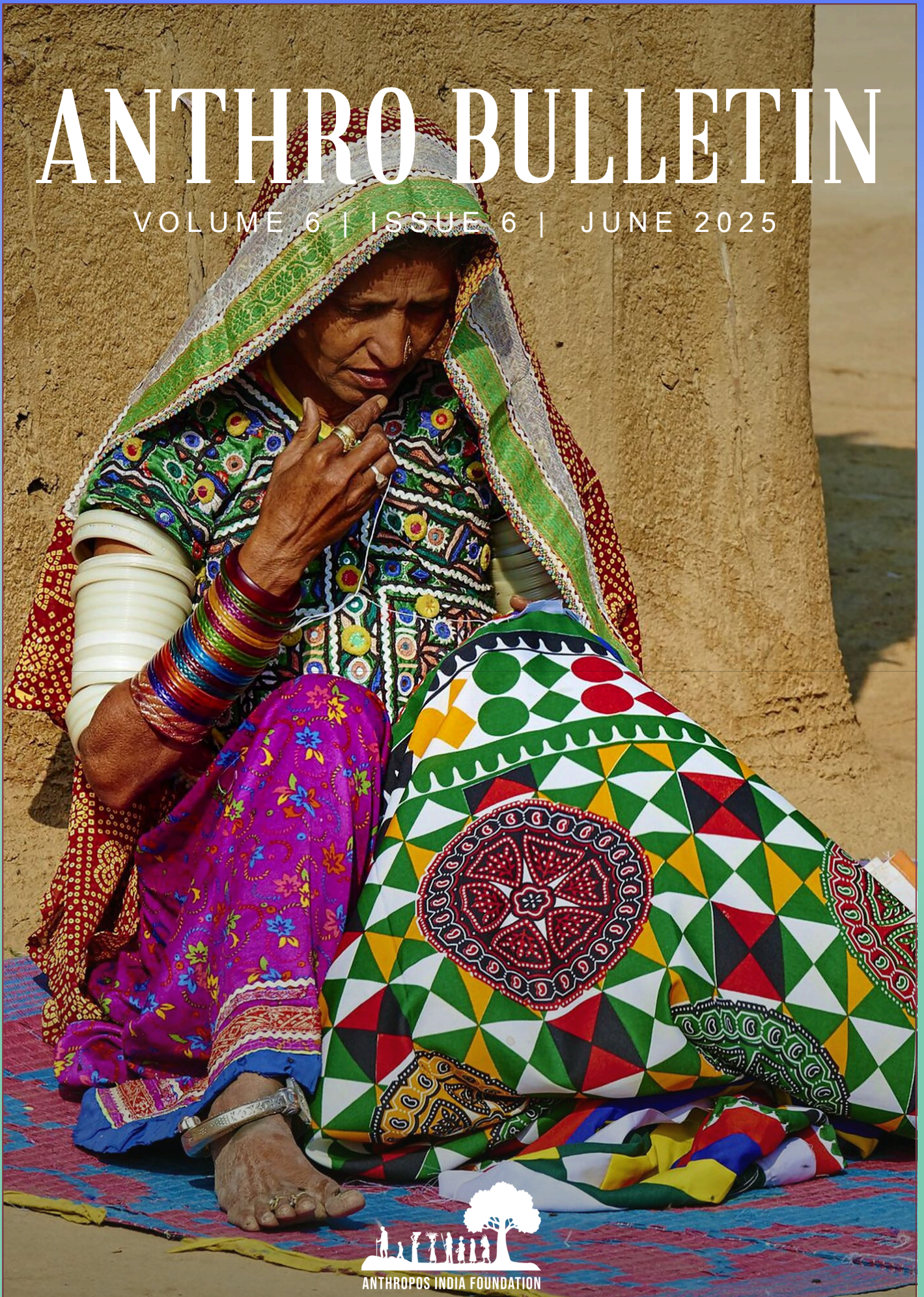


ANTHRO BULLETIN

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A digital magazine that celebrates cultural diversities of India.

