



NATIONAL LAW INSTITUTE UNIVERSITY, BHOPAL
CENTRE FOR TRIBAL STUDIES AND RESEARCH



Vol. 2 Issue II (2025)

THE **TRiBAL INSIGHT**



ABOUT CTSR

The Centre for Tribal Studies and Research (CTSR) has been established with the objective of adopting a comprehensive approach to issues concerning tribal rights, and the preservation and protection of their cultural heritage and traditional knowledge. The Centre engages in studies and research related to tribal law, focusing on the implementation and analysis of Central and State Government schemes for tribals, in collaboration with NGOs, local communities, and government bodies. The Centre also envisions to research and review the legal instruments and policies related to Indigenous rights and their protection in international forums across jurisdictions. The Centre shall organize seminars, conferences, and training programs in areas including education, economy, resettlement and rehabilitation, forest rights, customary laws, and the tribal criminal justice system, and shall publish related literature.

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MESSAGE FROM THE VICE CHANCELLOR



It gives me immense pride to witness the publication of the second volume of *The Tribal Insight*, a flagship initiative of the *Centre for Tribal Studies and Research (CTSR)* at the National Law Institute University, Bhopal. This magazine continues to serve as a vibrant platform for the celebration, documentation, and critical engagement with the diverse cultures, histories, and knowledge systems of tribal and indigenous communities.

As CTSR deepens its commitment to fostering inclusive academic dialogue and social awareness, this volume stands as a testament to the Centre's growing impact in bridging the gap between traditional wisdom and contemporary scholarship. In an age where the notions of progress and development often risk marginalizing the most vulnerable, the relevance of tribal voices in national and global discourse on sustainability, rights, and identity has never been more crucial. Through *The Tribal Insight*, we strive to honour these voices and amplify their significance. It serves to remind us that development must be inclusive, participatory, and respectful of the traditions and wisdom that tribal communities have preserved through generations.

I congratulate the CTSR team for their continued dedication and the contributors for their thoughtful perspectives. I am confident that *The Tribal Insight* will continue to evolve as an essential resource, sparking dialogue, reflection, and action. May this publication inspire in every reader a deeper sense of responsibility, curiosity, and solidarity with tribal communities across the world.

Best Wishes,

Prof. (Dr.) S. Surya Prakash

NOTE FROM OUR CHAIRPERSON



It is with a deep sense of satisfaction and hope that we present the second volume of *The Tribal Insight*, an initiative that continues to grow both in substance and spirit under the guidance of the *Centre for Tribal Studies and Research (CTSR)*. This edition continues our mission of fostering academic, cultural, and policy-oriented engagement with the lives, rights, and futures of tribal communities in India and across the world.

This volume reflects not only the academic strength of our contributors but also their empathy, curiosity, and commitment to representing the realities of tribal and Indigenous communities with care and accuracy. Each article, analysis, and creative contribution stands as a reminder that the stories, struggles, and knowledge systems of tribal communities deserve a central place in contemporary discourse, not just as subjects of study, but as sources of insight and direction. Through this publication, CTSR seeks to foster a dialogue that is not confined to academic spaces, but reaches into communities, policy circles, and classrooms, urging a more just and inclusive understanding of India's social fabric.

I take this opportunity to extend my heartfelt thanks to the editorial team, students, researchers, and members of CTSR for their tireless efforts. I am also deeply grateful to the Hon'ble Vice-Chancellor for his unwavering support and encouragement. I encourage all readers to engage with this edition critically and empathetically. I hope this edition encourages readers to pause, listen, and learn, and above all, to carry forward the values of respect, solidarity, and critical engagement.

Warm regards,
Prof. (Dr.) Bir Pal Singh

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ADI SANSKRITI

OVERVIEW

Adi Sanskriti Beta, launched by Hon'ble Minister of State for Tribal Affairs of India in New Delhi's Bharat Mandapam on September 5, 2025, is a pioneering digital university on tribal heritage, knowledge systems, and economic opportunity.^[1] Stemming from the motto '*From Shiksha to Sampada to Haat*'.^[2] This model is developed collaboratively by State Tribal Research Institutes spanning fifteen states, together with the Ministry of Tribal Affairs. This initiative merges education, business development, management, and cultural safeguarding-connecting ancient insights with modern abilities. This further ensures the empowerment of communities while sustaining their traditions, identity, economy, and culture.

More than 5,000 historic papers live on this site alongside displays of artistry over 45 distinct traditions, encompassing everything from songs used in ceremonies to handmade goods. Artisans connect with buyers around the globe because of TRIFED, selling their work within India and beyond. *Adi Sanskriti* blends old ways with new tools, helping people cherish where they come from while building real futures. It functions as a learning space, a place to trade goods, and a keeper of stories for those who follow.

ESSENTIAL COMPONENTS AND INSTITUTIONAL PARTNERSHIPS

Adi Sanskriti builds upon three core pillars: learning blend approaches, valuing traditions, and fostering ways to earn a living. They connect, ensuring the program feels useful while drawing from the local wisdom of culture taken from these communities.

Adi Vishwavidyalaya displays tribal art, music, dance, paintings, and crafts, through courses that blend online and in-person learning. Over fifty tribes contribute their knowledge; instructors are community experts. Rather than just lectures, lessons emphasize hands-on experience, like a potter picking up photography skills while a dancer teaches remotely. A local figure shared a story: someone youthful departed for employment, yet remained following training, showing the emergence of a path to profit through talent. This blend of ability alongside satisfaction defines *Adi Vishwavidyalaya*.



Adi Sampada holds more than 5,000 records detailing tribal traditions like fabrics, music, and healing methods.^[3] Developed alongside State plus Tribal Research Institutes, it strives for truthfulness, consideration, and ease of use. The project serves as an evolving tool intended for scholars, teachers, officials, and people within the communities themselves. A story within the collection features an elder sharing what a celebratory tune truly means, which is something books miss. It's precisely this personal touch *Adi Sampada* safeguards.

Adi Haat is a market powered by TRIFED^[4] where craftspeople build online shops alongside physical ones, which in turn connects them to more customers. It works by removing unfair dealers, so makers get reasonable prices while earning a living. They also learn how to show their goods online, prepare items for shipping, and manage simple finances. Female artisans particularly earn reliably without sacrificing their artistic vision now. Take a pottery group: they started selling straight to city customers following a workshop on promotion, subsequently supporting an apprentice scheme in their community.

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[2]<https://theprint.in/india/govt-launches-beta-version-of-adi-sanskriti-a-digital-university-for-tribal-heritage/2740586/>

[3]<https://ddnews.gov.in/en/tribal-affairs-ministry-launches-beta-version-of-adi-sanskriti-digital-platform-for-tribal-artforms/>

[4] <https://trifed.tribal.gov.in/home>

STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT AND PURPOSE

Adi Sanskriti champions a vision where everyone benefits and grows together. It operates on a simple belief: care, share, act. This approach dovetails with nationwide goals, specifically, uplifting young people alongside sustainable progress. Cultural heritage thrives when paired with economic chances, bolstered by active community involvement. Courses feel richer, memories stick better when people build them together. Working alongside colleges and museums worldwide opens doors to discoveries. Most importantly, it lets local groups lead the way in sharing their wisdom across borders.

