

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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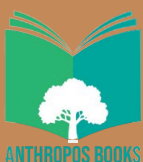
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Decolonizing the Minds

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

The first lesson as a Master's student in Anthropology class, we were told to go to the field (fieldwork) without any preconceived notions. Without carrying any baggage and understand the communities from the 'emic' perspective, from 'people's' perspective. And thus, inductive research using ethnography as a field method and ethnographic writing, with narratives in first person giving 'emic' and interpretation of the researcher as an 'etic' perspective. Ngugi Wa Thiong's book 'Decolonizing the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature' started off a debate about using an alien language to render native realities and culture, which continues even today.

Despite 80 years of independence, we still are stuck with a colonial mindset and carry ethnocentric biases, especially when we study 'janjatis', and the misinterpretation goes on, 'they are illiterate, ignorant, backward, superstitious and underdeveloped'. And the colonized mindset continues...' they need to be 'educated', 'empowered', 'developed' and 'civilized'. Similar tone and tenor which the British anthropologist applied to 'Indians'/ 'natives', we now apply to 'janjatis' and so-called 'backward' castes. Completely ignoring the social, political, economic and ecological factors for their 'lagging behind' in the race of 'development'. Last weekend, when I visited one of the Baiga house, near Kanha in Madhya Pradesh, a young woman was brewing Mahua drink and making a broom stick. She was sad to express that she could not study in school, but making sure that her daughter is going to college.

By now we should at least understand that it's the same janjatis who are living on this planet, with positive carbon footprints, with the least environmental damage, sustainable and simple living. Probably the happiest ones, in sync with nature. It's not their misdeeds, but the so-called 'civilised' people who pushed them to the margins and took away their rights to jal, jungle and jameen. I always wonder when the World Happiness Report 2025 ranks India with 118th rank among 147 countries in the world happiness index. The measurement is based on six key indicators- GDP per capita, social support, healthy life expectancy, freedom, generosity and perceptions of corruption. But when I look around, despite low incomes, less resources, people are smiling, living, peaceful, socially and environmentally connected and thriving. On the other hand, it's the people coming from west, developed nations, who are stressed, exhausted, burnt out in the race against time to achieve 'development'. Many of them come to India for spiritual salvation, detoxify with Ayurveda, and rejuvenate with yoga. I may be generalizing, but even the Happiness Index is doing the same, without having an 'emic' approach.

In this issue of the March 2026 Anthro Bulletin, Prof. KK Misra's theoretically rich and well-argued chief editorial piece thoughtfully engages with Clifford Geertz's interpretive framework, effectively challenging the myth of objectivity in anthropological research. It offers a nuanced

discussion on reflexivity, ethnographic subjectivity, and the evolving nature of truth as situated and context-dependent. The articles collectively highlight the richness of India's cultural traditions alongside evolving social identities in contemporary contexts. Article by Satya Sundar on Dhokra craft underscores a 4000-year-old metallurgical

rooted in the lost-wax technique, exemplifying indigenous knowledge, artistic precision, and cultural continuity. Despite its uniqueness—each piece being handcrafted and non-replicable—artisans face challenges such as resource scarcity and shifting market demands, raising concerns about sustainability and preservation.

Article by Indu Bhaumik and Chandra Shekhar explores Gambhira Puja among the Kisan community of Malda, presenting a localized, performative form of Shaivism. Through rituals like sacred stone worship, collective processions, and symbolic acts such as the "marriage" of Shiva with a banana plant, the festival integrates devotion with agrarian cycles, community bonding, and embodied spirituality, while also reflecting gendered exclusions. Shefali Sharma, in her article on Gangaur, highlights a women-centric festival in Rajasthan centred on Gauri (Parvati), symbolizing love, fertility, and marital devotion. Through rituals, symbols, and collective participation, it reinforces feminine agency, continuity, and evolving traditions in modern contexts. While Neha Singh examines Gen Z identity through digital anthropology, showing how social media serves as a site of political expression, cultural preservation, and self-making. Together, these pieces reveal the dynamic interplay of tradition, identity, and transformation in Indian society. Happy reading to all the readers...



The Ideal of Objectivity and the Reality of Subjective Experience in Anthropological Research

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

In his seminal essay "Thick Description," published in *The Interpretation of Cultures*, Clifford Geertz (1973) famously observes: "Believing, with Max Weber, that man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun, I take culture to be those webs, and the analysis of it to be therefore not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning." (p. 5). This formulation succinctly encapsulates Geertz's interpretive approach, wherein anthropology is conceived not as a positivist discipline seeking universal laws, but as a hermeneutic enterprise dedicated to the explication of meaning. The oft-cited assertion that anthropology is "not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning" (ibid.) thus emerges as a distilled expression of his broader theoretical stance.

Clifford Geertz's interpretive approach foregrounds the idea that anthropological knowledge is not discovered but constructed through the dynamic interaction between the researcher and the community under study. Cultural actors themselves continually interpret and make sense of their own worlds, while the anthropologist, in turn, interprets these indigenous interpretations. Ethnographic writing thus emerges as a layered, or second-order, process of interpretation. Furthermore, the anthropologist's own cultural background, linguistic competence, and theoretical orientation inevitably shape the manner in which symbols, rituals, and social practices are understood and represented. The influential "Writing Culture" debate of the 1980s also marked a significant turning point by foregrounding the literary and rhetorical dimensions of ethnographic representation. It prompted anthropologists to critically interrogate issues of voice, authorship, and authority, raising fundamental questions about whose perspectives are privileged in ethnographic texts and how such authority is constructed. This critical engagement gave rise to increasingly reflexive methodologies, wherein researchers consciously articulate their positionality, their social, cultural, and political situatedness, and examine the ways in which these positions shape both the process and the outcomes of their research.

The recognition that subjectivity informs both the methods and interpretations of anthropological research marks a significant departure from earlier attempts to model the discipline on the presumed objectivity of the natural sciences. In practice, the anthropologists cannot be regarded as detached or passive observers; rather, they are an active participant in the very process of knowledge production. Subjectivity, therefore, is not a methodological flaw to be eradicated but an inherent and potentially enriching dimension of anthropological inquiry, contributing to deeper and more nuanced understandings of cultural realities. At this juncture, it is essential to clarify the meaning of "ethnography," which constitutes the foundational methodology of anthropological research. Roy Ellen, in his edited volume *Ethnographic Research: A Guide to General Conduct*, observes that "ethnography is something you may do, study, use, read or write; the various usages reflect ways in which different scholars have appropriated the term, often for perfectly sound conceptual reasons" (1984: 8).

This formulation underscores the inherent flexibility and polyvalent nature of ethnography as both a method and a mode of representation. Consequently, it is only to be expected that subjectivity permeates the practice of ethnographic writing. Ethnographic texts, of ethnographic writing. Contemporary anthropology places considerable emphasis on reflexivity and the recognition of multiple voices,



moving away from the imposition of a singular, authoritative narrative. Increasingly, collaborative and participatory approaches have gained prominence, enabling community members to engage actively in both the research process and the representation of their cultural worlds. This methodological shift effectively challenges the conventional hierarchical divide between the observer and the observed, fostering a more dialogic and inclusive form of knowledge production. At the same time, the acknowledgement of inherent subjectivity raises critical concerns regarding the validity and reliability of anthropological knowledge. If all interpretations are shaped by subjective standpoints, the question arises as to whether anthropology can lay claim to any form of truth. In response, the discipline has reconfigured its understanding of truth, conceiving it as situated, contingent, and partial, anchored in specific contexts and perspectives rather than in universal, objective certainties characteristic of the natural sciences. This reconceptualization resonates strongly with broader postmodern critiques of grand narratives and the notion of absolute truth.

In the Indian context, the question of subjectivity acquires heightened importance owing to the country's immense cultural plurality, linguistic diversity, and deeply embedded social hierarchies. Anthropological inquiry in India necessitates engagement with intricate and often intersecting dimensions of caste, religion, gender, and regional identities. Within such a milieu, the anthropologist's positionality, whether as an insider or an outsider, inevitably mediates both access to communities and the interpretive frameworks through which cultural realities are understood. A critical awareness of subjectivity thus becomes essential, enabling researchers to approach these complexities with reflexive sensitivity and a strong sense of ethical accountability. In conclusion, subjectivity constitutes an inextricable dimension of anthropological practice rather than an aberration to be completely eliminated. Contemporary anthropology, moving beyond the illusion of detached objectivity, recognizes subjectivity as a productive site of insight and reflexivity. By foregrounding the dynamic relationship between the observer and the observed, the discipline advances a more layered, empathetic, and contextually grounded understanding of culture. When subjected to critical scrutiny, subjectivity emerges not as a limitation but as a methodological strength, enhancing anthropology's capacity to apprehend the richness and complexity of human experience.

