

ANTHRO BULLETIN

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ANTHROPOS INDIA FOUNDATION



A digital magazine that celebrates cultural diversities of India.

ABOUT ANTHROPOS INDIA FOUNDATION

Founded in 2011, Anthropos India Foundation (AIF) promotes the discipline of Anthropology, its philosophy and its methods to engage in applied and action research. Our work seeks to address issues of local communities through a bottom-up approach that is unique to their cultures and people. We conduct community-based research rooted in local knowledge systems, local culture and ecology to inform policy initiatives and drive transformational impact. AIF also conducts workshops, trainings and advocacy on various issues, especially on children. AIF promotes Visual Anthropology through vibrant, authentic, meaningful ethnographic films and photo documentation.

ABOUT ANTHRO BULLETIN

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

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

All submissions can be emailed to aif.newsletter2025@gmail.com.

We also welcome sponsors who would like to support this magazine.

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"The image was captured during my fieldwork in February 2022 at Ratay Busty, a remote village in Kalimpong district, West Bengal. It features a 78 year old Limbu tribal woman holding a stone tool that she continues to use for sharpening her agriculture implements, including sickle and knives. I believe this photo holds a significant ethnographic value, as it documents the persistence of traditional lithic technology in contemporary indigenous practice."



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

Dear Readers,
Greetings from AIF!

First of all, I feel deeply elated and truly blessed to have Prof. K. K. Misra as our Chief Editor. He was my cherished teacher 35 years ago, and yet I continue to learn from him with every interaction. A scholar with a golden heart, he embodies empathy, integrity, and genuine care. We eagerly look forward to the pearls of wisdom he shares in every issue of the Anthro Bulletin, enriching us through his thoughtful messages.

I would also like to express my heartfelt gratitude to Prof. Shalina Mehta, whose insightful and compelling messages have been a delight to read. With her sharp critical eye and engaging writing, she brings both depth and joy to every contribution. Shalina ma'am has been a steadfast mentor and ardent supporter of AIF. We draw immense inspiration from her intellect, her candour, and her unwavering commitment to speaking the truth without hesitation.

This November issues continue to celebrate the festivals like Kartik Chat and Shukla Paksha, a festival of light, motherhood and eco-spiritual devotion. Neha Singh article, brings the four day journey of purity and five Shukla paksha Sundays observed with offerings of five elements, deeply symbolic and spiritual, giving visual treat. However, as a Disaster professional, I would like to share deep concerns for the loss of lives while performing rituals... is a wake up call for the state to ensure mitigation plans to ensure safe and secure celebrations. Joy of celebrations should not become suffering and sorrow.

Nibedita Bhoi's article enlighten us about Bali Jatra, celebrated in Odisha, earlier known as Kalinga, showing glorious golden age of trade, cultural, spiritual exchange between Kalinga and Southeast Asia - specifically to Bali, Java, Sumatra, Borneo and Sri Lanka. The historical trade connections can be harnessed further, given the cultural continuity and similarities. On a different themes of anthropological relevance, Ritwik Banerjee's Ethno Fusion AI reconceptualises ethnography as an evolving epistemology by integrating clinical narratives with structured data in a multimodal Big Query-Vertex AI pipeline. Using synthetic patient datasets, it models ethnographic signals to improve healthcare predictions, challenging data hierarchies and demonstrating computational ethnography's potential to capture lived clinical realities.

Another article by Anshu Arora, "Numbers and Narratives," shares... modern economics relies heavily on data, yet numbers alone cannot capture human realities. Metrics reflect institutional choices and power, often obscuring lived experiences. Narratives from anthropology and the humanities add meaning, revealing motivations and complexities behind economic behaviour. Combining numbers with stories creates more empathetic, accurate, and socially grounded research.

The Anthropologist of the month is Dr. Stephen Christopher, a research affiliate at King's College London

and Co-Lead of the John Templeton Foundation grant (#63357) "New Religiosity and the Digital Study of Eudaimonia" (2025-27). Stephen has spent years researching the Gaddis of Himachal Pradesh. The human side of Stephen is to encourage young scholars and help them navigate the early stages of their



careers. He has guided three scholars to receive a Fulbright grant, including a Vietnamese student and two Gaddi students. One of the Gaddi students shifted from a small Himachali village to Yale University! This month, Stephen gave a lecture on "Levelling up your PhD: Pitfalls and Possibilities" to graduate students at JNU.

Amarnath article takes you all to the Kudakkallu Parambu - Megalithic Burial Site, Cheramangadu, Thrissur district Kerala. Many of the India's archeological sites are still under studied and known to general public, makes us wonder...that is India.

The photo essay by Yash Singh Sisodiya captures the remarkable resilience of residents living in Indore's slum communities—Nand Bagh, Musakhedi, and Avantika Nagar. Despite poverty being writ large on their everyday realities and the constraints of shanty living, these neighbourhoods display extraordinary coping capacities through micro-enterprises, adaptive housing, shared resources, and strong social networks. Women-led stitching units, community solidarity during floods, and small green pockets carved out of cramped spaces reveal a deep sense of ingenuity, dignity, and hope. Together, these images illustrate how residents transform limited means into vibrant, self-sustaining livelihoods.

We are also delighted to have two international scholars, Annabel and Agbede, interning with us. Annabel contributes a perceptive review of Anthropology Inside Out, drawing attention to the book's emphasis on the depth of fieldwork—seeing, sensing, and engaging beyond the mere act of note-taking. Her reflections remind us that ethnography unfolds through immersion, intuition, and the everyday relationships built in the field. Agbede, on the other hand, offers a fascinating comparative perspective. Building on Neha's earlier article on the Jeetiya festival, he draws parallels with rituals among his own Yoruba community in Nigeria. His essay explores how food cultures carry symbolic meaning, showing how specific dishes used in naming ceremonies become vessels of spirituality and sacred communication. Together, their contributions enrich our understanding of cross-cultural practices and the diverse ways communities infuse everyday life with ritual significance.

Happy reading ...

The Future of Humanity through an Anthropological Lens

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

It is a rare and humbling privilege to have been invited by Dr. Sunita Reddy, Managing Editor of Anthro Bulletin, to assume the role of Chief Editor of this digital magazine, issued monthly by the Anthropos India Foundation. Words fall short of conveying my profound gratitude to Dr. Reddy for entrusting me with a responsibility that is both demanding and deeply rewarding. I also owe heartfelt appreciation to my friend, colleague, and mentor, Professor Shalina Mehta, whose erudition and intellectual grace have immeasurably enriched this widely read monthly publication, who has been the Chief Editor for the last ten months. With utmost humility, I must confess that my endeavor will be nothing more than an earnest attempt to carry forward the distinguished academic legacy she has so thoughtfully built, although it may not match her wit and wisdom. Ever since Dr. Sunita Reddy invited me to write a message for Anthro Bulletin, I have found myself contemplating what theme might truly resonate with the readers of this digital magazine. It occurred to me that I might reflect briefly on the paradox of our times: the desire for predictability in an age increasingly shaped by uncertainty, and on the ways anthropology can illuminate the pathways to sustainable human survival amid a host of looming, human-made disruptions. In this spirit, I wish to consider two interrelated questions: the future of humanity, and the role of anthropology in deepening our understanding of the myriad conditions that shape human endurance and continuity.

Human evolution has been shaped by both biological and cultural forces. While multiple human species existed a million years ago, modern humans have changed significantly in the last 10,000 years due to the shift to agriculture. With the availability of abundant food, humans began to become heavier and taller. However, Thomas Mailund, a bioinformatics researcher, predicts that future humans may become smaller as they adapt to crowded, energy-efficient environments. He estimates that the global population could reach 11.2 billion by 2100, though population levels in the distant future remain impossible to foresee. Jason A. Hodgson, another researcher in Bioinformatics and Bigdata, argues that ongoing genetic mutations and future technologies, such as genetic implants, will gradually alter human appearance and could eliminate many genetic diseases before birth. While scientists foresee longer, healthier lives, the larger uncertainty is whether human technological culture can sustain our species for a million years, provided catastrophic natural events do not intervene. The most significant transformation in human history was the Industrial Revolution in the 18th Century that marked a shift from agricultural societies to more industrialized and urbanized ones. Innovations such as the transcontinental railroads, electricity, and market economies started to reshape traditional societal structures worldwide. This period saw a move toward more individual-centric societies, and the protective influence of kinship networks began to wane. Numerous anthropological studies have documented this shift. Globalization and increased mobility are intensifying cultural interactions and migrations, leading to ongoing debates over multicultural issues such as religious attire, language education, minority rights, and workplace discrimination. These challenges, highlighted by the global

Refugee crisis, underscore the need for anthropological insight to understand and address cultural differences in an increasingly interconnected world. Anthropological tools and methods, which are particularly useful in the context of addressing an unexpected distant future, can be used to gain a greater understanding of the short-term human term.