IMPLEMENTATION ROADMAP AND ANTICIPATED IMPACT

The model is growing steadily, guided by user feedback and statistical analytics, ensuring that things don't get out of hand or lose their purpose. The course is evolving. It now covers starting a business, online sales, and ways to make a living responsibly. The model spotlights unique regional skills like Telangana's Gussadi dance, Odisha fabrics, and Chhattisgarh healing methods. Eventually, expect official certifications, lessons in multiple languages, and virtual field trips alongside practical work.

[1][2]

Fifteen tribal research groups, collaborating with community knowledge keepers and tribal councils, intend to build upon *Adi Sampada*. They will employ techniques like 3D scans alongside translations into various languages. Stories, artifacts, and traditions are all preserved digitally, respectfully, complete with background information. Visitors can then explore these cultures through engaging virtual spaces, rather than just reading about them.

Adi Haat plans a marketplace with a broader range of goods in a hybrid environment, ensuring quality, including reviews from fellow sellers, alongside smoother delivery to and from the villages. Regional artisans will get help with building their brands, also learning how to run businesses, opening doors to selling worldwide via museums and exhibits abroad.

The system grants certifications, with the help of digital badges, displaying what the tribals know and understand about the versatility of tradition and cultures of different tribal communities, while also preserving individual identity. Built alongside academic institutions and tribal councils, these qualifications connect to standard job requirements, helping individuals get employment or continue learning

A secure online profile lets the people of the communities effortlessly display their accomplishments to potential employers.

The framework of this model tracks and analyses contemporary procedural developments using five key signs: people improving their lives, involvement in local traditions, gaining technical skills, a growing collection of resources, and strong sales. The model then gathers this information via website, individual and community feedback, and feedback from collaborators. Frequent check-ins will ensure swift modifications when required.

CONTEXTUAL CHALLENGES AND DIGITAL LITERACY

Land displacements, poverty, and spotty connections to the online world are among the many curveballs thrown at tribal groups by life. Often, women and elders get left behind when it comes to tech. Courses provided by *Adi Sanskriti* will be taught to them in their own tongues, led by people they already know and trust. This ensures a solid approach to closing that gap. *Adi Sanskriti* crafts tech solutions alongside mindful learning resources, letting people grow knowledge comfortably. The model aims for technology to uplift, offering opportunities for various tribes altogether instead of creating divides.

CONCLUSION

Adi Sanskriti combines usefulness with optimism. It joins school lessons, preserving heritage, alongside ways to sell creations in a single space where custom keeps people afloat instead of fading away. Designing tech that feels right for the culture, built by local communities, transforms it into something empowering, fostering respect and new chances. Communities flourish when their traditions matter. Moreover, when the transaction of funds is maintained positively, it fosters both spirit and staying power. *Adi Sanskriti* works to build this reality throughout India's tribal regions, joining efforts toward a thriving nation by 2047. Contribute in meaningful ways to the shared goal of *Viksit Bharat 2047* [3]

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[1] <https://ddnews.gov.in/en/tribal-affairs-ministry-launches-beta-version-of-adi-sanskriti-digital-platform-for-tribal-artforms/>

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ASSAM'S ST-STATUS STRUGGLE: TRIBAL VOICES IN THE EYE OF A STORM

In September 2025, Assam witnessed mass mobilizations as students and tribal groups hit the streets demanding Scheduled Tribe (ST) status for various communities who are at present listed as Other Backward Classes (OBCs). The 'tinder point' was in Golakganj (Dhubri district), where students carrying torches took to the streets in a dramatic protest for ST status and faced police action.

THE PROTEST AND ITS SPARK

On September 11-12, All Koch-Rajbongshi Students' Union (AKRSU) led a torchlight march from Chilarai College into Golakganj bazaar, demanding for ST status and even resurrection of a separate "Kamatapur" state. Protesters claim that the march, while peaceful, was forcibly ended by security forces, leading to lathi-charge and injuries, including among women. Two police officers were subsequently suspended for their behavior. The student union responded by calling for a 12-hour bandh (shutdown) in Dhubri.

The state government acted swiftly; the Golakganj police officer-in-charge was suspended, an inquiry was initiated, and top ministers were sent to speak with injured protesters. Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma labeled the crackdown as "unfortunate" and assured action would be taken.

COMMUNITIES PRESSING THE DEMAND

The Koch-Rajbongshis are not alone. At least six communities are demanding ST recognition, including Koch-Rajbongshi, Tai Ahom, Chutia, Matak, Moran, and the Tea Tribes /Adivasis.

In Dibrugarh, a massive protest by tea tribe and Adivasi workers drew over 50,000 people, demanding ST status, a raise in daily wages (to ₹551), and legal land rights (pattas). The agitation was joined by multiple organizations including Assam Chah Mazdoor Sangha (ACMS), Assam Tea Tribes Students' Association (ATTSA), All Adivasi Students' Association (AASAA), and others. Similarly, the Moran student community held a torchlight march in Tinsukia demanding ST status and elevating their autonomous council under the Sixth Schedule. Tai Ahom groups have also protested the delay, threatening to boycott the BJP in 2026 if recognition is not granted.

FRICTION FROM EXISTING TRIBAL BODIES

Other tribal communities of Assam are not in support of inclusion of new groups. Objections were raised by All Assam Tribal Sangha (AATS) as well, warning that inclusion of these six groups would dilute the rights, identity, and political space of already identified tribes. The Sangha argues that earlier additions such as Koch-Rajbongshi being temporarily brought under ST (Plains) in 1996 led to competition for ST seats and institutional places. Thus, Assam's tribal discourse now sits at a volatile intersection: long-pending demands for recognition by some and fears of erasure or marginalisation by others



Image: <https://scroll.in/article/842839/in-assam-six-communities-demanding-st-status-accuse-the-bjp-of-taking-them-for-a-ride>

GOVERNMENT CALCULUS AND THE WAY AHEAD

The Assam government has constituted a Group of Ministers (GoM) to examine the ST inclusion issue. It aims to table the GoM report in the Assembly on November 25, 2025. The Chief Minister has acknowledged the legitimacy of the protests and even suggested BJP workers might join in. Officials, however, also raise tensions where existing ST tribes reportedly resist expansion of the list. Bridging this divide without triggering internal conflict will require delicate dialogue.

If a fair resolution is delayed or ignored, the protests could broaden in scope, possibly affecting electoral outcomes in 2026. The government's challenge is to earnestly reconcile demands of identity, justice, and constitutional safeguards and ensure that in resolving one set of exclusions, it does not create new ones.

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INDIAN TRIBES VISIT UK MUSEUM TO BRING HOME ANCESTRAL REMAINS



Image:-<https://www.reuters.com/world/india/indian-tribes-visit-uk-museum-bring-home-ancestors-remains-2025-06-16/>

INTRODUCTION: RECLAIMING THE PAST

A 23-person Naga delegation from India travelled to Oxford's Pitt Rivers Museum in June 2025 to request the repatriation of ancestral human remains that had been removed during British colonial control. In addition to thousands of artefacts gathered from Nagaland through colonial control, the museum has 41 human remains. These remains, which were frequently bones and skulls, were gathered as "trophies" or for fictitious scientific research. Their homecoming represents a global appeal for justice, dignity, and decolonization in addition to cultural restoration.