Threads of Wax, Forms of Metal: The Dhokra Craft of Dhenkanal District



By Satya Sundar Digvijay

Introduction:

The Dhokra (dokra) art or bell metal craft is an ancient traditional art form. This art has continued to thrive in our country for the last 4000 years. The technique of making this craft is commonly known as the “lost wax method”. The bronze statue popularly known as “The dancing girl” found at Mohenjo-Daro belongs to the Indus Valley Civilisation and provides us with evidence of the existence of Dhokra art in ancient India. The craftsmen associated with this art form were originally nomads, and over time, they settled in various tribal areas like Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand and Odisha. Among these, the state of Odisha emerges as the hub of this art, with villages like Sadeibereni, Navjibanpur & Nuagan of Dhenkanal District being prominently associated with this art. Sadeibereni has already been notified as an artisan village by the state government of Odisha.



Figure 1: Sadeibereni Village (Information Board)

The artisans have won many State Level Awards in recognition of their creative expression. The product range includes Tribal Figurines, Deities, Animal Forms, Jewellery, and other decorative items etc.

Process of Making Dhokra Art:

This process begins with the artisans creating a model as per their choice by using a paste made by mixing red ant hill soil & sand. The model is then left to dry in the sun. The next process involves coating the model with a soft white soil (Kassi Mati).

Preparation of White Soil:

Hard White Soil is first filtered through a piece of white cotton cloth after being collected from the field, then dried and made into a powdered form. Thereafter, the filtered soil is mixed with the water of cow dung and then applied to the previously prepared model.

After this, the white soil coat is dried up, after which the artisans brush it to produce a smooth surface. The artisans then apply juice extracted from leaves of Hyacinth Bean (Simba) so that the coat is smooth and suitable for the application of wax. The artisans then create a design on the surface of the model using thin threads made of wax. These are the final designs on the model.

Preparation of Wax Threads:

The process of preparing the wax used in the manufacture of the threads is done by artisans with utmost care. Earlier, the artisans used to obtain this type of wax from dried beehives. Due to the lack of plentiful beehives in recent times, they mix raw wax, lacquer, and bitumen to obtain this type of wax. First, they melt the lacquer, then add bitumen, followed by mixing with raw wax. The mixture is then well stirred in a cooking vessel to produce a compound.

The mixture is then filtered through a white cotton cloth into a bucket filled with water, whereupon it solidifies into a cake-like substance. The cake is then lifted and dried under the sun, hammered until its texture is soft and thin, and then melted again, and finally, using a pressure machine, they produce thin strands of wax.

After the desired wax design is ready, another layer of soft white soil is applied over the wax. While applying this layer, a small hole is left so that molten metal can later be poured in and replace the wax. Because of this technique, Dhokra art is also referred to as “lost-wax casting”



Figure 2: A mould having an opening where metals are put



Figure 3: Various moulds are exposed to sun drying

Next, an outer thick layer, referred to as mould (Kui), is created using a mixture of red ant hill soil and husk. This layer is applied over the entire model and left to dry for one or two days. Once the model is completely dry, metal pieces (brass) are inserted in the face attached to the mould, and the model is sealed with soil. The model is then put in the furnace.



Figure 4: A furnace in which the mould is heated

Upon heating, the wax melts and comes out, and molten metal (brass) occupies the space previously occupied by the melted wax and assumes the form of the design. After one to two hours of cooling, the outer layer is chipped off, and different polishing techniques are applied to the metal. After toiling day and night with sheer dedication and hard work, like a machine, the artisan finally sees his imagination take shape in the form of beautiful Dhokra art.



Figure 5: Different Dhokra items



Figure 6: An Elephant

A Tradition Worth Preserving:

Currently, the artisans are actively engaged in this traditional art form with great dedication and satisfaction. However, they are faced with a number of challenges, such as a lack of resources and a changing market environment.



Figure 7: Dhokra art showing lord Shiva, Parvati and Ganesha

Despite all these challenges, Dhokra art reflects the rich cultural heritage of India and should be preserved in its original form. This is because, unlike other art forms, Dhokra uses a single-use mould that is discarded once the product is made, resulting in a unique piece without joints. In this regard, Dhokra stands out as a unique art form in the entire world.

Gambhira Puja among the Kisan of Malda: A Shaivite Rite of Embodiment and Transgression



Dr. Indu Bhaumik

Among the diverse forms of devotion to Lord Shiva across India, the Gambhira Puja of the Kisan community of Malda district in West Bengal presents a distinctive and localised expression of Shaivism. While Lord Shiva occupies a central position in pan Indian Hindu theology as ascetic, householder, destroyer, and cosmic dancer, his presence among the Kisan is marked by aniconism and domestic intimacy. There are no sculpted idols or temple-based icons. Instead, each nuclear family preserves a sacred stone that is believed to embody a part or essence of Shiva. The stone signifies permanence, ancestral continuity, and territorial belonging. In this way, the Kisan conception of Shiva retains an archaic and elemental character, closer to nature worship and ancestral sacrality than to temple-centred Brahmanical orthodoxy.



Sacred stone venerated by the Kisan community as an aniconic embodiment of Shiva's divine essence



Dr. Chandra Shekher Upadhyay

Under his guidance, a group proceeds to collect holy water from the Ganga in a ritual pot. The journey to the river and return with sacred water create a sacred geography. The water becomes the ritual substance through which purification and sanctification are enacted during the festival. In the days leading up to Syakrait, members of the group visit households throughout the village as part of the ritual proceedings. During these visits, they sing Shaivite devotional songs and perform vakta nach. Vakta nach is not a conventional or codified dance form; rather, it consists of irregular and vigorous bodily movements marked by rhythmic intensity and heightened physical expression. Importantly, this form of ritual performance is carried out exclusively by boys and men. As they move from house to house, the participants sprinkle holy water



Ritual procession undertaken to collect sacred water from the river Ganga

Ritual Leadership and Sacred Mobilisation

The Gambhira Puja, also locally known as Moshan, begins seven days before Chait Syakrait (Chaitra Sankranti), the last day of the Bengali month of Chaitra. The timing is significant, as it marks the end of an agricultural cycle and anticipates renewal. The festival commemorates the marriage of Shiva; however, the narrative is expressed not through scriptural recitation but through collective enactment. A central figure in the ritual is a team leader who temporarily assumes the role of a Shaivite ascetic or sannyasi. A central figure in the ritual is a team leader who temporarily assumes the role of a Shaivite ascetic or sannyasi.



Members of the group make rounds through the village, seeking offerings from each household

from sacred pots in each home and collect donations, primarily in the form of agricultural produce. These offerings are gathered in a sack and later exchanged for items required for the puja, as well as for intoxicating substances used within the ritual context. In this way, the ritual economy is sustained through collective agrarian participation, reinforcing community solidarity and redistributive bonds.

Whenever the group arrives to collect contributions, each household keeps prasad prepared in advance, usually fruits, specifically to serve the followers of Shiva who are part of the procession. Because the performers' bodies become heated from continuously performing vakta nach from one house to another, the fruits are offered to cool them down and restore their energy. In addition, some households provide water for ceremonial bathing. The performers often bathe while continuing their ecstatic movements, transforming the act into an extension of the ritual dance itself.

Although such practices may appear unusual to an outsider, both the household members and the participants deeply enjoy these moments. The community celebrates with the belief that their deity is getting married, making the atmosphere one of sacred festivity. The celebration represents a pure form of collective joy marked by dance, song, and ritual bathing. While girls and women are not permitted to participate directly in the performance, their excitement is clearly visible, smiles on their faces reflecting their shared happiness and devotion during this auspicious occasion.

Kopsara and the Symbolic Marriage

On the day of Syakrait, the atmosphere becomes more charged with sound and movement. Traditional drums, such as dhak and madal, are played from morning onwards, filling the village with rhythm. A particularly striking aspect of the ritual is the practice known as kopsara, which involves the theft of a banana plant. The plant must be taken secretly. This act of ritualised theft introduces an element of controlled transgression. What is ordinarily considered wrong becomes sacred when performed within ritual boundaries.

The stolen banana plant is transformed into the symbolic bride of Shiva. During the night puja, it is ceremonially married to him. The ritual requires specific items, such as thorns of a particular tree, ears of boro paddy, rice husk, flowers, fruits, and a winnowing fan. Each of these objects carries agrarian symbolism and invokes fertility, growth, and the continuity of life. Therefore, the marriage is not only a mythic remembrance but also an invocation of agricultural prosperity and cyclical regeneration.

