, and mutual support.

Observing these gatherings also prompted reflections on broader transformations in village life. Participants frequently spoke of earlier periods when communal labour exchanges occupied a more central place within everyday social relations. Before the widespread adoption of mobile phones and digital communication technologies, such occasions served as important spaces for interaction and information exchange. While many of these practices continue today, their social significance has been reshaped by changing patterns of communication, mobility, and economic activity.

The fieldwork experience ultimately underscored the fluid and relational nature of insider-outsider positionality. My shared cultural background facilitated access to participants and enabled a deeper appreciation of the meanings attached to weaving and village life. Yet temporal, educational and experiential distance also positioned me as an observer who was no longer fully embedded within the everyday realities of the community. Rather than viewing these positions as mutually exclusive, fieldwork revealed them to be interconnected and situationally produced.



Figure 6. Oldest respondent (Fieldwork, 2021)

This liminal position proved analytically productive. It enabled a balance between cultural intimacy and critical distance, allowing me to engage empathetically with participants while remaining attentive to processes of social change and cultural transformation. The field thus emerged not only as a site for studying handloom weaving but also as a space for interrogating questions of memory, belonging, and knowledge production. In this sense, ethnographic fieldwork became a reflexive process through which I sought to understand both the community under study and my own evolving relationship to it.



Figure 5. *si thwrnai saori* (Fieldwork, 2021)

The Awe @ Aihole



by Vaishnavi Y Nayak



Photo 1. Horseshoe-Shaped Durga temple at Aihole

On the banks of the picturesque Malaprabha River (Bagalkot district), sits the iconic village of Aihole, which hosts the architectural marvel of the early Chalukyan dynasty. My very first stop on this trip was at the Durga temple, and all I could do was stand in awe at the horseshoe-shaped temple with a missing shikhara. Well, it seems it isn't even a Durga temple, initially dedicated to Surya and Vishnu; the misnomer is because the temple stands in the ruins of "Durg"(fort). The innards of this temple have many sculptures like Lord Vishnu's Varaha avatar and Goddess Durga, as seen below. It's like the whole story of Aihole is summed up in these stone sculptures.



Photo 2. Varaha Avatar



Photo 3. Durga Sculpture



Photo 4. Vishnu Sculpture

Next stop at the Lad Khan temple - originally a Shiva temple - named after the person who resided there, has its own story to tell. It stood at the confluence of Shaivism (Shiva ling), Vaishnavism (Vishnu sculpture) and Shaktism.



Photo 5. An ASI placard detailing the LadKhan temple at Aihole

One of the most beautiful sculptures is that of the Garuda - in a squat position holding the naga in both hands - at the door of the temple. Both these temples have become massive tourism hotspots, especially for student excursions.



Photo 6. Garuda holding the Naga at the door of the LadKhan temple



Photo 7. Students on an excursion in Aihole



Photo. 8 UNESCO temple complex at Pattadkal

Next, after about a 10 km journey, I reached Pattadakal, a UNESCO World Heritage site. A collection of different temples with different architectural styles, where some stand as incomplete experiments, some as models for other temples and some are dedicated to gods. During the Chalukyan era, the site acted as a coronation stage for different kings. The site has nearly 10 temples - 9 dedicated to Hinduism and 1 to Jainism - surrounded by an even larger number of smaller shrines.



Photo. 9(a,b) Ruins of Pattadkal (due to weathering, erosion)

The complex shows a transition in the belief of the Chalukyan kings from Vaishnavism to Shaivism as temples dedicated to both the deities in different styles-Nagara(4), Dravida(4), fusion of both in the Papanatha temple- are present here. The largest in the complex is the Virupaksha temple dedicated to lord Shiva. The Jain temple was constructed at a later point during the rule of the Rastrakutas. Despite being subjected to erosion and other phenomena, the temples of Aihole and Pattadakal are well etched in the chapters of Indian architectural autobiography.