The tour led by anthropologist Dolly Kikon a Naga anthropologist from the Lotha-Naga tribe who teaches at the University of California, marked the first official attempt by the Naga tribes to revive their culture and promote cultural healing.

Repatriation talks are still in progress, but they have been postponed due to administrative obstacles, according to Laura Van Broekhoven, the museum director. Due to ethical concerns, the museum has already kept human remains out of the public eye since 2020.

Like recent initiatives in Germany and the Netherlands, this project is a part of a global movement for the repatriation of remains from the colonial past. Supporters view repatriation as a moral obligation to right historical wrongs, while others contend that contemporary governments shouldn't be held accountable for colonial deeds. This piece examines the historical, legal and ethical aspects surrounding repatriation and decolonization including references to global movements.

COLONIAL-ERA COLLECTION OF REMAINS

Human remains from Asia, Africa, and other colonies were transported to Britain and Europe by British officers and anthropologists throughout the colonial era. Many were taken from cemeteries and battlegrounds in Nagaland, which is indicative of the harsh and unfair colonial encounters.

These were employed for anatomical and racial research, frequently under debunked theories like phrenology, which held that skull form could be used to gauge intelligence.

THE PITT RIVERS MUSEUM AND THE NAGA COLLECTION

The Pitt Rivers Museum houses one of the world's most extensive collections of Naga artefacts. This collection includes over 6,000 artifacts, 41 human remains, primarily skulls and 178 objects possibly containing human hair. After conducting ethical reviews, the museum removed these remains from public display in 2020. This removal marked a shift toward prioritizing ethical engagement, acknowledging colonial injustices, and moving towards decolonization and repatriation.

According to Dr. Kikon, "the return of ancestral remains allows Indigenous communities to tell their own histories, promoting justice, dignity, and the preservation of cultural identity", and "for the first time, there is a Naga delegation to connect and reclaim our history, our culture, and our belongings."

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THE NAGA DELEGATION'S DECLARATION

The 23-member team, which included leaders, elders, and representatives of the Forum for Naga Reconciliation, made a statement at Oxford's Natural History Museum. They thanked their forefathers and underlined that the repatriation procedure signifies the Naga people's recovery and completeness. It marks a representation of harmony and tranquillity and the construction of a Naga Peace and Healing Monument. They also offered support to other Indigenous communities around the world fighting to reclaim ancestral remains and decolonize museums.

GLOBAL MOVEMENTS FOR REPATRIATION

This project is a component of a broader global campaign to repatriate cultural artefacts and human remains. For instance, Australia has repatriated more than 1,775 First Nations ancestors from museums throughout the world, including more than 1,300 from UK institutions. Similarly, in New Zealand, All Māori and Moriori ancestors are to be brought home through the Te Papa National Museum's program. In Africa as well, remains and artefacts have been repatriated to Ethiopia and other countries in recent years. Such returns signify the recognition of colonial injustice as well as spiritual restoration.

THE LEGAL AND ETHICAL CONTEXT IN THE UK

Human remains are not normally considered property under UK law, but they may be "owned" if certain skills or labor have been used (such as in anatomical preservation). The 2004 Human Tissue Act which aims to promotes making decisions on an individual basis using moral, scientific, and cultural factors.

Although the Act does not automatically require museums to return human remains, it allows them to do so in certain cases specifically for remains less than 1,000 years old, such as many of those in the Pitt Rivers collection. This provision gives the museum legal authority to repatriate Naga ancestral remains if it chooses to, based on ethical, cultural, and scientific considerations.

However, because the UK lacks a centralized repatriation policy, the decision rests with each museum's governing body. Due to this discretion, progress on the Naga claims has been variable, depending on how each museum interprets its moral obligations under the Act rather than on a clear national mandate.

DEBATES ON REPARATIONS AND DECOLONIZATION

Proponents of repatriation contend that it addresses colonial harms caused to tribal people. They also claim that the disappearance of ancestors causing a spiritual and cultural estrangement and that racism in academics and museums is structural.

Critics argue that modern organizations shouldn't be held entirely accountable for colonial deeds. However, Dr. Dolly Kikon and other Indigenous leaders emphasize that when communities take back their stories, real decolonization starts: "One way to confront the colonial legacy is for Indigenous people to be able to tell our own stories."

THE WAY FORWARD

For information on the logistics of repatriation, the Pitt Rivers Museum is presently in discussions with the Naga delegation and UK authorities.

The procedure, which serves as a link between the past and the future, is still administratively complex but symbolically powerful. According to the Naga declaration, Although it has taken us decades to make this right, we now come with deep respect to return you to the lands that are rightfully yours.

This movement, echoed across continents, marks a turning point in global museum ethics, from ownership to responsibility, and from display to dignity.

CONCLUSION: RESTORING DIGNITY, HEALING HISTORIES

The arrival of the Naga delegation to the UK serves as a significant reminder that scars of colonialism are felt even today. Tribes in India are regaining their identity and dignity by demanding the return of their ancestors' remains. This movement is a part of the global reckoning wherein indigenous peoples around the world, from Africa to Australia, are demanding respect, acknowledgement, and the ability to narrate their own histories.

Repatriation is a moral commitment to truth and reconciliation that goes beyond politics and the law. Humanity makes progress toward healing when museums transform from being keepers of colonial artifacts to collaborators in cultural justice. The journey of the Naga people is not only about returning bones to their homeland but also about restoring balance to a shared human story, one that honor the living by finally giving peace to the dead.

THE MONGMONG FESTIVAL OF NAGALAND



IMAGE LINK

Whether it is Lohri in the north, Onam in the south, Makar Sankranti in the west, or Mongmong in the east, what unites all these festivals is that they are celebrated during the harvest season in various parts of the country.

Mongmong is the most important of the twelve major festivals celebrated by the Sangtam tribe of Nagaland. Symbolising the unity and togetherness of the whole village and community, this six-day-long festival expresses the heartfelt gratitude of the local people for the continuous blessings of the Mother Nature.

Coinciding with the end of the harvesting cycle in the region, from September 1 to September 6, this festival reflects the deep-rooted philosophy of the Sangtam people through its rituals, which symbolize the cycle of birth, death, and renewal.

This six-day-long festival is celebrated through six distinct rituals and culturally essential practices, with each day devoted to one specific observance.

DAY-1 (Sinkkitsa): Villagers collect firewood, vegetables, millet, and prepare local wine for the coming days.

DAY-2: Animal sacrifices are performed, and the eldest women of the household conduct symbolic rituals; such as drinking the first water and eating the first meal, before anyone else in the family.

DAY-3 (Musuangtap): This is the most sacred day, dedicated to feeding the three cooking stones in the hearth with rice and meat. The stones represent the household deities. This practice allows people to connect with their ancestors and the divine to seek blessings.

DAY-4: A day of purification whereby villagers clean wells, paths, and fields, symbolizing renewal and spiritual cleansing. This reflects the philosophical belief of the Sangtam tribe in the continuous cycle of life and death, birth and rebirth.

DAY-5 (Shilang Wuba Nyumong): A social day of gift exchange, family bonding, and sharing rice beer. It strengthens kinship ties. In modern times of isolation, these types of community practices rekindle the spirit of collective identity and reinforce a sense of belonging and togetherness.