Cultural relativism is the first technique we use. In order to study society objectively, anthropologists must embrace cultural relativism. It is a methodological tool rather than an ethical precept. It is entirely feasible to accept and understand individuals on their own terms without adopting their viewpoint or endorsing their actions. "You don't have to be one to know one", as Clifford Geertz aptly said once. Ethnography, or fieldwork, is a central method in anthropology that relies on long-term, time-intensive immersion in a community. Through extended participant observation, often lasting a year or more, anthropologists gain deep insights into local ways of life and cultural subtleties that cannot be accessed through other research approaches. Comparing different types of data is the third most important technique used by anthropologists. Comparing societies based on human rights, environmental sustainability, or development is not the primary goal of comparison. Anthropologists who research on harmonious, multi-ethnic civilizations provide role models for cohabitation that can be applied to other contexts and policies. Actually, anthropological comparison yields knowledge that serves as a solid basis for developing forward-thinking strategies. Anthropology, with its theoretical and methodological tools, provides culturally sensitive, human-centered solutions to global challenges by drawing on deep knowledge of local cultures and belief systems. Its holistic, interdisciplinary nature, combining insights from fields like economics, biology, sociology, and political science, enables it to address complex crises such as climate change, pandemics, poverty, forced migration, and social inequalities. By integrating traditional knowledge with scientific data, anthropology also contributes meaningfully to policy-making. Anthropologists are their best in understanding the societal fall-out of the present-day technological revolutions, viz. artificial intelligence, biotechnology and bioinformatics, and digitization. Anthropologists help in developing ethically sound technology policies, keeping in view human rights and social justice, so that the benefits from technology become equitable and non-discriminatory. These days, anthropology and its methods of understanding civilizations and cultures are extremely important for comprehending issues that may arise in the future. Tim Ingold explains this further by saying, "Crucially, it requires us to think of anthropology as a way of studying with people, rather than of making studies of them. This is the key difference of approach. We learn from them, not just about them. This is what it means to undergo an anthropological education." Anthropologists can understand the situations better from an emic point of view, although they certainly do not have the magic box to solve all global problems. Their understanding makes them optimists to see a better and liveable world in future.

Kartik Chhath & the Five Shukla Paksha Sundays: A Festival of Light, Motherhood, and Eco-Spiritual Devotion



By Neha Singh

Among all Indian festivals, Chhath stands apart as a celebration of purity, discipline, motherhood, and ecological harmony. Observed mainly in Bihar, Jharkhand, Eastern Uttar Pradesh, and Nepal, this ancient festival restores the bond between human beings and the natural world. It arrives shortly after Diwali, at a time when the air is cool, the sky is clear, and the rivers glow with the reflections of rice lamps and prayers.

While the widely known four-day Kartik Chhath gathers entire communities on riverbanks, the less-known but equally sacred five Shukla Paksha Sundays are observed quietly at home. Together, they form a complete cycle of devotion to the Sun (Surya) and the Mother Goddess (Chhathi Maiya)—a union of energy and motherhood that has shaped this festival for thousands of years.

Vedic Roots: When Sunlight Became Prayer

Long before temples were built, the first worship space for humans was the open sky, and the first deity was the Sun. In the Rigveda, sages are described standing in water during sunrise and sunset, offering “arghya”—a humble bowl of water that catches and releases the sunlight. They believed that sunlight carried ojas, the vital strength that heals, purifies, and sustains life. These early practices grew into the structured tradition that later became Chhath. Standing barefoot on sand, fasting without water, and offering prayers in clean natural surroundings—all these reflect the ancient Vedic relationship between humans and the elements.

The Birth of the Mother Goddess Śaṣṭhī

As life expanded, the gods realized that creation needed more than energy—it needed protection. From the brilliance of Surya arose Śaṣṭhī Devi, the guardian of children, fertility, pregnancy, and family well-being. In the folk heart of India, she came to be known as Chhathi Maiya—a gentle, maternal force believed to watch over every child. For families dealing with illness, loss, or the hope for a child, Chhathi Maiya offers comfort and assurance. Her association with Kartikeya (Skanda) gives her the title Skandamata, while in the Vedas she resonates with Usha, the goddess of dawn. Thus, in Chhath, the Sun symbolizes life-giving light, and Chhathi Maiya represents life-protecting love—a beautifully balanced philosophy rarely found in other festivals.

Kartik Chhath: The Four-Day Journey of Purity

Kartik Chhath begins six days after Diwali. Homes are cleaned thoroughly, courtyards are coated with fresh mud, and the aroma of jaggery and rice fills the air. Unlike other festivals where decoration is often outward, Chhath emphasizes an inner and outer cleansing that prepares families for discipline and devotion.

Traditional songs—sung only after Lakshmi Puja and never before—create an atmosphere that is emotional, reverent, and deeply connected to ancestral memory. The songs often recall the love between mother and child, the pain of separation, and the eternal trust between devotees and Chhathi Maiya.

1. Nahay-Khay: Purity Begins with Simplicity

On the first day, devotees bathe in rivers or ponds, then eat a simple meal—usually ash-gourd and rice—cooked in bronze or clay vessels without garlic, onion, or excess spices. This marks the beginning of mental, physical, and spiritual purification. In ancient times, men often performed this vow dressed only in saffron dhotis. Today, women participate more widely, wearing simple sarees and minimal jewelry, symbolizing devotion rather than display.

2. Kharna: The Sweetness of Fasting

The second day is one of complete fasting—no food, no water. At sunset, the fast is broken with kheer made of jaggery, handmade rotis, and bananas. A small portion is first offered to Chhathi Maiya, then the devotees themselves taste a tiny amount. The remaining prasada is distributed to neighbors, children, and visitors. Kharna prasada is believed to carry healing energy, because on this day, devotees are thought to be under the direct grace of the goddess.

3. Sandhya Arghya: Surrender at Sunset

The third day is the most breathtaking. Families walk to the riverbank with bamboo baskets filled with seasonal fruits, sugarcane, coconuts, and handmade thekua. Women dressed in bright colors form long lines in the shallow water, standing with utmost discipline and devotion.

As the sun begins to set, the river glows orange. Hands rise. Lamps flicker. Songs fill the air.

The offering of the Evening Arghya symbolizes gratitude for the day, for life, and for the countless blessings often taken for granted. The atmosphere is mystical—somewhere between light and darkness, hope and surrender.

4. Usha Arghya: Receiving the First Light

The most sacred moment of Chhath is the Morning Arghya, offered before sunrise on the fourth day. Standing again in the river, devotees wait in silence as the sky transitions from blue to gold. This moment represents renewal, a fresh beginning, and the acceptance of divine blessings.

After the prayer, devotees break their long nirjala fast by drinking water and eating a piece of prasada. The vow is complete—but its purity remains in the home and heart for a long time.

The Five Shukla Paksha Sundays: The Gentle Extension of Kartik Chhath

After the grand public celebration of Kartik Chhath, many families continue their devotion privately through the five Sundays of the Shukla Paksha. This tradition is gentler, quieter, and deeply symbolic.

Why Sunday?

Sunday is the day of the Sun—Aditya-vār. Worshipping on this day strengthens the blessings of Kartik Chhath, especially for family unity, child safety, and future prosperity.

How are the Sundays observed?

These rituals vary between homes but follow a simple pattern:

The devotee cooks a pure, vegetarian meal after bathing. In many households, only the devotee and the youngest child eat this food. Each week, five items or offerings are made—symbolizing the five elements (earth, water, fire, air, sky). Every Sunday represents a gradual strengthening of protection and harmony in the home. The fifth Sunday is considered most auspicious; it completes the spiritual circle that Kartik Chhath begins.

An Eco-Friendly Festival Ahead of Its Time

Chhath is perhaps the only major Indian festival with zero commercialization and zero intoxication. Everything used—bamboo baskets, clay diyas, seasonal fruits, earthen cooking stoves—is biodegradable.