Photo 10. Dravidian-Style temple



Photo 13. Carved door entrances



Photo 12. A carved panel at Virupaksha temple



Photo 14. Depiction of Purusha-Prakruthi Dichotomy

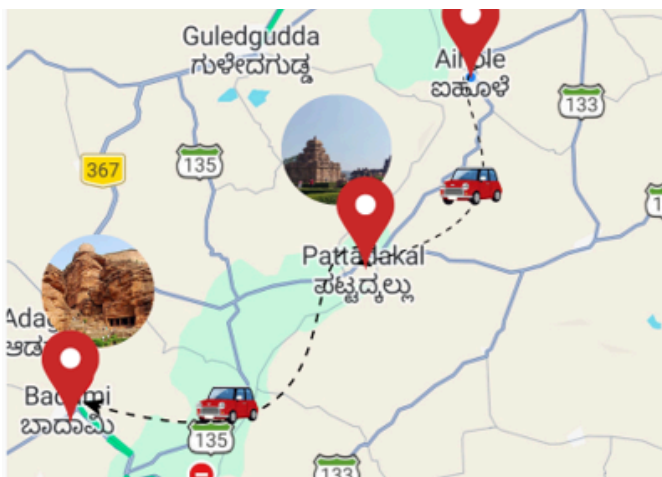
Photo 15. (a,b,c,d) Carved pillars in different temples at Pattadakal

The temples have stretches of endless, intricate carvings on the stone canvas. It's like every sculpture, carving has its own story to tell, and why not? Time has not erased these carvings; it has become part of them. What historian Cathleen Cummings describes as the "Purusha Prakruthi dichotomy" can be seen in this complex. It's truly as UNESCO describes it, "the apogee of an eclectic art which, in the 7th and 8th centuries, achieved a harmonious blend of architectural forms from the north and south of India".



Photo 16. Chalukyan Sculptural Trinity on G-Maps

Only a short distance separates Aihole, Pattadakal and Badami, yet centuries of architectural refinement lie between them. The sites of Aihole and Pattadakal, along with Badami (which I unfortunately couldn't visit), form a "Sculptural Trinity" (if I may call it so). Hopefully, my next journey allows me to explore such other places. What started as experiments stands today as Masterpieces of the 6th-7th-8th centuries, embodying geometry, sacredness and philosophy.



ADIVASI



Reviewed by: Khumo Makunyana

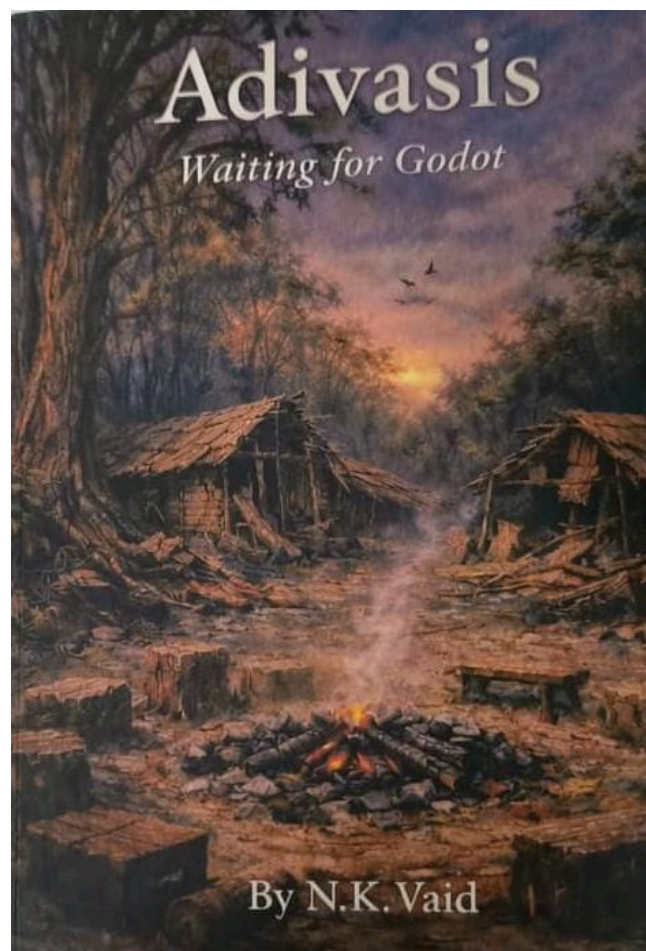
Book: Adivasis: Waiting for Godot by Naresh Kumar Vaid
Antim Publications, 2026. 999 INR. Non-Fiction. Foreword
by Prof. A. B. Ota (Retd. IAS)

From an anthropological perspective, Naresh Kumar Vaid's *Adivasis: Waiting for Godot* reads less as conventional ethnography and more as an act of "action anthropology" a committed, reflexive archive of India's unfinished project of tribal development. Vaid, self-styled "Academic Nomad" and trained anthropologist with fieldwork among the Bhotiya, Raji, Birhor, Pahadi Korba, and Saharia, compiles here the transcripts of over forty video commentaries originally delivered as podcasts. The result is a hybrid text that deliberately blurs journalism, public anthropology, and advocacy.