DAY-6 (Akatisingkitsa): The festival concludes with prayers for divine blessings. Nettle leaves may be placed on rooftops to ward off evil, and the community rejoices in unity. This not only marks the spiritual cleansing of an individual but also reaffirms collective harmony and social spirit.

As the name of the festival suggests, “Togetherness Forever,” the literal translation of “Mongmong,” it embodies the essence of harmony, unity, and the collective effort of the community to keep their traditions alive. It reflects their commitment to maintaining a close-knit community, preserving their sense of belonging to a distinct culture, and passing on this heritage to future generations to sustain their indigenous identity, which is now on the verge of fading away.

Recent trends in the decline of various indigenous practices and cultures threaten the very existence of these communities and must be urgently addressed to ensure their preservation.

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POLYANDRY IN KINNAUR: CUSTOM, LAW, AND THE CHANGING CONTOURS OF TRIBAL IDENTITY

INTRODUCTION

In the high-altitude valleys of Kinnaur, a tribal district of Himachal Pradesh, social life has long been shaped by geography, kinship, and custom. Among the Kinnaura people, who are listed as a Scheduled Tribe under the Constitution of India, one of the most distinctive and debated traditions is the practice of polyandry. Locally called *Jon'tar*, this form of marriage allows a woman to have more than one husband, usually brothers. The practice emerged from the ecological and economic realities of life in the mountains, where land was scarce, agriculture depended on collective labour, and family survival often required joint ownership of resources.

The Kinnaura form of polyandry is typically fraternal, with brothers sharing a common wife. This system once ensured that property remained undivided among siblings, maintaining the family's economic base and social stability. Local legends connect the practice to the Mahabharata, where Draupadi's marriage to the five Pandavas serves as a sacred reference point. Rituals such as the turban-tying ceremony symbolize the collective acceptance of one wife by all brothers and mark the beginning of a shared marital life.

However, as India's legal framework evolved after independence, this centuries-old custom began to encounter the boundaries set by modern law. The relationship between Kinnaura customs and national legislation raises deeper questions about how tribal identity, law, and social change interact in a constitutional democracy.

THE LEGAL LANDSCAPE

The Hindu Marriage Act of 1955 governs marriage among Hindus in India and establishes monogamy as a legal requirement. Section 5 of the Act states that a valid marriage can take place only if neither party has a living spouse at the time of marriage. A second marriage during the subsistence of the first is punishable as an offence of bigamy under Section 494 of the Indian Penal Code.



Source: <https://www.alliancemagazine.org/conf-report/ifip2025/>

Yet the same Act contains an important exception for Scheduled Tribes. Section 2(2) explicitly states that nothing in the Act shall apply to the members of any Scheduled Tribe unless the Central Government directs otherwise by notification. This provision means that the marital and familial relations of tribal communities continue to be governed by their customs unless the government chooses to extend the Act to them.

This legal position was clarified by the Supreme Court in the case of *Dr. Surajmani Stella Kujur v Durga Charan Hansdah* (AIR 2001 SC 938). The Court observed that members of Scheduled Tribes are outside the automatic operation of the Hindu Marriage Act and that their marital relations are regulated by customary law unless the Central Government issues a specific notification. In that case, both the Oraon and Santhal parties were tribals, and the Court held that a prosecution for bigamy could not succeed without proof that the alleged second marriage was void under a law in force. The Court emphasized that a custom must be ancient, certain, reasonable, and not contrary to public policy to have the force of law.

The decision in *Kujur* reflects a judicial understanding that customs can coexist with national law, but only when they remain consistent with the broader principles of justice. It also highlights the delicate task of balancing the preservation of tribal distinctiveness with the enforcement of uniform legal norms.

CONSTITUTIONAL MORALITY AND CUSTOMARY AUTONOMY

The Indian Constitution protects cultural diversity but also places customs under the supervision of fundamental rights. Article 13(3) includes customs and usages within the definition of law, meaning that they can be tested for compliance with equality, dignity, and liberty. The courts have made it clear that traditions which perpetuate discrimination or deny basic human rights cannot be upheld solely on grounds of antiquity.

In the context of Kinnaur, this raises important questions about gender justice. Polyandry as practiced in the past often reflected the community's need for economic stability rather than gender equality. Although women could consent to such marriages, they rarely had control over family property and were often excluded from inheritance. Their role remained tied to household labour and reproduction, with little individual agency once the marriage was arranged.

Modern constitutional values require that any custom must evolve to protect both community identity and individual dignity. The judiciary has repeatedly ruled that while customs form an integral part of India's plural legal order, they cannot contravene the rights guaranteed under Articles 14, 15, and 21 of the Constitution.

CUSTOM, ECOLOGY, AND CHANGE

To understand polyandry in Kinnaur only through a legal lens would be incomplete. The practice arose from the ecological and economic circumstances of the Himalayas, where survival often depended on collective family arrangements. Historical records, such as the Punjab State Gazetteer of 1910, reveal that even the colonial administration recognized polyandry as a stabilizing institution that prevented the fragmentation of land holdings.

However, this system also reinforced patriarchy by placing property control entirely in male hands. The woman in a polyandrous marriage was often respected but seldom independent. Her economic and social position depended on her husband's family rather than her own rights.

In the post-independence period, social and economic transformations have reshaped this landscape. Education, employment, and mobility have expanded individual choices, and the younger generations of Kinnauras increasingly prefer monogamous marriages. Polyandry still survives in certain villages, especially in remote valleys, but more as a cultural memory than as a common social practice. Community elders view it as part of their heritage, while younger people associate it with a way of life that belonged to a time of necessity rather than preference.

THE PATH AHEAD

The decline of polyandry in Kinnaur illustrates the natural evolution of custom in response to social change. Law alone has not abolished the practice; rather shifting economic realities and education have made it less relevant. Yet, as polyandry fades, it remains a reminder of the adaptability of tribal societies and their capacity to find balance between collective good and individual freedom.

Going forward, the focus should not be on condemning or erasing such customs but on ensuring that they evolve in ways that uphold equality and dignity. Reform is most sustainable when it arises from within the community through dialogue and awareness rather than through external coercion. Initiatives such as legal literacy programs, participatory local governance, and equal property rights for women can help tribal communities reconcile their traditions with constitutional ideals.

Himachal Pradesh has already recognized the principle of respecting tribal distinctiveness in its legal framework. The Himachal Pradesh Transfer of Land in Scheduled Areas Regulation, 1969, safeguards the rights of Scheduled Tribes over their ancestral land. A similar approach that values cultural autonomy while aligning with fundamental rights can guide the treatment of social customs as well.

CONCLUSION

The story of polyandry in Kinnaur is more than a study of a marital tradition. It reflects India's ongoing effort to balance cultural autonomy with constitutional morality. The custom evolved as a rational adaptation to ecological hardship, but in the modern world it must be measured against the standards of equality and human dignity.

As the Supreme Court in *Surajmani Stella Kujur* observed, customs hold validity only when they remain reasonable and just in the light of contemporary conditions. This principle captures the essence of India's plural legal framework. The challenge is not to impose uniformity but to promote harmony between tradition and progress.

Polyandry in Kinnaur, therefore, stands as a living example of how societies adapt their customs to changing realities. It teaches that culture and law need not exist in opposition. When guided by the values of fairness and respect, they can together build a society that honours both its heritage and its humanity.