Fasting without salt balances the body.

Standing in water improves circulation.

Early-morning exposure to sunlight enhances immunity.

This makes Chhath not just a cultural ritual, but also a scientifically aligned tradition that respects health, nature, and sustainability.

A Festival of Emotional and Spiritual Healing

Many families observe Chhath after a difficult year—illness, loss, or hardship. The festival becomes a silent conversation between the devotee and the divine. It offers: emotional purification strength to endure challenges a sense of maternal protection hope for the future and a return to inner peace. For women especially, Chhath becomes a personal journey of courage, sacrifice, and love—qualities that define motherhood itself.

Conclusion: The Light That Lives Beyond the River

Kartik Chhath and the five Shukla Sundays together reveal a complete spiritual philosophy:

Life must be balanced by discipline.

Energy must be protected by motherhood.

And devotion must remain connected to nature.

In an age of noise and rush, Chhath reminds us to pause, breathe, and feel the warmth of the rising sun—a reminder that even after the darkest night, light always returns.



Image 1: Day 1 Chhath Nahay Khay holy dip and Surya Arghya.

Image 2: Day 2 Kharna Prasada Pujan and Prasada eating by the devotees before Nirjala, Photo taken by the writer, at Nirsa Dhanbad Jharkhand.



Image 3: 32 years Mannat Fulfilling Chhath Offering with Band Baja and devotee's 5 times bowing to the Sun during reaching the Ghat.



Image 4: The final bowing to sun before Prasada Distribution



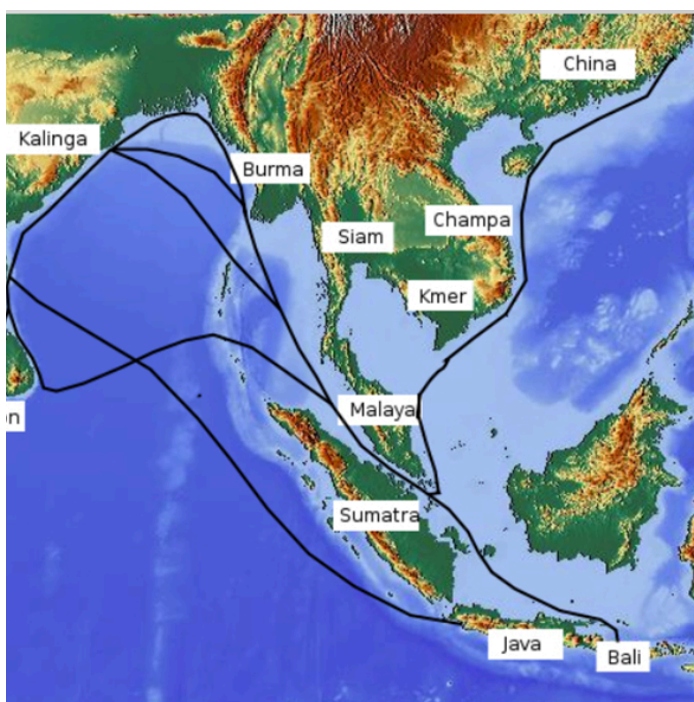
Image 5: After Sunset Worship (Sandhya Araghya) moments. Image 6: Chhath Etwar Worship Rituals similar to Chhath Offering at Home water filled tub instead of ghaat (River), Image taken by Google (as shared by the devotees)

Bali Jatra of Odisha : A Voyage to Bali



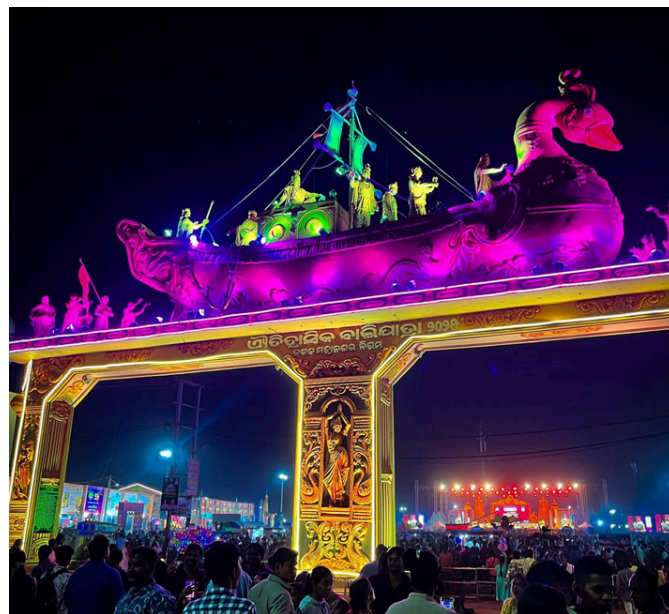
By Nibedita Bhoi

The Bali Jatra, literally meaning "Voyage to Bali," is a unique socio-cultural event with a glorious history that commemorates the vast maritime tradition of ancient Odisha, earlier known as Kalinga. Historians and government sources confirm that the festival celebrates the transoceanic voyages undertaken by brave and adventurous Kalinga traders, called Sadhabas, to Southeast Asian countries like Bali, Java, Sumatra, Borneo, and Sri Lanka. This ancient seafaring prowess placed Kalinga at a high position in India's maritime activities, with contacts extending from the Roman Empire and Persia in the west to China, Japan, and Ceylon in the east, earning Kalinga's king the epithet "Lord of the Sea" (as per Kalidas's *Raghuvamsha*). The festival keeps alive the memory of this golden age of trade, cultural, and spiritual exchange, which established deep ties between Kalinga and Southeast Asia.



(Source : <https://indianculture.gov.in/stories/bali-yatra#>)

Annually, on the full moon of Kartik Purnima, the traditional day the traders set sail—the festival transforms the Mahanadi riverbanks near Barabati Fort in Cuttack into one of Asia's largest open trade fairs, sprawling across nearly 100 acres. The commercial bustle is deeply interwoven with ritual; at dawn, the Boita Bandana ceremony is observed, where people float miniature boats (Boitas) carrying lamps and offerings, paying homage to the Sadhabas and their safe return.



Beyond its historical significance and ritual heart, Bali Yatra is a modern, massive cultural and commercial convergence. The fair hosts thousands of stalls selling everything from traditional Odisha art and craft to modern entrepreneurial ventures, generating significant economic activity.

The event has also gained modern recognition, notably achieving a Guinness World Record in 2022 for the mass crafting of paper boats, solidifying its status as a remarkable and record-breaking gathering. While the festival is organized by the Odisha government and receives participation from the Ministry of Culture, it has not yet been officially granted 'National Fair' status by the Central Government, a recognition that would further underscore its cultural and historical significance.

Ultimately, Bali Yatra is a voyage that never ends—a timeless celebration that connects history, faith, commerce, and community, reminding every Odia of their ancestors' courage and enterprise.

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Narrative Signals in Predictive Systems: A Pipeline for Computational Ethnography

By Ritwik Banerjee

In recent years, the convergence of ethnographic inquiry and computational tools has sparked a methodological reawakening across the social sciences. While Digital Anthropology has explored “methods mashups” that apply ethnographic principles to digital domains, such efforts often treat ethnography as a fixed template—stable, universal, and transferable. However, according to Brooker, re-examining anthropology allows us to rethink ethnography as a constantly evolving epistemology instead of a fixed methodology (Brooker, 2022). EthnoFusionAI, a BigQuery-powered pipeline for modelling clinical meaning across modalities (Banerjee, 2025), is a technical demonstration of this rethinking. It operationalises ethnographic logic within a computational framework. This pipeline demonstrates how unstructured clinical narratives can be efficiently utilised to address common classification and regression problems in healthcare systems rather than being left as peripheral artifacts.

In contemporary clinical systems, the separation between structured metrics and unstructured media is more than a technical gap—it’s an epistemological blind spot. Structured data like Lab results, billing codes, and demographic fields dominate the predictive modelling. On the other hand, ethnographic signals embedded in documents, images, and audio remain peripheral. This divide makes it difficult to interpret the lived realities of patients and clinicians alike. For example, healthcare billing complexity may not merely be a function of procedure codes. It might reflect sociocultural context embedded in clinical documents and ethnicity-linked narratives. Drawing from Bjerre-Nielsen’s framework (Bjerre-Nielsen & Glavind, 2022), I try to bridge this divide between high-frequency digital traces and deep ethnographic context. EthnoFusionAI is my attempt to bridge that divide.