The title's invocation of Beckett is not merely literary flourish. For Vaid, 'Godot' signifies "the one who never arrives": the promised state. His central ethnographic insight is that Adivasi communities inhabit a protracted temporality of waiting for justice, for land rights, for meaningful implementation of the Constitution's protective provisions. This frames the book's core intervention. Rather than produce another village study, Vaid turns the anthropological gaze upward and outward, interrogating the state apparatus itself as a cultural domain.

Methodologically, the text departs from participant-observation in favor of what might be called "media archaeology." Vaid notes in the Preface that the book collates news transcripts, borrowed scripts, and his own commentary, italicizing source material to distinguish it from analysis. While he acknowledges the "paradigm is very limited" due to reliance on print media, this limitation becomes data. The gaps, distortions, and selective narratives of mainstream reporting emerge as ethnographic artifacts, revealing how Adivasi realities are constructed for public consumption. The inclusion of PVTGs, denotified tribes, and the Great Andamanese, Shompen, and Sentinelese underscores his key assertion: tribal India is not monolithic but "diverse, fragile, and often invisible."

The foreword by Prof. A. B. Ota, Senior Advisor UNICEF, situates the work at the intersection of "history and modernity, policy and practice, rights and resources." The book's thematic sweep is indeed expansive. Vaid navigates debates on reservation policy and sub-categorisation, critiques the misuse of statistics in welfare evaluation, and



examines structural instruments like the Forest Rights Act and the National Commission for Scheduled Tribes.

His anthropological training surfaces in four fault lines he identifies: Policy Practice Gap which is how progressive legislation collides with bureaucratic inertia and weak political will on the ground. Secondly, Data Deficits on how Statistics are deployed selectively, obscuring both achievements and failures. Thirdly, Development without Consent, this is inclusive of mining, infrastructure, and conservation proceed without meaningful tribal participation, reviving the question: "Who decides development?". Lastly, Institutional Weakness in this case, the grievance redressal bodies lack autonomy or authority.

What makes this text valuable to anthropology is its refusal of detachment. Vaid practices what B.K. Roy Burman called "the promoter of Anthropology",

using disciplinary knowledge for public reasoning. The book is a “lived archive of observation, interrogation, and advocacy,” as Ota notes, drawn from four decades of engagement across administration, policy dialogue, and field realities. The work’s limitations are its strengths. It does not claim ethnographic thickness or theoretical novelty. Instead, it offers a curated, critical digest for students, activists, and policymakers who lack time to assemble scattered discourses on ‘PVTGs’,

‘Nomadic Tribes’, and ‘Reservation’. For the anthropologist, it is a reminder that our field’s responsibility extends beyond the village to the newsroom, the policy memo, and the YouTube algorithm where Adivasi futures are increasingly debated. The book’s density may deter casual readers, as Vaid himself admits. But for those “who feel concerned about the issues raised,”. Waiting for Godot is not a conclusion. It is an invitation to witness the wait, and to ask why Godot has not arrived.



Reclaiming the Power of Being Human: Reflections on 'Why Anthropology Matters More Than Ever' by Prof. Kamal K Misra



Annabel Cabezas Pacheco

In his article titled 'Why Anthropology Matters More Than Ever: Knowing Others, Understanding Ourselves', chief editor Prof. Kamal K. Misra offered us a reflective approach to the ways in which anthropology could shed light on today's challenges and our understanding of them. In a highly detailed detour through its contributions, Prof. Kamal K. Misra highlighted how the discipline's subfields offer tools to counter racism, interpret environmental change, preserve endangered languages, and foster cultural understanding. Ultimately, he claimed, anthropology's value lies in its ability to illuminate human diversity while cultivating empathy and critical reflection.