In mainstream Hindu traditions, the marriage of Lord Shiva to Parvati is most prominently associated with Maha Shivaratri, which is observed in the lunar month of Phalgun, usually falling between February and March.

This festival is marked by fasting, night-long vigil, temple worship, and ritual offerings to the Shiva lingam. Women, in particular, undertake vows and prayers seeking marital harmony, fertility, and the longevity of their husbands. The ritual atmosphere in mainstream practice is devotional, temple-centred, and scripturally framed, often accompanied by recitations of mythological narratives describing the divine wedding.

The Gambhira Puja of the Kisan community, however, unfolds at a different time on the ritual calendar. It begins seven days before Chait Syakrait, the final day of the Bengali month of Chaitra, which marks the end of the agrarian year in Bengal. This difference in timing is not incidental. Whereas Maha Shivaratri follows a pan-Indian lunar calendar rooted in Puranic tradition, the Kisan observance aligns with the agricultural cycle that structures their economic and social life. Chait Syakrait represents a threshold between one harvest cycle and the next. By situating Shiva's marriage at this liminal agricultural moment, the Kisan community symbolically links divine union with seasonal renewal, the fertility of the soil, and the hope for future productivity.



Vakta nach



Distribution of prasad among community members

In contrast to the mythological figure of Parvati, the Kisan ritual introduces a banana plant as a symbolic bride. This vegetal substitute is not merely a simplification of the narrative, but a profound localisation of theology. The plant embodies fertility, growth, and agrarian abundance. Thus, divine marriage becomes an ecological enactment rather than a textual remembrance. Instead of reciting the story of Himavan's daughter marrying the great ascetic, the community performs a marriage that fuses sacred powers with the rhythms of cultivation and harvest. Moreover, while mainstream celebrations often emphasise individual vows, fasting, and temple offerings, the Gambhira ritual is collective, performative, and materially grounded in agrarian exchange. Sacred water is carried from the Ganga, crops are collected from households, and the symbolic wedding takes place in a participatory village setting.

Embodiment of the Moshan

After the marriage ritual, the festival moves into a phase of ecstatic celebration. Participants consume the intoxicants that were procured through collective contributions. Dancing intensifies, and mud and clay become central elements of the performance. Men smear themselves with mud and continue dancing through the night until dawn,

In their intoxicated and mud-covered state, they resemble spirits or moshans. In Hindu mythology, Shiva is known as the lord of spirits and supernatural beings. He dwells in cremation grounds and is accompanied by ghostly attendants. By transforming their bodies through mud, intoxication, and wild movement, the participants symbolically become members of Shiva's retinue. This is not mere imitation but embodied devotion. The ritual collapses the boundary between the deity and devotee. Through altered states and physical transformation, participants experience a temporary identification with the marginal and liminal world associated with Shiva.

Gender and Ritual Boundaries

Women do not participate in the central puja, marriage ceremony, or mud-based revelry. Although they may consume intoxicants separately, they remain excluded from the primary performative space. This exclusion reflects gendered ritual roles and reinforces male authority in the public religious sphere. While mainstream Hindu celebrations of Shiva's marriage often foreground female devotion, especially in the form of fasting and ritual prayer for marital well-being, the Kisan Gambhira emphasises masculine ascetic impersonation and the collective male embodiment of supernatural force



Participants adorned in the guise of moshans

When Gauri Comes Home: The Ritual World of Gangaur



By *Shefali Sharma*

On the morning after Holi, as the colours of Dhulandi or Rangwali Holi spread, a new ritual begins across Rajasthan. Women and girls gather in the verandah or porch of their homes, making pairs, singing together and bowing before two idols. This is the beginning of Gangaur - a sixteen-day festival winding through the month of Chaitra, culminating on the third day of the bright fortnight. It is a festival about love, longing, fertility and the sacred bonds of marriage. The Myth at the Centre

Gangaur is dedicated to Gauri, a manifestation of Goddess Parvati, consort of Lord Shiva. In Rajasthani folk tradition, Shiva and Parvati are referred to as Isar and Gangaur. The mythology that animates the festival is one of penance and perseverance: Parvati, enamoured of an ascetic Shiva who was indifferent to the world, undertook intense tapasya to win his love. Her devotion was rewarded with marriage, making her the enduring symbol of feminine steadfastness and beauty. A beloved folktale enacts like this: after their marriage, Gauri visits her parental home for a few days - as is the custom for new brides in Rajasthan. Shiva eventually comes to collect her, and the festival's grand procession symbolize this reunion. In this narrative, the divine mirrors the human, and the human aspires to be divine. Notably, Gangaur is also worshipped after the marriage ceremony in Rajasthani weddings - the festival and the life event are intertwined from the very beginning of a woman's married life.

How Gangaur is Celebrated

Gangaur begins on the same day as Dhulandi or Rangwali Holi and runs for sixteen continuous days, culminating on Chaitra Shukla Tertiya. The number sixteen is not incidental. It refers to the solah shringar - the sixteen adornments of a married woman in Hindu tradition. Every day of the festival is, in a sense, a day of beauty, worship and feminine self-expression. Idols of Isar and Gangaur are brought into the home and placed in the verandah. In older times, these idols were made at home from clay and shaped by women's own hands. But today, most families purchase them from the market, and the idols have grown more ornate, more colourful and more elaborate. But their placement remains the same: at the threshold, where the home meets the world.

Each morning, women gather in pairs to perform the puja. The pairing is deliberate which is unmarried women and girls' worship alongside other unmarried companions, married women with married ones. Even the girls, as young as four or five years old, are brought into the fold, initiating them into a practice they will carry for the rest of their lives. Together they sing songs, holding one hand of the



Figure: Gangaur Puja in a House

companion and in one hand holding a dub (grass). They apply sixteen bindis or dots above the idol on the wall using kumkum (vermilion), kajal (kohl) and mehendi (henna). Songs are sung in a chorus and are passed down through generations via verbal transmission.

Unmarried women pray to Gauri for a husband who possesses the qualities of lord Shiva, and married women pray for the long life and well-being of their husbands. On the fifteenth day, the eve of the main festival, Sinjara is observed. Mehendi is applied to the hands, and new clothes are worn. On the final day, sixteen gune (a local sweet made of refined wheat flour and sugar) and ghewar (a local sweet) are offered to the idols. Women wear a chundari (traditional Rajasthani saree). In Jaipur, the royal procession begins from the City Palace, passing through the streets until it reaches Talkatora (a local pond), where aarti is performed, and bhog is offered. The Gangaur idol of the palace is carved from wood and dressed in garments of gold and silver thread.



Figure 2: Gangaur Procession in Jaipur (Source: Rajasthan Tourism)

On the next day of Gangaur, the idols of Isar and Gangaur are carried to a river, pond or well and immersed in water. The goddess departs, and the cycle closes.

Symbols: The Language of the Ritual

According to S.C. Dube, symbols in ritual are not decorative; rather, they are the primary medium through which meaning is transmitted and social values are reinforced.

SYMBOLS RITUAL USE MEANING		
Clay idols	Central object of 16-day worship	Fertility
Dub (grass)	Offered daily during puja	Regeneration, longevity and life-force
Sixteen bindis (kumkum, kajal, mehandi)	Applied above idol during each day's worship	Solah shringar encoded on the goddess beauty as devotion, adornment as sacred act
Gune and Ghewar	Offered on the concluding day	Moral reciprocity - the devotee's gift to the goddess in exchange for blessings (Mauss, 1954)
Water Immersion	Final act: idol immersed in river or pond	Closure and return

Table 1: Ritual Symbols of Gangaur Mapped through S.C. Dube's Framework of Symbolic Meaning in Ritual

Elements: Structure, Participants and Sacred Space
 Dube's framework also attends to the structural elements that give a ritual its architecture. In Gangaur, these elements are precise and non

-negotiable. The temporal element - sixteen continuous days maps onto solah shringar. The spatial element is the verandah which serves as a liminal space, a physical and symbolic threshold where the domestic becomes ceremonial. The pairing of women creates a community of shared intention where the prayer of one is amplified by the presence of another.

Ritual Process: A Cyclical Journey

Gangaur is not a linear event with a beginning and an end. Instead, it is a cycle, renewed each year as Dhulandi arrives. The ritual process, as Dube describes it, communicates social values at every stage. Each act in the sequence carries the community forward: through devotion, solidarity, celebration and release. Also, the sixteen days act as a liminal period for the women. Until the next Holi, the Goddess comes home again.