In the machine learning context, a pipeline is defined as a structured workflow that automates building, training, and deployment of a machine learning model. Built on BigQuery (a serverless, highly scalable, and multi-cloud data warehouse) and Google Cloud Vertex AI Platform, EthnoFusionAI is a multimodal pipeline that fuses structured clinical data with semantic signals from unstructured media. It treats medical ethnography not as an annotation, but as a clinical reality—something to be modelled, interpreted, and acted upon. I have developed this pipeline as part of the Kaggle data science competition BigQuery AI - Building the Future of Data.

To operationalize this vision, I generated synthetic data for 10,000 patients using a python script (Python version 3.13.1). In this way I have simulated behavioural logs, care timelines, referral pathways, and patient profiles in structured tables. These structured tables are ingested into BigQuery, while unstructured media are stored in Google Cloud Storage.

Using BigQuery’s Object Table interface, these media assets are indexed and joined with semantic metadata, forming a unified table. This acts as a structured layer over the unstructured data to demonstrate SQL-based querying of ethnographic signals. This is my attempt to reconfigure how healthcare systems interpret narrative content. My pipeline uses a pre-trained text embedding model (text_embedding_gecko_publisher_model) to generate semantic signals using VertexAI and fuses them with structured features. This way the pipeline creates a multimodal fusion that supports predictive modelling across four healthcare metrics: Discharge Time, Portal Engagement, Billing Complexity, and Referral Conversion. These four models are trained with fused embeddings to test how ethnographic signals can enhance healthcare management efficiency.

This fusion logic exemplifies Sapienza’s call for multidisciplinary approaches to digital traces (Sapienza & Lehmann, 2021). My pipeline does not merely add ethnographic data to an existing healthcare modelling system. It reorients the modelling process around lived experiences of patients and clinicians. From an anthropological perspective, EthnoFusionAI challenges the hierarchy of data types in healthcare systems. It resists the over emphasis of numeric fields over narrative fragments and proposes a computational ethnographic model where the healthcare reality is distributed across modalities. It also foregrounds infrastructure—Object Tables, embeddings, dashboards—as ethnographic artifacts in their own right, shaping how clinical knowledge is produced and interpreted. In conclusion, EthnoFusionAI is a methodological intervention in healthcare setting. It is a preliminary demonstration of how computational tools can augment ethnographic thinking by fusing structured and unstructured data. It builds machine learning models that think more like humans do—contextually, narratively, and interpretively. This is computational ethnography in action, and it points toward a future where medical anthropology and machine learning co-author the clinical record.

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Numbers and Narratives: The Human Side of Economics Research



By Ashu Arora

'There are lies, damned lies and statistics.'

Crunching numbers has become central to modern economic research, and no study today feels complete without a graph, an index, or a regression table. While the twentieth century saw the dominance of theoretical frameworks, the discipline has shifted since the 1980s toward empirical and application-oriented research. Numbers today do more than support arguments - they define what counts as truth.

In his book, *How Numbers Rule the World*, the author, Lorenzo Fioramonti argues that experts who work with numbers eventually become the guardians of social trust. Their control over data reshapes the principal-agent relationship: citizens, elected representatives, and stakeholders, the principals, often become dependent on experts, the agents, to interpret reality. Economist Morton Schapiro, in his book, *What Economists Can Learn from the Humanities*, similarly notes that economists are often uncomfortable with anything that cannot be placed neatly into an equation. As a result, culture, emotion, social norms, and lived experiences often remain outside the discipline's analytical frame. Even though economists study issues like poverty cycles or voter behaviour, rarely do they cite anthropology or sociology, disciplines that are fundamentally concerned with the meaning behind human actions. This brings us to a simple truth: numbers are not mirrors of reality. Data is collected, designed, and framed by particular institutions with particular objectives. Numbers are not harmful. But when power imbalances shape what is measured and how it is represented, numbers cannot be allowed to "speak for themselves" as they are partial accounts. Here, poverty measurement is a good example. Various institutions set very different thresholds - from the UN's \$1.25 per day definition of extreme poverty to the World Bank's current international poverty line of \$2.15, each threshold produces a dramatically different picture of poverty.

Therefore, even if numbers speak volumes, they must be accompanied by narrative to complete the picture. This idea complements cognitive scientist Rafael Núñez, who argues that numbers themselves are cultural products - just like writing or architecture and language and cultural traits are necessary for the establishment of number itself. This implies that numbers alone cannot explain reality; they require meaning, interpretation, and lived experience to become whole.

Consider the example of schooling in India. At the primary level (Grades 1 to 5), the gross enrollment ratio is above 100 per cent, suggesting high participation, even accounting for underage and overage students. Yet the ASER 2024 report reveals that only 20.9 per cent of Grade 3 students can read

a Grade 2 text, and only 28.2 per cent can perform a basic subtraction problem. Here, the numbers capture attendance and the narrative captures learning. The statistic celebrates enrollment, but the lived experience exposes the quality gap. This dichotomy shows how numbers can compress the complexity hidden in metrics.

This tension becomes sharper in an age when AI models analyse massive datasets and generate conclusions at an unprecedented scale. While data helps us identify patterns, it cannot fully capture social reality. Narratives, the human stories behind the numbers, add texture to trends by revealing aspiration, vulnerability, identity, and context. Economic decisions about work, migration, or spending behaviour are never purely rational. Anthropology enriches economics precisely because it explains the why behind these behaviours: why people move, why they save, why they refuse certain jobs, and why community norms shape economic choices.

To get a complete and unbiased picture, numbers and narratives must work in a tandem. Humanising economics means paying attention to the lived experiences behind the graphs so that research becomes more empathetic, grounded, and relevant. Every data point represents someone's struggle, choice, compromise, or hope. Recognising that makes us not only better researchers, but better listeners and better storytellers of the human condition hidden within the spreadsheets.



Dr. Stephen Christopher



Interview by Saba Farhin

Dr. Stephen Christopher is an anthropologist of religion whose research spans India, Japan, and Vietnam, exploring the intersections of religion, politics and economics. Between 2025–27, he is the Co-Lead of the John Templeton Foundation project “New Religiosity and the Digital Study of Eudaimonia”, a global study investigating the relationship between new religiosity and wellbeing among 400 religious groups in five world regions.

Dr. Christopher has published widely on topics including new religions, ecology, tribal politics, reservation, religious conversion, corporate religion, manga, pop culture and Tibetan Buddhism. His recent works include the edited volume - Caste, COVID-19, and Inequalities of Care: Lessons from South Asia and special issues of South Asian Diaspora, The Journal of Vietnamese Studies, Implicit Religion, Himalaya, and The Journal of the Tribal Intellectual Collective India. During his B.A., Dr. Christopher studied at the University of Hyderabad and was affiliated with the CSDS in Delhi. During his Ph.D., he was affiliated with the Institute of Chinese Studies in Delhi. After earning a doctorate in Anthropology from Syracuse University (2018), Dr. Christopher completed a JSPS postdoc at Kyoto University (2019), a Marie Curie postdoc at the University of Copenhagen (2022–24) and Visiting Research Fellowship at Nichibunken in Kyoto (2025). He is currently a Research Affiliate at King's College London (at Inform, based at Theology and Religious Studies). Dr. Christopher is the Co-Editor of Contemporary Buddhism and Asia Editor at the Database of Religious History (UBC). He has taught at nine universities across the USA, Asia and Europe. He is currently curating a museum exhibition and producing an ethnographic film in Vietnam.

What initially drew you to anthropology, and how did your fieldwork experiences across India, Japan, and Vietnam shape your intellectual journey as an anthropologist of religion?

As a child, I was raised in a conservative Evangelical environment in suburban Pennsylvania (USA). I often attended church three times a week, read only Christian books, listened exclusively to Christian music, and mostly had Christian friends. My childhood was steeped in what could be described as an intense religious atmosphere—marked by experiences such as exorcisms, faith healing, intercessory prayer, dream interpretation, and a prosperity gospel form of religiosity. Church leaders and laity sometimes

portrayed cultural and religious practices, especially from Asia, as backwards, harmful, or even demonic. My hometown itself lacked much cultural diversity, reinforcing this narrow worldview. However, during high school, I became friends with an Indian American student.