As I came to read this article and approach it critically, I could not help but ask myself a follow up question: in a time when our status and categorization as a discipline is uncertain, what is it that threatens our ability to make claims about people and their particularities?

As Alfred L. Kroeber affirmed, '*Anthropology is the most humanistic of the sciences and the most scientific of the humanities.*' Although this statement (and subsequent bi-categorisation of our discipline) has a long history behind it, it is currently materialised in ways that allow us to apprehend such a disciplinary reality. As (social) anthropologists, we rely on the scientific method to study social realities. However, we do so under the cover of an admitted 'inevitable' subjectivity that is inherent to the ethnographic method. Moreover, we present our findings in ways that are rather unfamiliar to other scientists: by resorting to narration – a characteristic that has led ethnography to become not only a method but a literary genre in itself. Still, our efforts to make ethnographies somewhat accessible and our findings only proved that we still have a long way to go, seeing as most people are still perplexed by the intelligible have

word 'anthropology' when they first hear it – in that is, before all of us anthropologists attempt to explain what it is for the 100th time in our lives.

Departing from the concept of knowledge-power (that is, the Foucauldian idea that knowledge is a form of power and that power produces knowledge), we see that it is usually the 'non humanistic' sciences that have the ability to make largely undisputed claims: scientific disciplines that do not seem to be 'limited' by relativity, subjectivity, and humanistic claims appear to offer more security and certainty. Ultimately, this leads anthropology and its disciplinary ambiguity to linger in somewhat of a limbo – a middle ground where we seem to be too scientific for the humanities and too humanistic for the sciences.

Despite this reality, however, AI seems to be turning the tables for us. That is, in a time when AI has come to 'scare' scientists under the alleged pretension of taking their jobs, we anthropologists have turned our 'weakness' into our strength: we have retained our ability to be human, turning our source of ambiguity into the thing that makes us necessary.

Thus, even as our trajectory as a discipline has been marked by the constant questioning of our validity and existence, our ability to make claims about people is under constant assessment and transformation. Even as knowledge-power systems have often unfavoured us, AI now puts us in somewhat of a unique position: in a world where scientists are trying to legitimise their existence in innovative ways, anthropologists are doing so by resorting to the most fundamental aspect of their trade: their ability to be people among people, and hence use human intelligence to apprehend itself.



APPRECIATION FOR ANTHRO BULLETIN

Thanks for two enlightening editorials. Prof. Sunitaji, I appreciate the way you advice. So brief, still so much clarity. "Read widely. Think critically. Write regularly. Revise relentlessly. Seek feedback without hesitation. collaborate generously. Uphold research ethics uncompromisingly. Above all, cultivate intellectual curiosity and integrity." I love to hear your perspectives on these basics.

I remember, not while studying anthropology, but when I was working with CARE in my 20's, our administrator (CEO) advised me, "do not get carried away in short-term goals, but imagine where you want to see yourself after 10 years, and keep trying to reach your destination". It helped.

- Prof. Walimbe

Enjoyed , Sunita,going through your article on the state of affairs in the standard of quality of research..and your advice..Enjoyed the chief editor's- on the Anthropological Research..Race..Biological or Social products.

Congratulations Dr Reddy. Best wishes

- Prof. Bhagwan Roy

Great work Sunita and team. I totally agree with Dr Walimbe. Your futuristic approach for Anthropological approach is awesome.im looking at your newsletter becoming a journal in next few years. Keep that spirit. 🍷🍌🍌🍌🍌

- Dr. Nita Mawar

Many congratulations, Sunita Madam. The Bulletin fills a long-felt gap for Anthropology in India. It gives young scholars a platform to express themselves through words, images, and other creative forms. Your editorial on the quality of research in India, along with its suggestions, comes from your experience. Therefore, it is a very sincere representation of the state of research in India. Prof. K. K. Mishra's thoughtful reflection on why anthropology matters even more today is an essential reading. Other articles too engage the readers powerfully and they truly present India in its many colors. I think the best part of the bulletin is its cover page. The smiling face full of life.

- Dr. Khirod Moharana

My compliments to the editors for highlighting the state of anthropology and the urgent need to revive a culture of rigorous research and research-based publication.