Continuity, Change and the Digital Gangaur

Clay idols shaped by women have given way to market-bought figures. Families living away from Rajasthan for work perform the rituals less frequently. Younger women photograph and make reels to share it on Instagram. Younger women are using YouTube to play the songs of Gangaur. Like all living traditions, Gangaur has evolved. All in all, Gangaur is not merely a festival of marital devotion - it is a festival of feminine agency.

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GenZ, Identity, and Digital Expression: A Visual Anthropological Case Study from South Asia



By Neha Singh

Introduction

Generation Z (born roughly between 1997–2012) has emerged as one of the most visible, vocal, and digitally connected generations in history. Initially dismissed as a “lazy” or “screen-addicted” cohort, their movements across the globe—from climate strikes in Europe to the pro-democracy protests in Hong Kong, Iran, and most recently Nepal (2025)—have transformed the perception of GenZ. What once appeared to be passive scrolling is now understood as a new form of digital activism, identity negotiation, and political participation. This article explores GenZ through an anthropological lens, using two South Asian case studies—a Kashmiri Muslim Rajput boy (Khan) and a Bihari Hindu Rajput girl (Singh)—to examine how identity, belonging, and protest are expressed in the digital and real worlds.

Abstract

This article explores how GenZ constructs identity on social media through two South Asian case studies, showing Instagram as both a public stage and a private space for preserving culture and self.

Case Study I: Kashmir and Political Identity

“The Kashmiri Gen Z boy’s Instagram profile reflects a digital self-anchored in political identity, cultural belonging, and social performance. His username carries family and regional markers, situating him within a lineage-oriented framework. On his feed, most posts are self-portraits—stylized photographs that project confidence and charisma. However, the Stories and Highlights tell a deeper story: they become windows into Kashmir’s political and cultural discourse. Through subtle references, slogans, or visual cues, his Instagram is not just aesthetic but a public stage of resistance and belonging.

A striking observation is the pattern of his group photos. While his profile shows occasional male peer groups, he more often appears in photographs surrounded by women classmates, hinting at a desire for recognition, charisma, and gendered social presence. This self-curation suggests Instagram as a platform of both visibility and influence, where digital self-making merges politics, popularity, and personal appeal.

The Kashmiri Rajput Muslim boy, raised in a politically charged environment, represents the fusion of tradition and modernity in GenZ. His Instagram feed is not just a

gallery of personal photos but a political stage—with stories reflecting his stance on identity, cultural pride, and Kashmiri autonomy.

Interestingly, his highlights reveal another GenZ trait: the performance of social belonging. He appears more often in group photos with young women than with male peers, signaling not only a break from conservative Kashmiri norms but also a gender-fluid comfort that contrasts with older generations. His posts blend aesthetic self-expression, cultural commentary, and subtle resistance, a digital ethnography of a generation negotiating both visibility and vulnerability.

From an anthropological lens, his Instagram functions as:

Subject: A Kashmiri Muslim Rajput (Khan).

Expression: Instagram posts mostly personal/lavish photographs, but stories and highlights reveal political and cultural perspectives. Interestingly, highlights often show him amidst female groups in college, symbolizing both social confidence and cultural performativity.

Meaning: For Khan, Instagram is a political stage and social theatre—a space where identity as Kashmiri, Muslim, Rajput, and young male merges. It performs resistance, belonging, and masculinity simultaneously.

Case Study II: Bihar and Spiritual Legacy

In contrast, the Bihari Gen Z girl’s Instagram is minimal, reflective, and legacy-oriented. Her username “insaaninsaniyat” rejects caste, region, or political labels, instead foregrounding humanity as her identity. The bio, mixing Hindi metaphors with anthropological framing, introduces Instagram not as a space for popularity but as a digital diary. The metaphor of the lotus in mud signifies purity in chaos, a symbolic resistance not through politics but through philosophy and spirituality.

Her profile is intimate: 9 followers and 12 following, which emphasizes selective expression over mass visibility. The Highlights—“Birthplace,” “युगप्रवर्तक,” “Maa”—show deep-rootedness in place, reformist vision, and maternal connection. Her posts range from

school children and local roads to religious shrines and mountains, often captioned as mini fieldwork notes. Here, Instagram becomes a bridge between her personal reflections and her anthropological journey.

Raised in Delhi, Singh carried the prestige of representing the capital in national exchange programs. She even performed in Kashmir as part of Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat, where her songs were applauded, autographs requested, and praise showered on her. To the public, she embodied Delhi's cultural ambassador

But the applause carried a hidden irony. During the same event, someone in Kashmir remarked: "Yeh jo bheekh maang rahe hain na, yeh sab Bihari hote hain." For her, a proud Rajput girl of Bihar origin, the statement pierced deep. Nobody knew that the performer on stage—receiving honor and admiration—was herself Bihari. At that moment, she could not speak back.

This silence became a turning point. Instead of escaping abroad to pursue her dream in Australia, she chose to return in 2019 to Bihar—her roots. There, she began teaching students, committed to strengthening future generations and challenging the stereotype that "Bihari" equals poverty or backwardness. Her journey represents how GenZ transforms personal pain into social responsibility, and how digital and cultural capital can be redirected toward ground-level empowerment."

From an anthropological lens, her Instagram functions as:

Subject: A Bihari Hindu Rajput (Singh).

Turning Point: Represented Delhi in Kashmir during Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat. She was celebrated with applause and autographs. Yet, in the same space, she overheard: "Yeh jo bheekh maang rahe hain, yeh sab Bihari hote hain."

Silence & Realization: She could not reveal that she herself was Bihari. The pain of silence became the seed of transformation.

Choice: Instead of migrating to Australia (her dream), she returned to Bihar in 2019 to understand why "Bihari" had become a stigma. She began teaching, aiming to strengthen future generations.

Instagram Expression: Unlike the Kashmiri boy, she uses Instagram as a digital diary—archiving spiritual reflections, motherly notes, and life lessons for her future children.

Meaning: Her Instagram is not protest, but preservation. She resists by redefining Bihari identity through care, knowledge, and spiritual truth.

Comparative Anthropological Insights

Kashmiri Rajput (Khan)

Mode of Expression: Political, cultural, activist

Instagram Role: Stage for performance

Temporal Orientation: Present struggles

Identity Work: Asserting Kashmiri-ness & masculinity

Bihari Rajput (Singh)

Mode of Expression: Personal, spiritual, motherly

Instagram Role: Archive for legacy

Temporal Orientation: Future generations

Identity Work: Reclaiming Bihari-ness & maternal care

Anthropological Lens: Digital preservation

Conclusion

The study shows that Gen Z cannot be reduced to a single identity- In Khan, we see the Gen Z activist-performer, using Instagram as a stage for political identity and sociability. In Singh, we see the Gen Z preserver-teacher, transforming Instagram into a digital diary of spirituality and maternal legacy. Together, these cases reveal Instagram not as a space of vanity, but as an anthropological site of identity-making, where politics and spirituality, protest and preservation, public and private coexist. From Nepal's protests that challenged political authority to India's digital self-expressions, Gen Z emerges as far more complex than prevailing stereotypes.

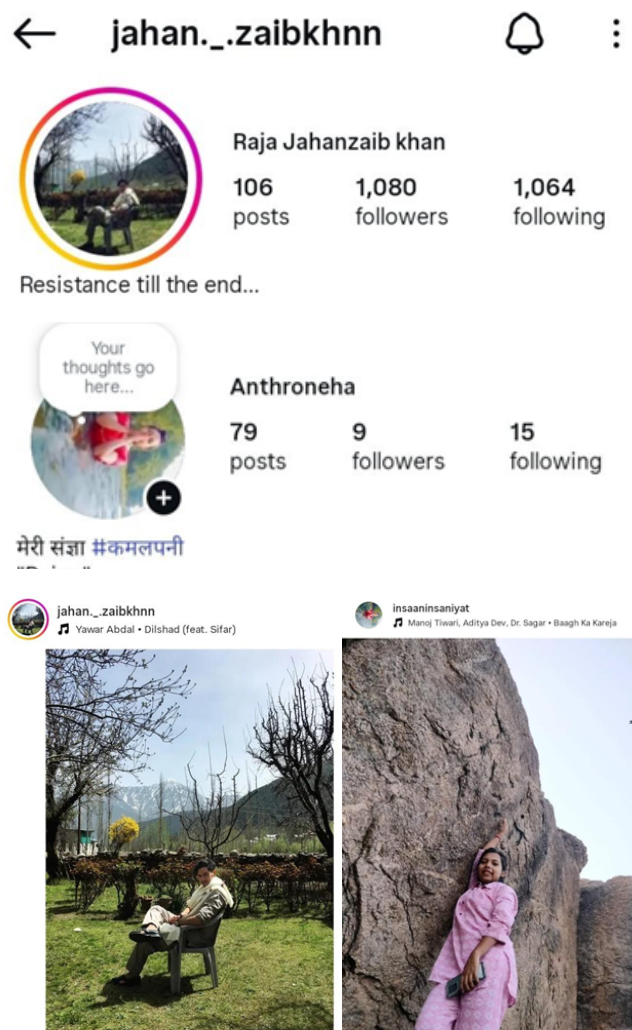


Image Instagram Profile (screenshot taken with permission.)
Bihari Girl's Instagram Profile (screenshot taken with permission)