Through him, I was introduced to Hinduism and tasted Indian food for the first time. Around the same time, I read R.K. Narayan's condensed version of The Mahabharata and watched Peter Brook's film adaptation. These early encounters sparked a deep interest in South Asia and its cultures. By the time I entered university, I knew I wanted to become an anthropologist focused on South Asia. I was fortunate to study abroad through Semester at Sea, a floating university that visits multiple countries in a single semester. I fell in love with India, Vietnam, and Japan—countries that are now central to my research. A professor from the University of Hyderabad who taught on the ship encouraged me to study in India, and during my junior year, I spent a semester at the University of Hyderabad studying tribal cultures. That experience laid the foundation for my long-term academic engagement with tribes in the Himalayas, specifically the Gaddis of Himachal Pradesh. Since then, I have lived in India for over eight years, conducting research across Himachal Pradesh and Ladakh. Although my Evangelical upbringing now feels distant, I am grateful that it provided me with first-hand experience of certain modes of religious thought and practice—insights that have shaped my work as an anthropologist of religion. Today, I study new religious movements, esotericism, Hinduism, and Buddhism using an ethnographic, “lived religion” approach that focuses on the everyday experiences of ordinary people.

Your research spans diverse themes, from tribal politics and religious conversion to corporate religion and queerness in Asia. Which of your projects or findings do you feel has been your most meaningful contribution to the discipline so far, and why?

It often feels like the current project is the most important one—but that's likely just the bias of the present moment. When I reflect on the range of topics I've researched, I'm hesitant to single out any one

project as the most meaningful. Yet each has been driven by a clear sense of purpose. For instance, I'm proud of my fieldwork with Scheduled Caste Gaddis. I believe I am among the first scholars to anthropologically examine the existence of Dalit communities within tribes—communities that are often excluded from the 5th and 6th Schedules and denied access to tribal reservation quotas. This intersection of caste and tribe remains a misunderstood and under-researched area within the broader study of India's tribal populations. If my work has contributed in any way to shedding light on this issue, I am grateful.

In Japan, a very different ethnographic context, I'm also proud to be the first scholar to systematically investigate the Tibetan diaspora there, particularly its entanglement with Japanese right-wing politics. This is a sensitive and controversial subject, and I hope my forthcoming publications will help broaden our understanding of both the diversity within the Tibetan diaspora and the complex forms of political support it receives.

Finally, my research in Vietnam has explored the rapid popularization of Tibetan Buddhism—a phenomenon that, until now, has received little attention in Tibetan Studies. I've focused on how Tibetan Buddhism is expressed through new forms of religiosity, often involving syncretic religious movements and commercial, for-profit ventures. I hope that the upcoming 2026 museum exhibition, research catalog, and ethnographic film will help bring greater public awareness to these emerging expressions of Tibetan Buddhism in Vietnam. I anticipate that Vietnam will become even more of a major hub of Tibetan Buddhist patronage soon.

How do you see the field of anthropology evolving in the coming decades, both in India and globally, especially in relation to digital cultures, religion, and well-being?

Anthropology is not a predictive science, so it's difficult to say with certainty how the discipline will evolve. I can only speak from my experience in the United States, where I received my PhD training. From my perspective—and I acknowledge this is subjective—it seems that cultural anthropology has moved away from the height of postmodernism. In my view, this shift is a positive development. This turn is, in part, a response to the limitations of certain postmodern approaches—particularly forms of auto-ethnography and so-called “me-search” that often lacked empirical grounding. While it remains essential for the field to grapple with questions of subjectivity, power and interpretation, I believe (or at least hope) that cultural anthropology has moved beyond excessive particularism and fragmentation, and toward a renewed emphasis on empiricism, cross-cultural comparison, and meaningful intellectual collaboration across cultures.

Anthropologists often speak about collaboration, but in practice, co-authorship with interlocutors or research partners is still relatively rare—largely because of how academic credit and authorship are structured. I hope the field continues to evolve towards more genuine forms of polyvocality and collaborative scholarship. This is especially important in the anthropology of religion, where longstanding debates around insider/outsider perspectives and the emic/etic divide remain unresolved and, at times, entrenched.

What advice would you offer to young scholars in anthropology who are just beginning their research journeys, particularly those navigating interdisciplinary and cross-cultural work today?

I have come to realize that while every PhD student follows a unique research path, there are striking patterns that emerge—often cutting across nations and institutions. In that sense, whether at Harvard, JNU, Himachal Pradesh University or Vietnam National University—PhD students must all respond to certain pressures. One of the most crucial factors for long-term success is choosing a dissertation topic that is sufficiently broad in scope. Ideally, it should be a topic that can be explored across multiple ethnographic field sites and, if possible, in different countries. But geographic breadth alone isn't enough. The topic should also hold theoretical significance across multiple academic disciplines and address issues that feel urgent and socially relevant. When a research project meets these criteria—broad in geography, rich in theoretical depth, and resonant with public importance—only then does it give an emerging scholar the best chance to thrive during the PhD and to remain adaptable in the competitive job market that follows. Such a topic allows for maximum flexibility: the ability to publish across a range of academic journals, apply for postdocs and positions in both academic and non-academic sectors, and pursue large international grants without being confined to a narrow academic niche. Perhaps most importantly, this flexibility empowers the researcher to evolve—to reframe and reinvent themselves over time, both on the job market and on the lecture circuit. This adaptability not only opens more doors professionally, but also supports the development of a resilient scholarly identity.



A Journey Through Time: My Visit to Kudakkallu Parambu



By Amarnath K. P

A History and Archaeology professional with academic training, research, and extensive field experience. He holds a Master's degree in History from Sree Sankaracharya University of Sanskrit and a Postgraduate Diploma in Archaeology from the Centre for Heritage Studies, Government of Kerala.

- State & Site Name: Kudakkallu Parambu – Megalithic Burial Site, Cheramangadu, Thrissur district Kerala
- Exact Location :Latitude, 10° 36' 20.48" N. Longitude, 76° 5' 6.99"

My journey to Kudakkallu Parambu began at the Thrissur Railway Station, though I didn't yet realize how unexpectedly challenging the route would be. Kudakkallu Parambu is not the kind of place people talk about in travel circles, nor does it show up with glowing reviews on tourist websites. It exists quietly—almost forgotten—tucked away near the village of Cheramangad. To reach Kudakkallu Parambu from the Thrissur Railway Station, I took a bus first to Kunnankulam, then another to Porkkalam Junction, and finally a local bus to Cheramangad Village, followed by a short rickshaw ride of about one kilometer to the site. I took three buses and two rickshaws, each ride pulling me a little further away from the town's noise and deeper into a landscape that felt older than memory itself.

When I finally reached the site—about one kilometer from Cheramangad—I was surprised to see only one person there. He was the sole supervisor appointed to look after the entire heritage area. There were no crowds, no commercial tourism energy. Just silence, laterite soil, and stones standing like ancient sentinels. The caretaker greeted me with a tired but kind expression and became my guide through the site. He explained that the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) protects the area, but a very few people visit. Occasionally, researchers or students come, take notes or photographs, and leave. Recently, an excavation had taken place, but it, too, received little attention.

As I walked further in, the landscape slowly began to speak. The umbrella stones —Kudakkallu— stood around me, some weathered, some still sharp-edged, all silent but powerful. To stand among stones believed to be over 4,000 years old is a humbling experience. The air felt still, as if time itself had paused here long ago and never resumed. When I placed my hand on one of the Kudakkallu slabs, I felt a cool, coarse surface that carried centuries of wind and rain — and, perhaps, the unseen echoes of the people who built it. It was not just stone; it was memory solidified.

Brief History and Background:

Kerala, historically part of ancient Tamilakam and located between the Western Ghats and the Arabian Sea, holds a prominent place in South Indian archaeology for its rich Iron Age and megalithic heritage. Central Kerala, in particular, preserves a wide variety of megalithic monuments, reflecting diverse burial traditions adapted to the region's laterite and granite landscapes. The Iron Age in Kerala, dated between 1000 BCE and 100 CE, marks a major cultural shift with the widespread use of iron tools, weapons, and agricultural implements. The period shows continuity from the late Neolithic–Chalcolithic phase, with megalithic practices bridging pre-historic and early historic cultures. Megaliths across Kerala were primarily commemorative burial monuments, constructed using large dressed or undressed stones. These include umbrella stones (Kudakkallu), hat stones (Thoppikkallu), dolmens, urn burials, stone circles, rock-cut chambers, and menhirs. Kudakkallu Parambu in Cheramangad, Thrissur, with 69 well-preserved monuments, exemplifies this heritage. The site, protected by the ASI, stands as a lasting testament to Kerala's Iron Age engineering, spirituality, and reverence for the dead.