The real crisis is not the shortage of quality publications but the erosion of scholarship. An academic system that rewards quantity over quality has reduced research to a numbers game, with technology merely serving as a convenient tool to accelerate output. Genuine research demands intellectual curiosity, integrity, sustained field engagement, critical reflection, and time - qualities beyond the reach of technology.

RACs and TACs can strengthen research only when their members are accomplished scholars with established research credentials. The uncomfortable truth is that the tradition of rigorous, field-based research in Indian anthropology is steadily diminishing. We know what needs to be done; the question is who has the conviction and commitment to do it.

-Prof PK Misra

The editorial, "Quality Research and Publications: What Is Lacking?", is both timely and thought provoking. While it rightly emphasizes the importance of collaboration, I believe we still need to reflect on what meaningful collaboration truly entails. Genuine collaboration should ideally be interdisciplinary or multidisciplinary, bringing together researchers with complementary expertise to address complex scientific questions.

In this context, one may reflect on the scholarly contributions of Prof. Vinay Kumar Srivastava. Much of his work was conceptual and theoretical, demonstrating that originality and intellectual depth do not necessarily depend on multiple authorship. This is not to undermine collaboration but to remind us that the value of research lies in its quality, novelty, and scientific contribution rather than the number of co-authors.

As Prof. Sunita rightly observed, today's students are growing up in the digital era, with unprecedented access to artificial intelligence and online resources. While these technologies offer immense opportunities, they should complement, not replace, the development of conceptual understanding and critical thinking. Strong theoretical foundations remain indispensable for meaningful research.

At the same time, the current emphasis on collaborative publications calls for careful introspection. Collaboration should represent a genuine intellectual partnership, with each author making a substantial and identifiable contribution to the conception, design, execution, analysis, or interpretation of the research. It should not become a mechanism for inflating publication counts through honorary or ghost authorship, where names are exchanged without meaningful scholarly involvement. Such practices may increase the number of publications but ultimately diminish the credibility of both the research and the collaborative process.

The growing number of research retractions worldwide serves as a timely reminder of the importance of maintaining the highest standards of research integrity. India has witnessed an increasing number of retracted publications in recent years, highlighting the need for greater vigilance. As institutions strive to enhance their research output and global rankings, equal emphasis must be placed on scientific rigor, transparency, ethical authorship, and reproducibility. Quality should always take precedence over quantity in research dissemination.

I am reminded of the words of my teacher, Prof. R. K. Kar, who passed away last year. He often said, "Omission is better than commission." Those simple yet profound words continue to guide my understanding of research ethics. It is far better to refrain from making an unsupported claim than to compromise scientific integrity. In an era where publication pressure is steadily increasing, his wisdom remains more relevant than ever.

CONGRATULATIONS Team AIF. I am happy to see the ever improving quality of content of the ANTHRO BULLETIN.

Keep up.

- Dr. Arbind Sinha

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/>

- AIF is organizing a National Conference on Himalayan Healers: Non-codified healer's Recognition and Policy.

Date: 28-29th September, 2026

Registration Link: [Click here](#)



- AIF is organizing a seminar on **Menstrual Practices, Beliefs, Taboos, Health and Hygiene: An Interdisciplinary Dialogue on Menstrual Dignity**

Date: 16 - 17th September 2026



PAST EVENT

- For our Distinguished Guest lecture series, an online lecture was organised and delivered by **Dr. Khirod Chandra Moharana** on **25th June 2026 at 5:30 pm onwards**

For more details - [Click here](#)

YouTube Live Link: [Click here](#)



FELLOWSHIPS AND JOB ALERTS

- Global Health Emerging Scholars (GHES) Fellowship 2026-2027

Last Date to Apply: 01.10.2026

Application Link: [Click here](#)

- Various Positions at AIIMS Bhatinda

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- Chief Minister's Good Governance Associates Programme 2026

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NEW!

We are thrilled to announce the collaboration between Anthropos India Foundation (AIF) and Indira Gandhi Rashtriya Manav Sangrahalaya (IGRMS) to bring a series of offline workshops on "Ethnography and documentation of culture." We are excited to host the fourth workshop of this series soon — with many more to come!

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.

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'CHILDHOOD MATTERS'

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