Dr. Rukshana Zaman



Interview by Saba Farhin

Dr. Rukshana Zaman trained in anthropology is now teaching at Discipline of Anthropology, School of Social Sciences, Indira Gandhi National Open University, New Delhi, India. She completed her Ph.D. in 2007 from the Department of Anthropology, University of Delhi, supported by a short-term grant from the Indian Council for Social Science Research. From 2002 to 2010, she worked on multiple social awareness and health-related projects at All India Institute of Medical Sciences and the International Clinical Epidemiology Network, before joining IGNOU as an Assistant Professor in 2010.

Her research within Social Anthropology spans ethnicity, identity, ethnic conflicts, anthropology of performance (especially dance), emotions, visual anthropology, gender studies, social institutions, and autoethnography. She has presented widely at national and international forums and has around 50 academic contributions, including journal articles, book chapters, and IGNOU course materials.

Dr. Zaman was a Charles Wallace India Fellow in Queen’s University Belfast in 2019. A President’s Awardee for her service as a Girl Guide, she also holds a diploma in Odissi dance. She served as a nominated member of IGNOU’s Academic Council from 21 July 2012 to 20 July 2014.

Her upcoming works (2026) include the edited volume “Reorienting Visual and Digital Anthropology: Southeast Asian Perspectives” (Routledge India), and chapters on “Teaching Anthropology via Facebook Live and Women’s Access to Mosques” (Springer Nature). Her latest publication (2025) explores embodied experience in a Belfast mosque in the Irish Journal of Anthropology, alongside earlier works in visual anthropology, life histories, autoethnography, and poetry.

What inspired your journey into anthropology, and how did it shape your research interests?

Anthropology, for me, was something of an accidental discovery rather than a carefully planned choice. I hadn’t initially set out to study it. The turning point came when I was selecting my subjects in higher secondary school, my father encouraged me to take anthropology as an optional. Until then, my only exposure to the field had been through a couple of adventure books I had read around Class IX, where anthropology and archaeology appeared more as

exciting ideas than academic disciplines. When I began my higher secondary studies with anthropology as one of my subjects, my interest was still largely rooted in biology. However, I knew that pursuing the conventional science route with physics, chemistry, and mathematics wasn’t



ideal for me and mathematics, in particular, was a challenge. So, opting for the arts stream with anthropology became a practical and meaningful alternative. My father suggested that since I was inclined toward biology, anthropology, especially physical anthropology would allow me to stay connected to that interest. That is how my journey truly began.

I owe a great deal to my teachers at Cotton College (now Cotton University), especially Dr. Upala, Dr. Bandana, Dr. Lonu, Dr. Aditi Barua and Dr. Elizabeth, who played a crucial role in shaping my early understanding of society and culture. As classes progressed, my interest gradually shifted from biological aspects to social anthropology. Learning about communities like the Garos and the Khasis was particularly fascinating. Although Meghalaya is geographically close to Guwahati and I had visited the region before, I had never engaged with these communities in a deeper, more analytical way. The classroom discussions opened up entirely new perspectives, transforming familiar places into subjects of meaningful inquiry.

This blend of the familiar and the unknown drew me further into anthropology and strengthened my connection to the discipline. In many ways, it was this gradual unfolding, supported by inspiring teachers (Prof. Subdhara Mitra Channa, Prof. Vinay Kumar Srivastava, Prof. S.M. Patnaik, Prof. K.K. Misra, Prof. D.K. Bhattacharya, Prof Nita Mathur, Prof Shalina Mehta and many more whom I met later after joining Department of Anthropology, University of Delhi) and immersive learning that shaped my academic path. It’s also worth noting that very few schools in India offer anthropology at the higher secondary level. Institutions like Cotton University are among the rare ones that provide this opportunity, which makes early exposure to the subject

all the more special and impactful.

What do you consider your most significant contributions to the field?

That's a rather intricate question, because I still see myself as a researcher in progress, with much more to contribute. However, if I were to reflect on my work so far, I would say that my most significant contribution lies in my PhD research, Charles Wallace India Fellowship that gave me much exposure during my stay in Queen's University Belfast and being a part of Indira Gandhi National Open University.

My doctoral work focused on the construction of Odissi dance and Odia identity. I chose this topic at a time when many of my peers were working on themes like Panchayati Raj, which were then emerging as popular and "grounded" areas within anthropology. In contrast, my interest leaned toward performance anthropology, a relatively niche field at the time, with limited scholarly work, especially in the Indian context. To the best of my knowledge, my research was among the first to explore this particular intersection in depth. One of the most meaningful aspects of my work was documenting the life history of Sashimani Mahari, the last surviving Mahari (known as Devadasi in other parts of India) of the Jagannath Temple, in Puri, Odisha. When I interacted with her around 2005–2006, she was about 80 years old. I had the rare opportunity to spend considerable time with her, recording her experiences, memories, and the legacy she carried. Preserving her life history, I believe, is one of my most valuable contributions—both to anthropology and to cultural history. Her life also opened up important perspectives on gender. Maharis were dedicated to the temple as young children, often around one to one-and-a-half years old, without any agency or choice in shaping their own futures. Their lives were predetermined, leaving no room for personal aspirations or alternative paths. Yet, paradoxically, it was the Maharis themselves who eventually brought an end to the tradition by choosing not to adopt and train other young girls to continue the tradition. This act, in many ways, reflects a subtle but powerful assertion of agency.

Through the life history of Sashimani Mahari, my work attempts to trace not only a fading cultural tradition but also the complex intersections of gender, agency, and identity embedded within it.

Being a part of Indira Gandhi National Open University which aspires to provide inclusive and equitable access to higher education, as an educator, I feel as an educator I have been able to reach out to the unreached. Anthropology as we all know, is offered in very few Universities and Colleges in India, thus, our Masters and Bachelor of Science programmes offered through the open, distance and digital mode have been able to bring anthropology as a subject to the

door-step of many. With easy access to course material on Egyankosh, Swayam and Swayam Prabha channels, Interactive Radio counseling sessions and Gyandarshan, learning anthropology has become affordable to our learners across the country with added academic face-to face counseling and support provided by the Regional Centres.

How do you see the present and future of anthropology in India?

Anthropology, as we often say, has a profound and enduring contribution to make. As anthropologists engaged in research, our work is fundamentally grounded in empirical reality; this is what gives the discipline its lasting relevance. The value of anthropology does not diminish over time precisely because it is rooted in lived experiences, field-based observations, and close engagement with communities. Society is constantly changing, and anthropology evolves alongside it by documenting and interpreting these changes. Today, we are witnessing the rapid expansion of artificial intelligence (AI) across almost every field. AI is transforming the way knowledge is produced, processed, and disseminated. Anthropology, too, can benefit from these advancements in various ways, whether in data organization, analysis, or documentation. However, there remains a core aspect of anthropology that cannot be replaced by technology.

Fieldwork, the process of going into communities, engaging with people, and understanding their lives through participant observation, remains central to the discipline. Despite ongoing debates around methods like participant observation, understanding every-day lived experiences, the essence of anthropology lies in this immersive, human-humane centered approach. It requires sensitivity, reflexivity, and the ability to build trust qualities that cannot be replicated by artificial intelligence. In this sense, anthropology continues to hold a vital place, especially in a multicultural country like ours. I would certainly say that anthropology is extremely relevant in today's age and we still have a long way to go. Our discipline has a bright future with the AI boom that is happening at the moment. As long as there are societies to understand, cultures to interpret, and human experiences to document, anthropology will continue to play a crucial role.

Even in an increasingly AI-driven world, there will always be a need for anthropologists - trained individuals who can engage in face-to-face interactions, conduct meaningful fieldwork, and provide nuanced, grounded insights into human life.