Archaeological Features of the Site

The Kudakkallu Megalithic Burial Site is located in Kadangodu Panchayath, 9th Ward, within the rural landscape of Cheramangad Village, Kerala. Spanning 2.5 acres, it is protected by the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI), with one ASI employee overseeing its conservation. Cheramangad stands as one of the most prominent megalithic sites in the region, with burial monuments concentrated within a small area. The site mainly consists of Topikkal (hat stones), hood stones, and stone circles. Among these, Kudakkals (umbrella stones) are the most remarkable examples.

These umbrella-shaped stones resemble giant mushrooms or palm leaf umbrellas once commonly seen in Kerala. A total of nine Kudakkals are found at the site, all carefully aligned with cardinal directions. Each one is supported by four clinostatic stones arranged in a square pattern and bevelled to form a parabolic base that holds the large capstone above. The largest Kudakkal measures 270 cm in height and 150 cm at the base, while the others range between 210 cm and 130 cm.

Umbrella Stone (Kudakkal)

The Umbrella Stones of Kerala are distinctive architectural monuments and form a key part of the Iron Age burial traditions. Locally called Kudakkal, they were first recorded by Babington as Kodeykull, which he translated

as “Hat Stone.” However, in Malayalam, kuda means “umbrella,” while thoppi means “hat.” Later surveys confirmed the occurrence of both Kudakkal (Umbrella Stones) and Thoppikkal (Hat Stones) at sites like Cheramangad and Ariyannur, highlighting regional variations in burial practices.

Hat Stone (Thoppikkallu)

The Hat Stones, locally called Thoppikkallu, are hemispherical structures usually made of dressed or undressed granite. They act as lids placed directly on burial urns, unlike the umbrella stones that feature supporting pillars. Thoppikkallu has a limited distribution, primarily in Thrissur district at sites such as Cheramangad, Porkkalam, Eyyal, Vandiperiyar, and Thiruvilvamala. Archaeologist V.D. Krishnaswami (1949) described them as “hood stones,” noting their resemblance to umbrella stones but without pillar supports.

Hood Stone

This monument consists of a large circular arrangement of sectorally dressed clinostatic laterite stones. The circle generally comprises 5 to 12 stones placed at a slanting angle similar to those forming the base of Kudakkal. Although the stones converge towards the top, they remain unconnected, leaving a large circular gap at the centre. These stones show no indication of ever having supported a capstone. Their open structure suggests a different type of burial or ritual purpose within the megalithic tradition.

Reflections and Site Surroundings: Walking through Kudakkallu Parambu, surrounded by these ancient structures, I felt a deep sense of calm and continuity. Located away from urban noise, the site rests in a quiet corner of Cheramangad, where the still air is broken only by rustling leaves and bird calls. The laterite soil glows red against the greenery along the boundary, giving the space an atmosphere where time seems slow and respectful. Having previously participated in a megalithic burial excavation in North Kerala, this visit felt personal. The umbrella and hat stones here reflect the same cultural rhythm which I once uncovered in the field. Each structure embodies not just the memory of an individual, but the shared beliefs of a community that honoured life beyond death. As I walked among these stones, I could imagine the pre-historic people shaping laterite blocks, arranging them with precision, and performing rituals for their dead. The silence here is not empty— it echoes history, ritual, and the pulse of an once-thriving culture.

Although protected by the ASI, signs of erosion, cracks, and growing vegetation indicate slow decay. Yet, despite aging, Kudakkallu Parambu remains dignified. It reminds us that heritage is preserved not only through official protection but also through awareness and respect. Such places deserve to be experienced, and not merely studied. Local communities, students, and travellers should be encouraged to visit and learn from them. Standing among the umbrella stones, I realized that preservation is a shared responsibility. These quiet stones are the storytellers of our past; it is our duty to ensure that their voices continue.

PHOTOGRAPHIC DOCUMENTATION



Umbrella Stone: A circular laterite capstone supported by four laterite slabs set at a slanting angle, forming a square base. The structure resembles a palm-leaf umbrella and represents a typical Iron Age burial monument of Kerala.



Site Map



Hat Stone: A hemispherical laterite stone placed directly on the ground, covering the burial urn beneath. Its dome-like shape resembles the traditional farmer's hat of Kerala, giving the monument its local name Thoppikkallu or "Hat Stone."



The green ASI signboard marking the entrance route to Kudakkallu Parambu Prehistoric Site near Cheramangad village



Hood Stone: A cluster of curved laterite slabs arranged in a circular pattern, forming a hood-like enclosure typical of Kerala's multiple-hood-stone burials. The weathered rface shows the monument's age and exposure to the elements.



How to reach here:

Nearest Railway Station: Waddakkanchery, about 18 km |

Thrissur, about 25 km

Nearest Airport: Cochin International Airport, about 75 km |

Karipur International Airport, about 80 km

Bus Route: Thrissur-Kunnamkulam- Cheramangadu.



A wide view of burial field

Threads of Resilience: Life in Indore's Slum Communities

By Yash Singh Sisodiya

In the heart of Madhya Pradesh, Indore stands as a city of contrasts. Beyond its growing urban landscape lie communities that embody the true spirit of resilience—NAND BAGH, MUSAKHEDI, and AVANTIKA NAGAR. These neighborhoods, often simply labeled as "slums" on city maps, are vibrant ecosystems of human ingenuity and community strength.

The Fabric of Livelihood

The narrow lanes of these communities are alive with economic activity. In homes that are barely 10x12 feet, women like those in the photos have turned these small spaces into thriving micro-enterprises. The white ZOJE sewing machines, often shared among families or borrowed through community networks, serve as tools for economic independence. These informal stitching hubs create everything from school uniforms to festive attire, forming a vital part of Indore's textile supply chain. What might look like chaos—scattered fabric, spools of thread, and garments in various stages of completion—is actually a sign of a vibrant cottage industry. For the people living in these areas, self-employment isn't just a last resort; it's a smart response to the lack of formal job opportunities.

Adaptive Architecture

The brick homes with their exposed walls are like storytellers, revealing tales of gradual growth. In NAND BAGH, families often add to their homes little by little as they gather resources, resulting in a charming mix of architectural styles. The satellite dish perched on one of the houses symbolizes hope—a link to information and entertainment that connects their community to the broader world. These neighborhoods showcase an incredible ability to adapt to their surroundings. When the monsoon floods hit, as depicted in one of the images, residents come together with creative solutions—lifting their belongings to higher ground, digging drainage channels, and forming support networks to help each other navigate the rising waters.

Cultivating Hope

Perhaps most striking is the presence of green spaces within dense urban settings. In MUSAKHEDI, small gardens with banana plants and other greenery offer both practical benefits (privacy, food) and psychological respite from concrete surroundings. A woman tending to a potted plant embodies how communities nurture beauty and growth even in challenging circumstances.

Community in Action

The true strength of these neighborhoods comes from their tight-knit social fabric. When flooding hits, as shown in that striking image, it's not just individuals who step up; the entire community rallies together. Kids splash around in the water while adults work together to navigate the flooded streets—facing challenges as a united front and finding solutions together.

The home-based workshops you see in the photos often function as collaborative efforts, with neighbors pooling their resources, skills, and market insights. This kind of interdependence creates a safety net that formal systems frequently overlook.

Beyond Challenges

While these communities grapple with issues like poor infrastructure, inadequate sanitation, and seasonal flooding, the photos tell a different story—one that goes beyond just struggle. They capture the essence of people crafting beauty through their clothing, nurturing plants in tight spaces, forging connections through their work, and holding onto their dignity even in tough times.

In AVANTIKA NAGAR, the community's resilience shines through as they turn limited resources into lively living environments, adorned with vibrant fabrics, lovingly cared-for plants, and well-organized work areas that fulfill both economic and social needs. These communities embody not only the realities of urban poverty but also the incredible strength that enables individuals to flourish despite systemic challenges. The narratives captured in these images serve as a powerful reminder that communities are shaped not by their difficulties but by how they respond to them—with creativity, unity, and a steadfast dedication to improving their lives.