SOURCES:

1. Dr. Surajmani Stella Kujur v Durga Charan Hansdah, AIR 2001 SC 938.
2. Punjab State Gazetteer: Shimla Hill States, 1910.
3. StudyIQ, Polygamy in India - Explained, available at: <https://www.studyiq.com/articles/polygamy-in-india/>

THE READJUSTMENT OF REPRESENTATION OF SCHEDULED TRIBES IN ASSEMBLY CONSTITUENCIES OF THE STATE OF GOA BILL, 2025

INTRODUCTION

The Readjustment of Representation of Scheduled Tribes in Assembly Constituencies of the State of Goa Bill, 2025, was passed by both Houses of Parliament to address the absence of Scheduled Tribe (ST) representation in the Goa Legislative Assembly. With 40 seats in the Assembly and only one reserved for Scheduled Castes, the Bill aims to ensure that ST communities, now officially recognized are not left out of the democratic process. Law Minister Arjun Ram Meghwal introduced the Bill, stating its purpose was to correct this gap and provide fair representation.

Historically, Goa did not have any reserved seats for STs due to their negligible population. Over time, however, certain communities in the state were added to the Scheduled Tribes list, changing the demographic profile. The Bill builds on this shift, acknowledging that the earlier lack of reservation no longer reflects the present reality. It was first introduced in the Lok Sabha on August 5, 2024, and later passed in both Houses by August 13, 2025.

SIGNIFICANT CHANGES INTRODUCED BY THE BILL

The Bill authorizes the Census Commissioner to estimate Goa's ST population using the 2001 census, with final figures published in the Gazette of India. Based on this, the Election Commission will revise the Delimitation Order to reserve seats for STs, following public consultation and review. Empowered with civil court powers under the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita, 2023, the Commission can summon witnesses, request documents, and correct errors.

This Bill is significant for representation of the tribal communities of Goa, such as the Gowdas, Kunbis, Velips, and Dhangars. For many years, their voices were missing in government decisions not because they were silent but because they were not fully counted in official records. This Bill changes that scenario. It empowers the Census Commissioner to estimate the tribal population and use those figures to issue an order reserving seats so that Goa's tribal communities finally get fair representation.



Source: <https://digitalgoa.com/lok-sabha-passes-bill-to-enable-political-reservation-for-scheduled-tribes-in-go-a-assembly/>

The Bill has merit in that the process under it, though time taking, is thorough and offers invitation for consultation, while also providing for a review mechanism. It calls for proper estimates, invites people's opinions, and makes sure every change is fair and open. The Election Commission will play a strong role in making these adjustments with care and honesty.

For Goa's tribal people, this Bill is not just about numbers or boundaries. It is about being seen, respected, and included. It is a small but meaningful step toward giving them the place they deserve in the state's decisions. Quiet as it may seem, it brings justice and strengthens the spirit of democracy in Goa.

SOURCES:

1. <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/parliament-passes-bill-to-provide-reservation-to-scheduled-tribes-in-go-a-assembly/article69919739.ece>
2. <https://egazette.gov.in/WriteReadData/2025/265409.pdf>
3. <https://www.newsonair.gov.in/parliament-passes-bill-to-readjust-st-representation-in-go-a-assembly/#:~:text=6%3A53%20PM-,Parliament%20Passes%20Bill%20to%20Readjust%20ST%20Representation%20in%20Goa%20Assembly,passed%20the%20bill%20last%20week.>

NURTURING LEADERS WITHIN TRIBAL COMMUNITIES: ADI KARMAYOGI ABHIYAN



Image: https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fFStlcZY1etU_NFFTHwyo8Q&__tn__=EH-R

INTRODUCTION

The Adi Yuva Fellowship, Adi Karmayogi Volunteers along with other such initiatives are parts of the larger Adi Karmayogi Abhiyan launched by the Hon'ble Prime Minister alongside the Minister of Tribal Affairs and the United Nations ("UN") in India[1]. The program emphasizes a one-year fellowship experience with a push for volunteers, aiming to improve services reaching villages, nurture leaders within tribal communities, and turn local needs into tangible results. It links working directly with people to broader national objectives by bolstering institutions and improving access to things like healthcare, training, and government support. This piece examines the scheme from its vision, architecture, the initiatives therein to the actual groundwork. It also analyses its impact analysis from a comparative point of view.

LAUNCH, VISION, AND SCALE

To honor ancestral traditions, a new partnership blossomed between the government's tribal ministry and the UN in India, aiming to connect with many villages. The goal being better jobs coupled with stronger community support, all geared towards building a thriving future by 2047. It reaches 110 million people spread through 100,000 villages within 550 districts.[2] Detailed strategies are built from initial efforts to concrete plans, shifting energy toward real improvements rooted in communities and sustained by local backing.

PROGRAM ARCHITECTURE AT A GLANCE

This initiative connects young people through local hubs via two pathways. One is a full-year program offering tribal youth insights into policymaking alongside guidance plus training. The other sends volunteers directly into communities, into neighbourhoods, and rural areas to build connections, organize efforts, and enhance services.

The two paths converge at hubs, that is, Adi Seva Kendras, to offer help, encourage people to get involved, and then provide ongoing support afterward. They create a flow from participating in community life to finding work, maintaining momentum between projects, while strengthening local government and public services long-term. Volunteers engage through these centers to serve and mobilize communities, while fellows continue the work by designing and implementing sustained development initiatives.

Track 1 - Adi Yuva Fellowship: Policy and Career Pipeline (12 Months)

Young people from tribal communities are selected by the program for a year[3] spent working alongside organizations such as UN offices in India. During this time, they gain guidance from mentors, participate in planned training, get financial support plus health coverage, all while assisting with studies, planning projects, and on-the-ground work.[4] This model will spotlight growing leaders, help in understanding how things work within government, and highlight connections between doing good and building a career. Volunteers who finish move on to jobs or further training, turning a year dedicated to service into qualifications, practical skills, and then real opportunities and positions that matter to them.

Track 2 - Adi Karmayogi Volunteers: Last-Mile Catalysts (Approximately Two Months)

For around two months, dedicated young people get involved at a local level in neighbourhoods and rural areas, with backing from the United Nations Population Fund.[5] These volunteers spread awareness about available benefits, wellness programs encompassing healthcare plus good food, opportunities to learn new skills; moreover, they help both government representatives and local organizations organize efforts and ensure progress.

SOURCE:

- [1] <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2169786>
- [2] <https://india.un.org/en/302698-tribal-youth-gain-skills-new-fellowships>
- [3] <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2173858>
- [4] <https://india.un.org/en/302698-tribal-youth-gain-skills-new-fellowships>
- [5] <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2169786>
- [6] <https://india.un.org/en/302698-tribal-youth-gain-skills-new-fellowships>

These volunteers ensure a quick, better, and wider reach, understanding, and then implement smooth socioeconomic ventures. Locals pitch in, turning ideas for village progress into real plans while bridging gaps between people, hubs, and government. For instance, in Rayagada district, Odisha, Adi Karmayogi volunteers working through local Adi Sewa Kendras helped streamline access to maternal health services for over 300 tribal women within six weeks. This bottom-up, youth-led outreach mirrors the participatory innovation seen in the NYKS (Nehru Yuva Kendra Sangathan) scheme, yet distinguishes itself by integrating direct governance linkages through continuous local engagement.