What advice would you give to aspiring anthropology students and researchers?

The most important thing in anthropology is that we stick to our basics. As a discipline, anthropology has

expanded in many exciting directions like digital anthropology, virtual anthropology, visual anthropology, and more. While these developments are valuable, the strength of anthropology still lies in its core traditions. What we must continue to uphold is the practice of ethnography as empirical, field-based research. Going to the field, engaging directly with people, building relationships with communities, and collecting first-hand data remain central to what we do. Equally important is how we interpret that data and how we use it responsibly for the well-being of communities and the broader society. That ethical responsibility should always guide our work.

Coming to artificial intelligence, yes, it is emerging rapidly and influencing all fields, including anthropology. Many young researchers may feel that

it makes things easier: collecting data, organizing it, and even generating reports. While AI can certainly be a useful tool, it should remain just a tool, a support system. It should not become the creator of your work. The essence of anthropological research lies in lived experience like what you observe, feel, and understand in the field. The depth of interpretation that comes from those experiences cannot be replicated by AI. Your dissertation, your analysis, your insights must emerge from your own engagement with the field.

So, while we embrace new methods and technologies, the key is to stay grounded. Stick to the basics, because that is where the true strength and essence of anthropology lies.



Lalbangala: The Sacred Kitchen and Cultural Regulation of Purity among the Chuktia Bhunjia of Odisha- A Fieldnote



By Subham Prasad Sahoo

The Chuktia Bhunjia: A Brief Ethnographic Note

Chuktia Bhunjia is one of the thirteen PVTGs in Odisha, mainly inhabiting the forest and hilly areas of the Sunabeda Wildlife Reserve in Nuapada District. The name Bhunjia derives from the word bhum (earth), which indicates its traditional dependence on land and forest resources. In linguistics, they use mixed dialects, which are influenced by Baiga and Chhattisgarhi. The settlements are in relatively isolated hills, and their economy is based on subsistence agriculture, forest products collection and animal rearing. The religious life of Chuktia Bhunjia revolves around worshipping several gods, Sunadei being considered the supreme god. Village rituals and festivals such as Chaitra Jatra, Dasara, Gauthas Jatra, and Patalganga Jatra play an important role in reinforcing community solidarity.

Household Pattern and Spatial Organisation

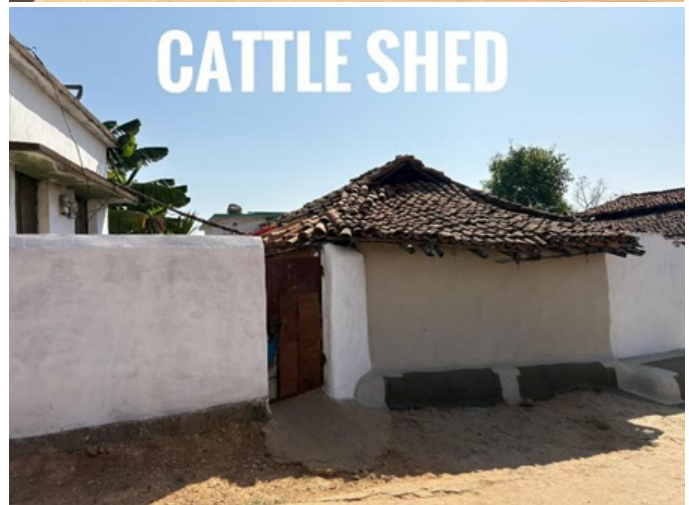
The traditional Chuktia Bhunjia family consists of three different buildings:

1. The main house (jhinjiri) is used for sleeping and storing cereals.
2. the kitchen (lalbangala); and
3. the cattle shed.

This spatial segregation reflects a cultural distinction between ordinary domestic activities and sacred practices. Among these, the Lalbangala occupies the most important position, as it serves both as a cooking space and a ritual centre associated with ancestral spirits.

Construction and Material Features of Lalbangala

The Lalbangala is constructed using locally available natural materials such as mud, wood, and thatch. Roofing is done with wild grasses, mainly Singkhar (*Pennisetum purpureum*) and Dabkhar (*Imperata cylindrica*). The floors are mixed with cow dung and mud, and the walls are painted with red soil (rata met), giving the structure its unique red colour. The word "Lalbangala" literally means "red house". The use of bricks and cement is strictly prohibited because it violates customary standards and is believed to offend the ancestors' spirits. Even in villages where pakka houses have been built under state schemes, households continue to build Lalbangala in its traditional form, usually in front of the main house. The surrounding areas of Lalbangala are kept clean, often decorated with flowers, reflecting both aesthetic sensibility and ritual purity.



Lalbangala as a Sacred Space

According to the Chuktia Bhunjia, Lalbangala is considered the most sacred space in the family. It is believed to be the residence of ancestors' spirits and household gods. Here cooking, food consumption and rituals are performed, making the Lalbangala central both to its livelihood and to its religious life. External persons and members of other clans are forbidden to enter. Even married daughters are not allowed to enter their mothers' homes because they are associated with another lineage after marriage. It is believed that violations of these standards result in ritual pollution and cause misfortune.

Rituals of Construction and Purification

Every household maintains its own Lalbangala. A new Lalbangala needs to be created when a son creates a distinct nuclear family after marriage. Following construction, a pigeon and a hen are offered to the household deity as part of the ritual sanctification. Holy water and milk are sprinkled inside the structure and on household members for purification. These rituals are performed by the village ritual specialist (Dinwari) on an auspicious day. In cases where the Lalbangala is believed to have been polluted—due to unauthorised entry or ritual transgression—it is demolished and burnt, and a new one is constructed after performing purification rites.

Purity, Pollution, and Gender Restrictions

The concept of purity and pollution associated with the Lalbangala is closely linked to gender and biological processes. Women are prohibited from entering the Lalbangala during menstruation, pregnancy, and certain stages of puberty. Women avoid entering the Lalbangala for seven days during menstruation. Pregnant women are restricted for a month and can only return after cleansing rituals.

After puberty, girls must follow certain rules, such as washing their feet before entering Lalbangala and strictly following food-related rules. These practices reflect deeply rooted cultural beliefs in the purity of the body and ritual order.

Social Control and Cultural Continuity

The strict regulation of the Lalbangala serves as an effective mechanism of social control. The belief that ancestral spirits constantly observe household conduct reinforces adherence to customary norms. Illness, crop failure, or other misfortunes are often interpreted as consequences of ritual violations related to the Lalbangala.

Despite increasing exposure to modern education, development programmes, and changing lifestyles, the symbolic importance of the Lalbangala remains intact. Although residential homes can undergo material changes, the kitchens are constructed and maintained in accordance with traditional standards, highlighting the cultural continuity of the Chuktia Bhunjia.

Conclusion

The Lalbangala occupies a central place in the socio-cultural life of the Chuktia Bhunjia. Far beyond its function as a cooking space, it represents a sacred domestic institution that regulates purity, gender relations, kinship boundaries, and ancestral worship. The persistence of the Lalbangala, even in the face of modern influences, underscores its significance as a marker of cultural identity and ritual order. This field note showed that understanding indigenous material cultures, such as Lalbangala, is essential for understanding India's wider social and cultural organization.



Indigenous Communities and Traditional Crafts. The Auspicious Shells of Irikpal: A Journey into Banjara Cowrie Craft



By Dr. Doraboina Udaya Kumar

Subject: Smt. Badli Bai, a Craftswoman from the Banjara Community in Irikpal Village, Baster Region, Chhattisgarh.

The Craft: Kaudi -Shell Craft (Cowrie Craft). It involves sewing seashells into fabrics to create items like Baskets, Jewellery, and Traditional Attire (Choli/Lehenga).

Cultural Significance: Cowries represent Goddess Lakshmi (Wealth and Prosperity) and are linked to Lord Shiva and protective deities in various myths.

Social Context: Smt. Badli Bai learned the Art from her in-laws. Despite receiving the State Level Handicraft Promotion Award in 2002-2003. She lives in an isolated home with limited travel facilities and seeks further financial assistance from the government.

Economic Aspect: Materials are sourced wholesale from Jagadpur. Products are sold in nearby towns and exporting to regions like Bastar, Raipur and Shimla etc.

Irikpal is a small village located in the heart of the Bastar region, Chhattisgarh, home to a vibrant tradition that weaves together divinity, history, and survival. Here, the Banjara community continues the practice of Cowrie Craft, or Kaudi Shellwork, a craft that transforms simple seashells into intricate cultural artifacts.