Photos:

- 1) Urban gardening,
- 2) Community during heavy rains,
- 3) Low-lying, congested slum house,
- 4) Home workshop (Women from the slum community hustling for financial management,
- 5) Sewing micro-enterprise,
- 6) Workspace details



The banana plants and greenery in the garden represent growth and care in a dense urban environment. The woman's act of holding a plant mirrors how communities nurture hope despite limited resources. Children and adults wading through muddy water embody a collective perseverance. The bicycles, plastic containers, and laundry lines show how life continues amid chaos, with the brick wall and hanging laundry symbolizing home as an anchor even in displacement



The clutter (scissors, fabric scraps, tools) reflects the hustle of daily labor, while the vibrant sarees and fabrics nod to cultural identity



The exposed brick walls and unfinished plaster contrast with the satellite dish—a marker of aspiration and connection to the wider world.



A woman stitches together not just fabric but also her family's livelihood.

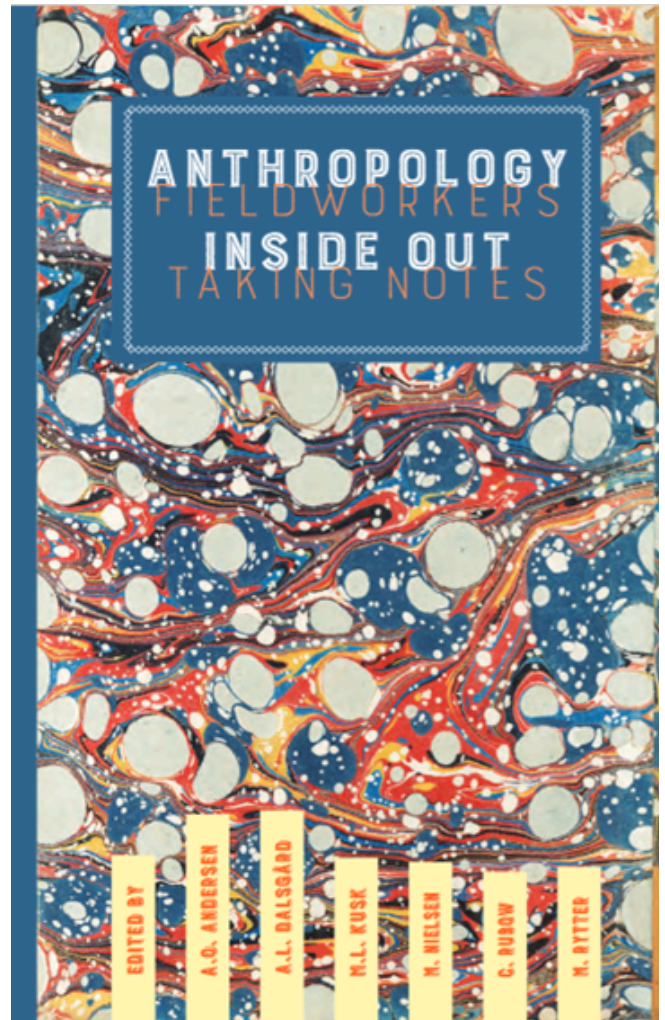
Is there more to the field than just notes? A review of *Anthropology Inside Out: Fieldworkers Taking Notes*



By Annabel Cabezas Pacheco

Have you ever wondered how flip-flops can become an ethnographic fieldnote? What's more, have you reflected on what things are worthy of becoming fieldnotes — and, conversely, what things we refrain from noting down? First published in, *Anthropology Inside Out* is a collection of diversely authored essays that narrate field experiences challenging our understanding of ethnographic practices. From talking about objects as fieldnotes to theorising the idea of collective ethnographies, the authors strive to promote a nuanced and critical approach to contemporary ethnography, with a focus on fieldnote production.

The book thus becomes a space for the exploration of fieldwork as an experience, a transformative process, and a pedagogical tool — leading us, on many occasions, to linger on the makings of our subjectivities as ethnographers. Similarly, it offers a 'naked' and personal account of diverse experiences in the field, which serve not only as a call for innovation but also as a deep dive into the (often forgotten) human behind each ethnographer. Plagued with examples of challenges in their work, the authors theorise how ethnographic 'failure' can be a blessing in disguise, and how different forms and modes of expression arise in every context. Thus, every piece of this narrative puzzle contributes to a growing body of work that unravels our positionality (Crenshaw, 1991) as people (and anthropologists!).



Successfully engaging with the reader, this book consolidates itself as a (much-needed) example of intelligible anthropology: despite the recurrent use of academic jargon, it effectively employs narrative tools and compelling stories to illustrate the experiences that foster empathetic engagement with the ideas presented. It is a useful read for both novice and experienced ethnographers — or even for those who enjoy being intellectually challenged. Going forward, I believe this piece of work to be a model for the kind of reflective practices we should be promoting as anthropologists: works that take a critical stance towards what we've all been taught is the norm — doing fieldwork on our own, not publishing our notes, or relying solely on our written word. Instead, it opens the door to a myriad of 'what ifs': what if notes weren't simply pieces of paper? What if there was more to them? I hope every future reader of this book can contribute to this debate with answers, questions, and more enriching accounts of what it means to do our job.

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"Note of reflection on Neha's article on Jeetiya: The Festival of Mothers and Children in Bihar"



By Àgbèdè, Oláolúwa Babátúndé

Neha's article beautifully captures the Jeetiya festival, demonstrating how motherhood is both love and devotion, and also tradition and resilience. It is an annual festival held in Bihar's villages and surrounding regions in September. It is one of the most obvious examples of how tradition, food, and faith come together to honor the bond between mothers and their children.

Initially, Jeetiya was a festival for the well-being of only sons, with daughters being excluded. However, over time, it has evolved to the point where both sons and daughters are regarded as the two eyes of a face. This change reflects how cultural practices are being modified for different purposes, and one of such is gender balancing.

The festival starts with Nahai-Khay, in which mothers eat a pure meal of noni saag, madua roti, jhingi sabji, and kachchu root (kanda). Sweet and festive foods such as pua, puri, thekua, and nimki are all prepared. They are offered to God and later given to children as "Othgan"; the sacred prasad carries a mother's blessings. Food is viewed as a means of conveying blessings from mother to their children. This illustrates how cultural contexts can influence the purpose of food. Culture creates contexts, which influence meaning-making in all cultural activities.

On the main day, mothers observe nirjala vrat, which involves fasting without drinking anything. Most mothers, no matter how weak or ill, insist on keeping the fast, saying with pride, "Teej aur Jeetiya koi aurat nahin chhod thai." Their strength transforms into a silent prayer for their children's long lives. This is an example of what motherhood entails, that is sacrifice. Motherhood's strength stems from their children's well-being; this is what keeps their flesh alive even when they are ill.

Mothers break their fast with Satanja; a mixture of seven ingredients including chana, chawal, gehun, matar, kanda, khira beej, and noni saag. Each food represents a wish; that the child will be playful like chana, radiant like rice, strong like kanda, and prosperous like noni saag. Once again, food becomes a symbol of mothers' desires, with each food carrying a wish. Food truly becomes a medium of blessing.

FOOD AND BELIEF IN THE NAMING CEREMONY OF YORUBA

The Yoruba people are primarily found in Nigeria, but their culture and traditions extend to a few countries in and out of Africa, including Benin Republic, Togo, Cuba and Brazil. Food is extremely important in Yoruba culture. It is deeply entangled with spirituality and tradition. In Yoruba spirituality, certain dishes are believed to carry spiritual energy - àṣẹ - making them essential in rituals. These dishes are thought to be capable of communicating blessings and aiding in prayers, serving as a connection between the physical and the spiritual realms. As a result, certain dishes are customary for specific ceremonies, such as naming ceremonies. The naming ceremony, known as "Ìsomolórúko" is usually held eight days after the birth. It is the responsibility of a baby's father to ensure that everything needed for the day is available. The eldest man in the man's family will anchor the ceremony and name the child. Prior to that day, the eldest man would have been given the child's name.

Certain food ingredients are extremely important for the day. They are culturally recognized as symbols of blessings and must be used to bless the new baby. Every naming ceremony must include oyin (honey), epo (palm oil), omi (water), iyò (salt), obì (kolanut), and orógbó (bitter kola). Each of these ingredients has special significance in the child's blessing. Oyin represents sweetness, Epo represents prosperity, Omi represents purity and life, Iyó represents preservation, Obí represents power over death, and Orógbó represents strength and longevity of life. They used all of these to bestow blessings and protection on the newborn. They make sure that the baby tastes everything while praying. During the Yoruba naming ceremony, the baby is given a small taste of each of these ingredients, followed by prayers and blessings. This act represents the child's introduction to the world's experiences, both sweet and bitter, and it serves as a warm welcome into the community. As the child tastes each ingredient, the officiating elder prays that the child will embody the qualities represented by each item, wishing them a balanced and fulfilling life. This meaningful ritual officially welcomes the child into the family and community.