ADI SEWA KENDRAS: ANCHORS FOR CONTINUITY AND OWNERSHIP

Local Adi Sewa Kendras serve the communities with government schemes and programs, healthcare, while also providing training opportunities. These hubs coordinate volunteers, boost the involvement of these communities with the government and other relevant authorities, while linking the tribals to the relevant resources. Making things consistent with various events during the off-season helps maintain momentum,^[1] and people do not forget what they have learned. Furthermore, these hubs give various tribal communities a place to connect, ensuring projects get done, records are kept accurately, and everyone feels invested in how things grow and services become better.

ADI SEWA PARV AND VILLAGE VISION 2030

Communities jumpstart change during Adi Sewa Parv,^[2] getting organized from village to district level. People collaborate on Village Vision 2030 plans, roadmaps, and break down goals for things like healthcare, jobs, schools, and local resources into achievable phases. People working together, volunteers alongside those in the office, connect with the community, collect info, and then pinpoint where help is needed. This shared effort fosters responsibility, yet also establishes clear next steps for everyone involved: volunteers, local organizations, and government bodies. These actions continue via established hubs coupled with regular check-ins.

IMPLEMENTATION FOOTPRINT AND TRAINING

To reach many people, we train leaders, group members, and government staff together, giving them shared materials and practices so programs launch quickly throughout regions.^[3] Local volunteers learn about benefits, healthcare connections, job skills resources, and also how to maintain records during meetings at local hubs. Participants go through a carefully designed program focused on leading, understanding policy, speaking effectively, plus real-world experience. This combined effort creates reliable expertise across many locations, skills readily put to use, observed, then refined based on what people in the field and leaders suggest.

PARTNERSHIPS AND INSTITUTIONAL LINKAGES

Collaborating with organizations such as the UN Population Fund in India brings technical expertise, global benchmarks for inclusion, and structured mentorship that strengthen local initiatives. The Ministry of Tribal Affairs coordinates these efforts to align community-driven action with national priorities, while local governments integrate volunteers into projects and planning. Partner organizations provide targeted placements that build leadership capacity. This collaborative model facilitates knowledge transfer, promotes best practices, and ensures that community participation and government support reinforce each other for sustained impact.

PATHWAYS TO LIVELIHOODS AND SKILLS

This program deliberately connects helping others with getting a job. Participants build their resumes through hands-on work and mentorship, transforming community service into employable skills. Those who volunteer acquire valuable skills, recommendations, and networks, simplifying access to education or new positions. Local hubs gather details about courses and employment; meanwhile, people running them alongside collaborators share what folks need. Consequently, this connects wanting to learn with actual chances, so that boosting services simultaneously helps individuals grow professionally and builds skilled workforces across areas.

WHAT VOLUNTEERS CHANGE ON THE GROUND

Volunteers contributed by addressing everyday issues the communities face when using public services. They run information sessions, assist families with paperwork, and arrange wellness events.^[4] Moreover, they connect people with training opportunities, point out problems to those in charge, and ensure needed check-ins happen. Locals keeping basic notes at hubs indicates the consistency of the model. Having them there also eases lines, clarifies benefits, builds faith between people and government, ultimately meaning services are easier to get, plus officials react faster.

SOURCES:

[1]https://adiprasaran.tribal.gov.in/adikarmayogi/Docs/Resources/ConceptNoteAdi_Karmayogi.pdf

[2]<https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2169786>

[3]<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/bhubaneswar/initiative-launched-to-empower-frontline-tribal-functionaries/articleshow/123049612.cms>

[4]<https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2169786>

COMPARATIVE OUTCOMES: DIFFERENTIATED YET COMPLEMENTARY

Participants on the leadership path grow their skills, understand how things work, and actively shape projects, showcasing this through completed tasks, credentials, and routes to jobs or further training. Those who volunteer expand reach, tackle issues, and boost services documented by centerlogs alongside feedback from people they help and the local tribal council. Volunteers fuel work; fellows transform knowledge into skill alongside professional growth, a climb where involvement builds people's potential, simultaneously improving everyday experiences for communities.^[1] Together, the two tracks create a feedback ecosystem that strengthens both local governance and youth empowerment.

GOVERNANCE ALIGNMENT AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOAL POSITIONING

Village projects start with local blueprints, subsequently flowing into larger regional, then state-wide frameworks, all geared toward broader national objectives alongside global sustainability efforts.^[2] Because of this structure, collaboration gets a boost, wasted effort shrinks, and responsibility for results becomes clearer. Information gleaned from connecting with people, signing them up, and making things better flows directly into plans, allowing us to adjust as needed. Because local communities are involved alongside official procedures, this builds trust while letting initiatives grow - so efforts genuinely advance well-being, learning, jobs, and equal access for everyone. However, sustained impact depends on institutionalizing these linkages beyond project cycles.

WHY THIS DESIGN IS DISTINCTIVE

This plan combines leadership training, a focused period of volunteering, and lasting community hubs.^[3] It differs from one-off events because it turns initial enthusiasm into long-term skills development, yet maintains momentum for individuals. Insights flow directly to action, then back to refinement, linking what we learn with how things get done. This creates a scalable system that connects policy learning with community-led development.

CONCLUSION

Leaders develop alongside faster, better services and personal progress fuels positive change for people. Fellowships boost connections, and by extension careers. Volunteering speeds up help while removing obstacles. Local hubs offer ongoing support, collaboration, data documentation, and protection so that the tribals can adjust accordingly. Working alongside countrywide groups focuses funds where they're needed. This blend of energy transforms youth engagement into lasting social capital, advancing national goals for tribal development and inclusive growth. Long-term success will depend on how effectively the program measures outcomes and maintains volunteer motivational plans concerning well-being, learning, and economic growth of the tribal communities.

SOURCES:

- [1] <https://india.un.org/en/302698-tribal-youth-gain-skills-new-fellowships>
- [2] <https://india.un.org/en/302698-tribal-youth-gain-skills-new-fellowships>
- [3] https://adiprasaran.tribal.gov.in/adikarmayogi/Docs/Resources/ConceptNoteAdi_Karmayogi.pdf

TANTARA-VAMIRO

MYTH, MARRIAGE AND SOCIAL REFORM IN NICOBAR



The Andaman and Nicobar Islands, India's remote tropical archipelago in the Bay of Bengal, are dramatically bisected by the Ten Degree Channel, a 150-kilometer-wide stretch of an open ocean that separates the Andaman group from the Nicobar Islands. At the southern edge lies Little Andaman, while 96 kilometres across the channel begins Car Nicobar, the gateway to the Nicobar archipelago. Geologically, this separation resulted from millions of years of tectonic shifts and post-glacial sea-level rise. The islands sit atop a submerged mountain range where the Indian and Burmese tectonic plates collide, creating an unstable landscape prone to earthquakes and tsunamis. Yet for the indigenous Nicobarese people, the split has a far more intimate explanation: a tale of forbidden love and ultimate sacrifice that quite literally tore their world in two.