I have a great interest in knowing Indian art and craft forms. Accidentally, I watched a YouTube video regarding Irikpal Cowrie Craft - Badli Bai's video. After that, I visited Irikpal on 5th December 2025. I met Badli Bai, a master craftswoman who inherited this art from her father-in-law and mother-in-law. I faced a lot of difficulties tracing and reaching her home. It is isolated from the village, and a narrow road leads to her home. Now, she is 65 years old, and she taught this art to her son, daughter-in-law, and granddaughter. Now the whole family is continuing the family legacy by doing this art. Watching her sew shells into fabric is a lesson in patience; a single basket will take one day to complete, and it will cost Rs. 400-500. They are selling not only in the village but also exporting to other areas like Raipur, Bastar, Shimla, etc.

Initial state: Badli Bai's husband, Shri Hira Lokpal, was a recognized artisan, receiving the Rajya Hastha Shilpa Puraskar in 1997-98. After her husband's demise, she has not gone unnoticed. During 2002-2003, she was honored with the State Level Handicraft Promotion Award by the Chhattisgarh Government and received Rs.10000 in prize money.

However, the prestige of these awards stands in contrast to the daily realities of the artisans. She is getting Rs. 1000/- as an old age pension from the Chhattisgarh government; apart from this, she is not getting any support from the government. As we celebrate the "vibrant expression of creativity" found in cowrie craft, it is essential to recognize and support the practitioners who keep this ancient "shell money" history alive in the modern world.



Picture 1: Author with Badli Bai showing Cowrie Craft Basket.



Picture 2: Badli Bai Showing Her Craft Material.



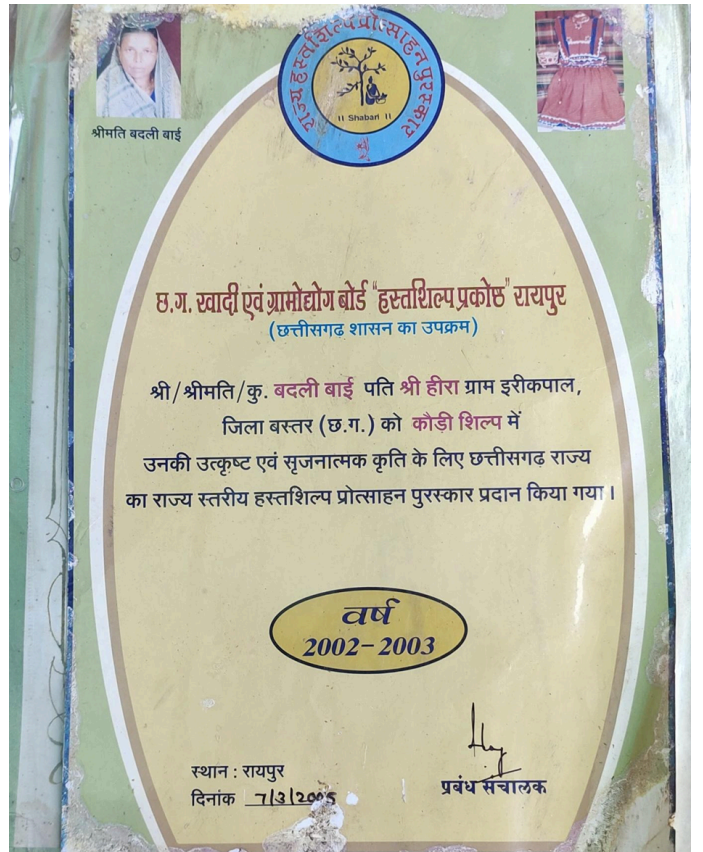
Picture 3: Badli Bai is Sewing Shells onto a Lehenga.



Picture 4: Badli Bai Showing Her Craft Material.



Picture 5: Author is buying wristbands from Badli Bai.



Picture 6: Badli Bai's State Level Handicraft Promotion Award by the Chhattisgarh government.

Mafia Raj: The Rule of Bosses in South Asia (2024)

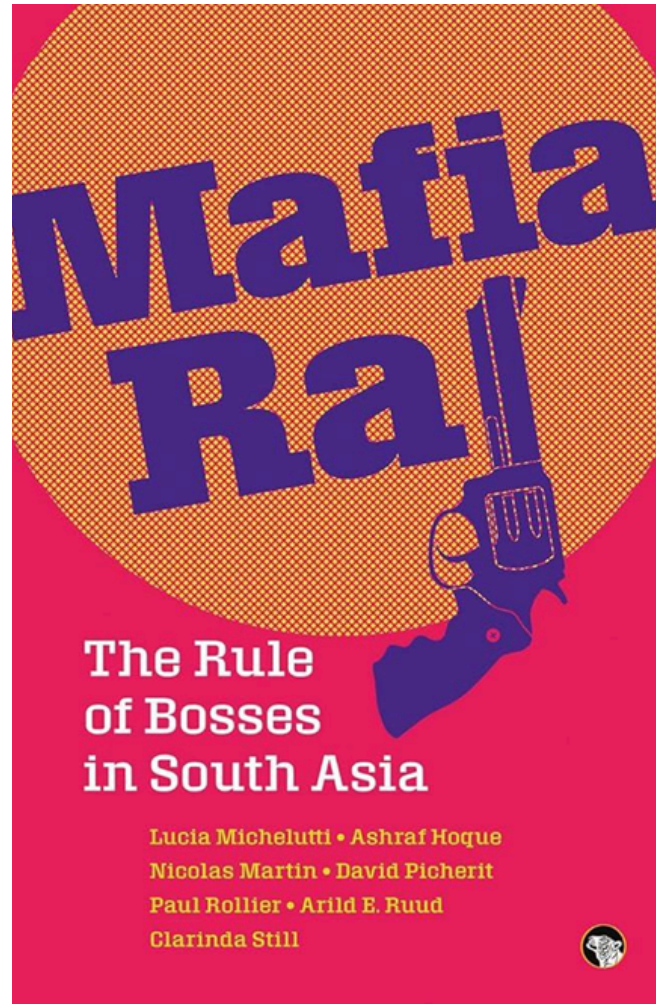


By Aditya Tyagi

Mafia Raj: The Rule of Bosses in South Asia provides a rigorous scholarly discourse on South Asian studies by employing theoretical contributions and ethnographic investigation to understand the worldwide impact of strongman politics through the lens of organised crime. This book is co-authored by Lucia Michelutti, Ashraf Hoque, Nicolas Martin, David Picherit, Paul Rollier, Arild E. Ruud, and Clarinda Still. It was first published in 2018 and reprinted in 2024. This reintroduction is well-timed because of the slew of events, making this book a revisit for academics, journalists, and law enforcement practitioners, such as the assassination of gangster politician Atiq Ahmad in police custody, and the suspicious death of Mukhtar Ansari in judicial custody, showing the thin line between crime, politics, and justice in postcolonial democracies. This book will help scholars by offering an alternative lens for examining these events, which will aid understanding of ongoing democratic backsliding, caste-based political mobilisation, and the criminalisation of politics in South Asia.

This book examines different types of boss heroes in Bangladesh, Pakistan, and India, emerging as a groundbreaking ethnographic intervention into the criminalisation of politics in post-liberalisation. The main argument on "the art of bossing" explores how bosses can be seen as entrepreneurial strongmen navigating the sphere of violent entrepreneurship, including land-grabbing, extortion rackets, or manipulating electoral systems. The chapter's headings evoke a filmic sensibility, using titles such as "The Godfather," "The Legend," and "The Henchman," which appropriates a noirish touch by foreshadowing how these characters construct stereotypical personalities by carving out their personal histories along the lines of Bollywood and Lollywood traditions. This book has deserved much criticism and praise for its vivid descriptions of so-called "bosses" that reside in a grey area between organised crime and legitimate authority.

However, the book uncritically supports a Euro-American approach rooted in charisma and brutality, rather than a more detailed analysis of embedded structures. The bosses are described not as major stakeholders in systems of exploitation that connect the state, banks, and violence, but as colourful anti-heroes by glorifying the virtue of masculine attractiveness, which unwittingly idealises the neoliberalization of violence. The empirical gap in this



book is its failure to address public procurement, the primary domain in which criminal networks can seize state assets. Multiple media reports state that public procurement, such as railway and sand mining tenders, has been the primary source of income for organised crime groups, as well as the central point of contention among them, defining their jurisdiction. Nonetheless, this book stands out as a seminal work in the ethnography of power and crime, highlighting the complex interconnections among democracy, violence, and charisma that characterise modern South Asian politics. The genius of this ethnography lies in its unwillingness to impose a theoretical framework on topics related to the South Asian region, which remains under-researched through an indigenous lens. To scholars working on organised crime, this book will serve both as an inspiration as well as a challenge to think outside the box.