Food, Belief, Blessing, and Parenthood: How the Jeetiya Festival and the Yoruba Naming Ceremony Connect

The Jeetiya festival in Bihar and the Yoruba naming ceremony (Ìsomolórúko) in Nigeria showcase how food and belief combine to express parental devotion, spiritual continuity, and communal blessings. Despite their different geographical and cultural contexts, these traditions share an anthropological logic: food as a medium of belief, instrument of blessing, and symbol of parental intercession.

Food: a Sacred Medium

Food, in both cultures, becomes a vehicle for prayers and blessings in addition to its nutritional function. Mothers in Jeetiya break their fast with *Satanja*, a sacred mixture of seven ingredients that symbolize their children's health, playfulness, and prosperity. Similarly, honey, palm oil, water, salt, kolanut, and bitter kola are used in the Yoruba naming ceremony to bestow divine favor on the newborn. In both cases, the act of tasting or serving food represents the transmission of spiritual energy and intention. The ingredients represent abstract values—sweetness, longevity, strength, and purity—that are materialized through ritual consumption.

Belief and the Spiritual Logic of the Blessing

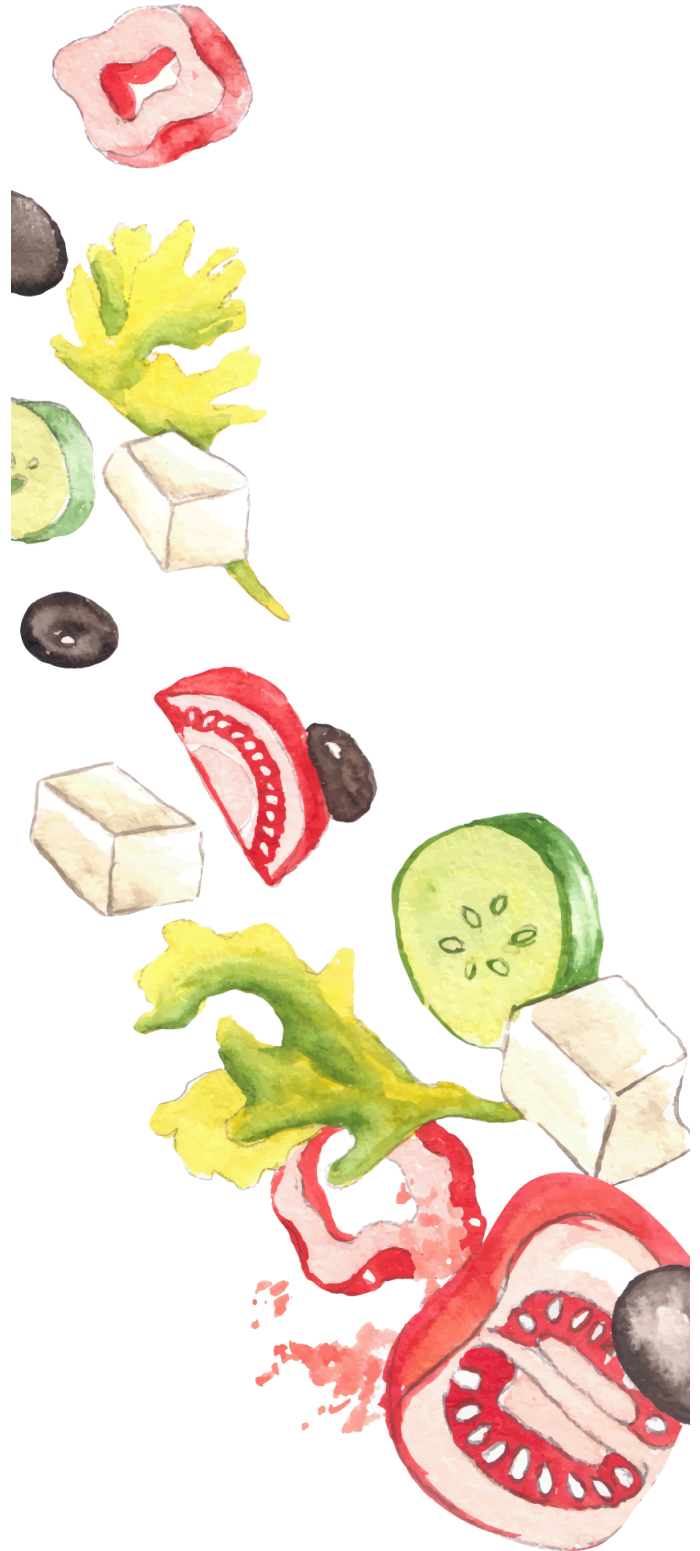
Both rituals are based on the idea that divine favor can be mediated through material substances. In Jeetiya, mothers' fasting and eventual consumption of symbolic foods represent a bodily prayer—a spiritual contract between mother, deity, and child. In Yoruba practice, the officiating elder treats each ingredient as a linguistic and material metaphor, verbalizing blessings as the baby tastes each one. This demonstrates a shared symbolic economy of food, in which belief gives meaning to substance and substance enacts belief.

Parenthood: Sacrifice and Continuity

Both traditions honor parenthood as a form of sacrifice and continuity. Jeetiya focuses on the maternal body, with mothers fasting and foregoing food and water, transforming physical endurance into a form of sacred intercession for their children. Yoruba naming ceremonies, while less ascetic, emphasize communal parenthood, with elders and parents invoking virtues for the child to embody, symbolizing the collective responsibility of nurturing life. Both rituals portray parenthood as biological and spiritual, based on care, ritual labor, and the desire to preserve lineage.

Food as a Cultural Text

Anthropologically, both the Jeetiya festival and the Yoruba naming ceremony can be interpreted as "food texts"—ritual performances that inscribe belief systems, moral values, and kinship structures in edible symbols. They demonstrate how different societies use everyday materials to create sacred languages, with taste, fasting, and feeding, serving as communicative acts that connect the human, spiritual, and ancestral realms.



In conclusion, food has a three-fold sociocultural importance. It nourishes the body, satisfies the soul, and connects the physical and spiritual realms. The Jeetiya festival and the Yoruba naming ceremony both show that food is more than just sustenance; it is spirituality materialized. Fasting and feeding, tasting and blessing are all ways that mothers in Bihar and families in Yorubaland use food to express their beliefs, perform parenthood, and pass down blessings. Despite the geographical distance, their symbolic use of food reveals a common human understanding that ritualized nourishment becomes a profound expression of love, faith, and continuity.

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

By Dr. Shree Bhagwan Roy
Founder Chairman of IBRAD

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

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

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

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

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



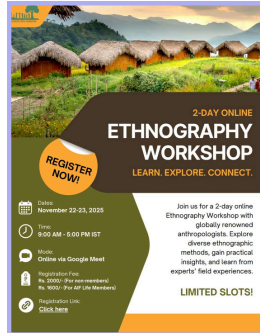
FORTHCOMING EVENT

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

PAST EVENT

- A 2-day online Ethnography Workshop was organised on November 22nd and 23rd, 2025, with globally renowned anthropologists, exploring the diverse ethnographic methods, gaining practical insights and learning from experts' field experiences.

For more details - [Click here](#)



- For our Distinguished Guest lecture series, an online lecture was organised and delivered by **Dr. Stephen Christopher** on November 25th 2025, 6:30 pm onwards

For more details - [Click here](#)

YouTube live Link - [Click here](#)



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- Teaching Positions at Babasaheb Bhimrao Ambedkar
Last Date to Apply: 14.12.25
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- Humboldt Research Fellowship (Germany)
Last Date to Apply: Year - Round
Application Link: [Click here](#)
- Individual Consultant - UNICEF
Last Date to Apply: 09.12.25
Application Link: [Click here](#)
- Post-Doc Positions at Toulouse School of Economics and IAST
Last Date to Apply: 23.01.26
Application Link: [Click here](#)



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

Stay tuned for stories that speak beyond words!

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



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

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

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