In the Nicobarese oral tradition, the story begins when Little Andaman and Car Nicobar were one continuous landmass. Tantara, a young man from Pasa village, was renowned for his kindness and the mysterious wooden sword he always wore, believed to possess divine powers. He was beloved across villages, always first to help during harvest, and was welcome at every festival.[1]

One evening, while walking the beach at sunset, Tantara heard a melodious voice drifting across the waves. Following the sound, he discovered Vamiro of Lapati village, singing a traditional love song to the sea. When a wave splashed her, breaking her reverie, she found herself face-to-face with a stranger. Tantara, utterly enchanted, could only plead for her to continue singing. Annoyed by this breach of propriety, Vamiro demanded his identity, reminding him that customs forbade casual interaction between unmarried people from different villages. Yet something in Tantara's genuine admiration softened her resistance. Before disappearing, she whispered her name "Vamiro". Word spread of their forbidden courtship, and tensions mounted. The core issue was clear, Nicobarese custom demanded strict village endogamy. Marriage was only permissible between members of the same village. This wasn't mere preference but sacred law, designed to maintain village cohesion and social stability.

The confrontation came during the Pashu Parva, the annual animal festival where villages gathered to celebrate with livestock displays, strength competitions and feasting. Vamiro, unable to resist, slipped through the coconut palms to glimpse Tantara. When her mother discovered them together, she erupted in fury. Before the assembled crowd, she publicly shamed Tantara, accusing him of corrupting her daughter and disrespecting sacred customs. The crowd joined the condemnation.

Trapped between his love for Vamiro, who stood weeping, powerless, and the community he'd always served, Tantara felt rage and despair overwhelm him. In explosive emotion, he drew his wooden sword and plunged it into the earth with supernatural force, then began dragging it across the land. Behind its path, the ground began to shudder and crack. A massive fissure opened along the sword's track, splitting the land entirely. Vamiro ran along the widening chasm, screaming Tantara's name, but the gap grew into an unbridgeable gulf. The section where Tantara stood began sinking into the sea. He tried leaping to Vamiro's outstretched arms but lost his grip and plummeted into the churning waters, his final cries lost in the roar. Vamiro, watching her love disappear, descended into madness, haunting that beach daily until she faded away. The islands stood permanently divided- Little Andaman and Car Nicobar separated by 96 kilometres of ocean.

Hence, the Tantara Vamiro legend functions on multiple levels within Nicobarese culture. It validates geographical knowledge, transforming geological reality into a moral lesson and making geography inseparable from collective memory. The story addresses the tension between individual desire and communal welfare, acknowledging the pain caused by rigid customs while showing the chaos that follows when tradition is violently rejected.

Most significantly, the legend provided cultural permission for social reform. After this tragedy, the Nicobarese abolished village endogamy restrictions. Rather than framing this as abandoning tradition, the story recasts it as honouring a sacred sacrifice. Tantara and Vamiro became martyrs whose deaths purchased freedom for future generations. This is the genius of oral tradition: it allows communities to evolve while maintaining that evolution is itself traditional. The story essentially says, "We changed because our ancestors' sacrifice taught us to change." Today, the Tantara-Vamiro legend remains vitally relevant across India's tribal landscape. While Nicobarese communities have abandoned strict village endogamy, parallel customs persist among many of India's 700+ tribal groups, affecting over 104 million people.

The contemporary Nicobarese people, numbering approximately 30,000, are classified as a *Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group (PVTG)*. They live primarily in coastal villages on Car Nicobar and smaller islands, practicing a mixed economy of horticulture, pig-rearing, and fishing. Their traditional governance system village councils led by elected captains still functions alongside Indian administrative structures.

Cultural festivals featuring traditional dances and storytelling receive government support. Nicobarese scholars have documented their folklore, ensuring survival. Villages have established cultural centres where elders teach traditional practices to children. Most importantly, the Nicobarese have demonstrated adaptive resilience, selectively adopted beneficial modern practices while protecting core cultural elements: their language, governance, land rights and marriage customs now based on individual choice rather than village boundaries.

When Leeladhar Mandloi, the distinguished broadcaster and writer, documented the Tantara-Vamiro legend in his collection Kala Pani (Dark Waters), he preserved more than a story. It shows how societies can change from within. Today, many indigenous communities feel forced to choose between losing their culture completely or rigidly clinging to outdated traditions. The Nicobarese people show us a better way: they use their own myths and stories to guide meaningful change while keeping their identity intact. Tantara's sword didn't just divide the land. It opened the door for new ways of building relationships and families. Even now, as the Nicobarese struggle to survive as a community, they look to Tantara and Vamiro's story for guidance. This proves that folklore isn't just about remembering the past, it's a living tool that helps communities honour their heritage while adapting to new challenges.

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<https://ncert.nic.in/textbook/pdf/jhsp110.pdf>.

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Nicobarese - Summary - eHRAF World Cultures

ART WITH A HEART

HOW 'TRULY TRIBAL' IS RESTORING DIGNITY TO ARTISANS



ABSTRACT

In a soulless world of capitalistic mass production, the soul of tribal art and craft is often lost in a supply chain that exploits its creators to the end. Shweta Menon, a former IT professional, witnessed this injustice and decided to spark change through an enterprise. She founded Truly Tribal, a social enterprise with a simple mission: to connect India's tribal artisans directly with consumers by cutting out exploitative middlemen who have historically taken the largest share of profits.

Truly Tribal is an online platform that showcases the rich heritage of more than 25 traditional art forms, including Warli, Pichwai, and bamboo crafts. It is not merely an ordinary store; it is a lifeline for more than 500 artisans in over 150 clusters across 18 states. By providing a marketplace that delivers fair value for artisans' hard work and creativity, the platform ensures that creators are rewarded for their skill and labour without middlemen taking the lion's share.

The platform also fosters innovation. It helps artists adapt their work to contemporary items such as coasters and trays, and it facilitates new ventures such as online art workshops. By blending tradition with modern enterprise, 'Truly Tribal' is not merely selling art; it is restoring sustainable livelihoods for tribal artisans in India who have endured economic exploitation at the hands of intermediaries.

This piece aims to present the conception, inner workings, and outcomes of a social enterprise that transforms business supply chains to make them more sustainable and equitable through its unique approach.

THE WIDENING GAP: A HERITAGE AT RISK

At one point, orders ceased. Demand disappeared, and he believed there was no option but to abandon his art. This is how Warli artist Sanjay Sangle, from a small village in Maharashtra, describes his experience. His story is not unique. Thousands of artisans who preserve centuries-old traditions across India have faced similarly grim fates. Patient, intricate craftwork representing cultural heritage was disappearing in the fog of mass-produced goods. The sophisticated designs of Warli, the devotional narratives of Pichwai, and the earthy beauty of Gond art were at risk of being confined to memory as their creators increasingly faced financial hardship. This was the aftermath of a failed system, a soulless commercial world in which the price of art was lost in a supply chain that made everyone but the artist a profit-making beneficiary. The distance between the artisan's village and the urban consumer became cavernous, marked by exploitation and apathy, pushing living traditions to the edge of extinction.