Gupta Navratri and Das Mahavidya: A Tradition Guiding Human Existence Beyond the Physical



By R. Harini

Neha, in her article in February 2026 Anthro Bulletin - entitled "Gupt Navratri and Das Mahavidya: A Tradition Guiding Human Existence Beyond the Physical", introduces the former as the disciplined, experiential exploration of human consciousness transmitted through trained knowledge lineages external to the sphere of "mass religion". The author explores the Sadhana of the ten Mahavidyas (with and without initiation by a Guru) as the structural reorganization of consciousness across the ten core domains of "time, void, desire, fear, power, illusion, silence, death, awareness, and integration"; the ten metaphysical forms are cosmic frequencies propitiated through their own mantras. Concretized as a central tenant of Shaktism in texts such as the Devi Bhagavata Purana, the Mahavidyas represent ten facets of the Divine Mother (Mahadevi, Adi Parashakti) as the ultimate, primordial truth.

The article is an engaging and in-depth read, providing a wonderful insight into Gupt Navaratri and the worship of the ten Mahavidyas. As someone who has been deeply interested in Shaktism and the worship of the female primordial, the allegories intertwined in the iconographic appearances of the former has been a source of intrigue to me. Therefore, within this submission for Reflections, I shall be exploring the motifs and symbolism associated with each Mahavidya that were of particular interest to me, as well as substantiate them with strands of my own research in religion, faith and transcendence.

Note: I do wish to clarify here that I hold absolutely no authority or knowledge over the worship/Sadhana of the ten Mahavidyas (which the author of the original article has eloquently addressed). My reflections are primarily allegorical and symbolic, recounting what I have previously read and engaged with.

1. The ultimate form of Brahman: Devi Kali, Mahakali or Kalika as the devourer of Time, is iconographically striking with her ebony skin, lolling tongue, third-eye (perceiving the past, present and future), a necklace of decapitated heads and a skirt of severed arms. The more innumerable her forms, the more magnificent their attributions and descriptions.
2. The eternal mother: Devi Tara, "blue-skinned" and donning a tiger-skin skirt, is also envisioned as the nursing mother of Lord Shiva himself to neutralize the poisonous Halahala. The maternity of Devi Tara became of particular interest to me when reading about Bamakhepa, the "mad saint" of Tarapith, who

would spend his days in cremation grounds, unclothed and smoking hemp. Consuming offerings before they were offered to the deity, relieving himself with temple compounds and lying with dogs, Bamakhepa would transgress the corporeal and spatial by dissolving the categories of sacred and profane and in doing so, worshipped the goddess as a distinctly maternal figure.

"My Father (Shiva) is naked; my Mother (Tara) is also naked."

3. The material, astral and causal: Devi Tripura Sundari, associated with the powers of creation, protection and dissolution, is regarded as supreme divinity and exalted in the Lalita Sahasranama, which narrates the tale of her battle with Bhandasura. Her head bears the crescent moon and she sits on a throne whose legs are the Pancha Brahmas; the Jnana Khanda of Tripura Rahasya describes her in the form of "eternal consciousness". She is worshipped by the Shri Vidya (a movement of Shakta Tantrism) through the abstract Sri Chakra Yantra, symbolizing the union of the masculine and feminine through concentric levels of triangles.
4. The infinitesimal cosmos: Devi Bhuvaneshari as the sovereign mother of all space, of bhooḥ (earth), bhoovaḥ (atmosphere) and svaḥ (heavens), perceives the complete knowledge of the manifested worlds (Vanamali, 2024) through her three eyes. She is both formed and formless, embodying the universe and all her children that reside within it.
5. The destruction of obstacles to spiritual enlightenment: Devi Bhairavi, decked in red garments (and often red skinned) adorns her head with Chandra (The Moon) and her neck with a garland of skulls. The consort of Bhairava, her wrath and bloodthirst towards the cruel is as potent as her love for her children.
6. The cycle of sacrifice, destruction, creation and renewal: Devi Chinnamasta as the immortal Mahayogini sacrifices herself to replenish the world; self-decapitation rips off maya (illusion, ego and attachment) to attain jnana, moksha and self-realization. She carries her severed head in her hand or on a kapala, with three streams of blood feeding her and her companions (The yoginis Dakini and Varkini). In the pratyalidha stance, she stands over Kama and Rati, who are engaged in copulation, denoting victory over desire and the illusion of samsara.

- The “Void”: Devi Dhumavati, the divine “inauspicious” widow with her insatiable hunger (due to the loss of Purusha), rides in a horseless chariot and resides in cremation grounds. She is also the great teacher and guide, embodying primordial ignorance and truths of the “unmanifest”; she is “the power that destroys all thoughts, indeed Samadhi (death and liberation) itself.”
- The attainment of siddhis: Devi Bagalamukhi is the foundation of all sustaining powers; immobilizing a demon by striking his outstretched tongue, the yellow-laden goddess paralyzes malicious intent and offers precedence over the base senses
- Transcendence through Transgression: Devi Matangi or Uchchhishta-Matangini is associated with pollution, residue and impurity; the patron of left-overs is described in connotations with historically marginalized communities and is “outcasted” “herself”. Viewed sacrilegious in traditional Hindu worship, Devi Matangi is propitiated with half-eaten food offered in the ritually “polluted” Uchchhishta state; offerings of clothing stained with menstrual blood and objects associated with death and ceremonial disgust (animal heads, clothes of deceased individuals and ashes of a crow) are also presented to the Tantric form of Saraswati along with more traditional items such as camphor, saffron and bael leaves. By transcending notions of purity and pollution, the Sadhakas of the governess of inner thought (esoteric, instinctual and peripheral) and expression attain enlightenment.
- Protection from fear: The tenth Mahavidya, Devi Kamala or Devi Kamalatmika, is perceived as the Tantric characterization of Devi Lakshmi. Her associations with elephants denote an emphasis on fertility and her etymological allusion to the lotus flower indicate her detachment from the material world she is rooted in.

APPRECIATION FOR ANTHRO BULLETIN

Superb Sunita, many many congratulations Well done team AIF

- Prof Shalina Mehta

Thank you, all seniors n friends, we are trying to put our best efforts, and seek your support.

Sunita with two senior and three interns is able to come with monthly edition, congrats to her efforts, then institution like manav sanghralya with a system should do its duty to share with its stakeholders it's works.

- Prof Amitabh Pande

Colourful and very innovatively designed. Very good articles. One on chhena poda is superb.

Congratulations Sunitha Madam and best wishes always

- Dr. Khirod Chandra Moharana

Congratulations Anthro Bulletin..excellent as usual with rich varied information.

- Prof S.B Roy

Hearty congratulations to Professor Pandeyji and Professor Sunita Reddy. Well done. Keep it up.

- Prof PK Misra

Great way to share your good work Drs Sunita Reddy and APandey. Your timely bulletine would many others know about Anthro work. I small sure you would have a long list of people and institutes who receive it through your mailing list. Can I request you to add all institutes of ICMR , Medical college, Medical council, FOGYC, Dental councils, AYUSH, funding agencies like CSIR, DST, DBT, ICSSR, ICAREtc

- Dr Nita Mawar



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- 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/>

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- For our Distinguished Guest lecture series, an online lecture was organised and delivered by **Dr. Ruksana Zaman** on 30th March 2026 at 6:00 pm onwards

For more details - [Click here](#)

YouTube Live Link: [Click here](#)

DISTINGUISHED GUEST LECTURE
Reflexivity and Positionality: Fieldwork Experiences

Dr. Ruksana Zaman

Dr. Ruksana Zaman is an anthropologist and Associate Professor at Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU), New Delhi. She earned her PhD from the University of Delhi in 2007 with IGDS support and worked on health and social awareness projects at AIRA and INCLIS (2002-2008) before joining academia.

Her research areas include ethnicity, identity, conflict, dance and performance, emotions, visual anthropology, gender, and autoethnography. She has widely published, presented at national and international forums, and contributed to academic works including IGNOU course material, a Chitra Kalpalatna Fellow at Gandhi University, Barter (2018) and a trained Odissi dancer, she has also served on IGNOU's Academic Council (2019-2024), her recent and upcoming work focuses on (re)writing anthropology, gender, and lived experiences, with publications in journals, edited volumes, and books.

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