CODE TO CRAFT: A FOUNDER'S CALLING

In this harsh environment, Shweta Menon stepped in not as an artist or social worker, but as an experienced IT professional with 13 years of experience in technology and management. It was not merely a career change but a return to her roots. Menon was brought up in Chhindwara, Madhya Pradesh, located in one of India's largest tribal belts. For her, tribal life was not distant or foreign; it was the life of the people among whom she lived. This intimate connection with tribal culture was reinforced by her father's counsel: anyone can raise their own child, but if you can help raise another's, someone beyond your own kin, you can make a meaningful difference. This philosophy changed her perception of entrepreneurship from pure profit to purpose. A purchase of a handmade item exposed the exploitative path it had taken to market. With a vision to restore dignity to artisans and a background well suited for building a digital solution, she left her IT career and founded a business she named Truly Tribal.

WEAVING A NEW FUTURE: REAL TRIBAL IMPACTS

Truly Tribal is not merely an online store but a social enterprise designed as a lifeline for artisans. Its model is straightforward: connect India's tribal artisans directly with consumers to cut out exploitative middlemen who have traditionally taken the lion's share of profits. This digital bridge has helped build a network that supports more than 500 artisans in over 150 clusters across 18 states. The platform features more than 25 traditional art forms, including Warli, Pichwai, Gond, Madhubani, and bent-bamboo crafts.

Menon's approach adapts contemporary business strategies to a traditional industry. Her information-technology background enabled her to build not only a website but also a robust digital infrastructure that supports direct-to-consumer sales and complex B2B orders, including one-stop solutions for international buyers. The platform is innovative in helping artists translate classical expertise to modern markets. Traditional motifs now adorn contemporary objects such as coasters, trays, desk organizers, and personalized corporate gifts, making heritage relevant to modern consumers. This shift itself is an act of cultural preservation. By making these art forms economically sustainable, Truly Tribal helps ensure they remain living traditions within the contemporary economy. Ultimately, Truly Tribal is not merely a business selling art; it helps restore dignity and sustainable livelihoods for local communities and ensures recognition of tribal craftsmanship for future generations.

GOVERNANCE, FAITH, AND FORESTS

RETHINKING SACRED GROVES

THROUGH THE LENS OF

KANTARA



The notion of sacred groves emerges as a living doctrine of governance, where faith shapes India's diverse experiential and ecological history and recalls an earlier state of being. Such groves, known as Devarakadu in Karnataka, Devrai in Maharashtra, Oran in Rajasthan, and Law Kyntang in Meghalaya, define pockets of forest reverence protected by communities because they are believed to be the dwelling places of a deity or ancestor. The customary practice of non interference with such groves stands beyond the articulation of legal governance and endures alongside contemporary environmental law.

KANTARA AND RENEWAL

This ancient awareness of sacred groves finds renewed expression in the Kannada film "Kantara," directed by Rishab Shetty, which explores tribal reverence for a cultural demigod, the Daiva, in relation to the forest and the disruption of this relationship by state power. In "Kantara," viewers encounter not merely a spectacle but a cultural production of space, mindful of time, faith, ecology, and governance, rooted in indigenous Indian histories.

FAITH AS GOVERNANCE: THE SACRED ECOLOGY OF TRIBAL WORSHIP

Forests have always played an essential role in the lives of tribal communities. They are regarded as living entities that breathe, listen, and respond. A forest is not a land to be managed; it is kin. Every movement, whether the flowing of a river or the rustling of leaves, carries divine power. The deities that dwell in trees, hills, and rivers transform the act of living into a moral dialogue with nature. In this sacred worldview, groves are both temples and protectors, where the sacred and the ecological converge. There are no written laws, no formal enforcers. Security lies not in statutes but in affection, awe, and an aversion to offending the invisible beings within. It is a form of governance woven from ritual, memory, and moral imagination.

RITUAL AND COVENANT

Rituals such as the Bhoota Kola, depicted in "Kantara," play a crucial role in spiritual and social regulation. The Daiva is understood as the spirit of the forest, protecting those who live in harmony with nature and cursing those who exploit it. This vision creates a religious covenant between humans and nature, a covenant that is based on respect rather than extraction.



THE KANTARA PARADIGM: CONFLICT AND CONTINUITY

“Kantara” translates this religious connection to forests into a contemporary legal and political setting. The central conflict arises when the state asserts authority over forest land without considering the community’s spiritual inheritance. The protagonist, Shiva, is torn between two worlds, the coldness of law and the warmth of living faith. In the film, the forest is not a backdrop, it is a living, divine, alert, and autonomous presence. When the sanctity of the forest is violated by greed, the Daiva intervenes, restoring order and reaffirming the moral power of nature over human law. The final transformation, Shiva becoming the Daiva, where man and myth converge, reminds us that true harmony with nature requires stewardship rather than domination. In this poetic arc, “Kantara” distills the philosophy of the sacred grove.

JUDICIAL REFLECTIONS: WHEN LAW ENCOUNTERS THE SACRED

India’s judiciary has, at times, mirrored the spirit of indigenous forest governance. In *T.N. Godavarman Thirumulpad v. Union of India* (1996), the Supreme Court expanded the meaning of “forest” to include community-protected areas, implicitly acknowledging sacred groves within legal protection. Likewise, in the *Niyamgiri case*, *Orissa Mining Corporation v. Ministry of Environment and Forests* (2013), the Court upheld the Dongria Kondh community’s right to safeguard their sacred hills, recognizing nature-linked faith as a facet of religious freedom under Article 25. Together with the *Forest Rights Act* (2006) and the *Biological Diversity Act* (2002), these developments articulate a jurisprudence that unites law, ecology, and belief, affirming that governance must honor both regulation and reverence.



RECLAIMING THE CULTURAL LENS IN ENVIRONMENTAL GOVERNANCE

“Kantara” and sacred-grove wisdom invite contemporary governance models to move beyond purely technocratic approaches to conservation. Policy often treats forests as economic or environmental resources rather than spiritual and social entities. However, conservation guided by the fear of divine punishment or respect for the sacred can be more effective than conservation enforced solely by law. When faith is aligned with ecological ethics, it becomes a powerful instrument of governance that cultivates community ownership, moral responsibility, and long-term sustainability. Acknowledging the cultural foundations of forest protection does not weaken the law, it deepens it, infusing administration with emotion, identity, and meaning.

CONCLUSION

“Kantara” revives a vital conversation in India, the dialogue between law and lore, between state authority and the forest. Sacred groves exemplify a form of governance both ancient and urgently relevant, decentralized, ethical, and grounded in a worldview where the divine protects the ecological. As India grapples with accelerating deforestation and climate change, custodianship rooted in faith is not nostalgia but necessity. When the forest hearkens to its own governance, as do the communities of “Kantara,” there emerges not only conservation but communion. In that moment, the forest ceases to be a resource and is revealed for what it has always been, a living deity, a moral compass, and a home.



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Citations:

[1] Governance-Faith-and-Forests-Rethinking-Sacred-Groves-through-the-Lens-of-Kantara.docx
<https://ppl-ai-file-upload.s3.amazonaws.com/web/direct-files/attachments/86918808/534a3138-8edd-4d56-8294-051fcab9948b/Governance-Faith-and-Forests-Rethinking-Sacred-Groves-through-the-Lens-of-Kantara.docx>



NATIONAL LAW INSTITUTE UNIVERSITY, BHOPAL
CENTRE FOR TRIBAL STUDIES AND RESEARCH



Published By
Registrar
National Law Institute University, Bhopal
Kerwa Dam Road -462044 (M.P.), India