ABOUT ANTHROPOS INDIA FOUNDATION

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

ABOUT ANTHRO BULLETIN

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

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

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

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Of Bones, Blessings, and Belonging

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

Have you ever noticed how we often take for granted the very things that sustain us—our health, mobility, and everyday freedoms? It's only when they're snatched away that we begin to appreciate their value. When we're agile and pain-free, we seldom pause to express gratitude. And then, in a flash—an accident, a fall—life alters its course. Plans are derailed, and the body, once effortless in motion, demands complete stillness.

After a month-long summer break in Bangalore, filled with the warmth of family, the joy of friendships, and cool breezes that made Delhi's heat seem like a distant dread, I was preparing to return to work. But on the morning of the 30th June, while coming down the stairs post-stretching and yoga, I fell. In seconds, I was immobilized. A fractured fibula. Surgery was immediate and necessary.

The pain was excruciating—something I had only read about in Arthur Kleinman's work on suffering. Experiencing it firsthand transformed abstract knowledge into visceral reality. The fracture humbled me. It also opened my eyes to the precision and power of biomedical care. In the sterile comfort of a modern hospital, guided by skilled orthopedic surgeons and a compassionate nursing staff, I was reminded of both the strengths and costs of institutional medicine—thankfully, mitigated by insurance. Yet healing is never only biomedical. My own research with herbal healers and traditional bonesetters in the remote hills of Northeast India shows a different world of care. These practitioners, often dismissed as quacks or superstition-mongers, are lifelines for many rural and tribal communities. They operate beyond recognition, beyond the state's radar, with immense knowledge passed through generations. They treat, they soothe, they stay.

This issue of Anthro Bulletin brings such stories to light. Dr. Shubham Tiwari's ethnographic essay on Gond shamans in Amarkantak offers a fascinating glimpse into how these traditional healers address ailments—from jaundice to bone injuries—through a holistic fusion of ecology, medicine, and spirituality. His work underscores the urgency to preserve this fragile knowledge system, which continues to thrive despite the onslaught of biomedical dominance. In a world increasingly defined by volatility and violence, our moral compass is frequently tested. Prof. Shalina Mehta's searing essay on the recent Israeli airstrikes in Iran critiques the idea of a "just war," tracing philosophical and theological justifications of conflict from the Bhagavad Gita to modern political rhetoric. Drawing from her 2012 visit to Iran, she contrasts this ideology with the everyday resilience of Iranian women—agents of strength, not victims—whose silent dignity defies both patriarchy and war.

Her anthropological lens invites us to imagine peace as a system, not merely the absence of war. Elsewhere in this volume, Swastika Mukherjee takes us into the intricately stitched world of Kantha embroidery. What began as women's domestic expression—recycling old saris into stories

—has now entered the fashion world. Yet, as with many artisan traditions, the original creators are often marginalized while designers reap the rewards... not the women who weave. Her piece reminds us that heritage and empowerment must go hand in hand.



Subiya Asad's article on Yawm al-Arafah illuminates the sacred terrain of Islamic pilgrimage. Drawing on Durkheim's "collective effervescence" and Victor Turner's "communitas," she explores how Mount Arafat becomes a liminal space, dissolving social hierarchies and opening the door to spiritual renewal. Even those not on pilgrimage partake in its sanctity through fasting, prayer, and reflection, creating a global moment of unity and grace. Rakhi Yadav's article explores the cultural continuity and contemporary significance of the Harappan city Rakhigarhi, using archaeological findings to trace its evolution from the Pre-Harappan to Mature Harappan phases. Building on my earlier piece on ancestral worship, Prof. Subhash Walimbe reflects on his 2013 visit to Ko Kha in Thailand, where locals venerate the fossilized "Lampang Man" as a guardian ancestor. Though scientifically debated, the symbolic power of such practices mirrors Indian traditions of veergal worship and the enduring connection between the living and the dead.

Finally, don't miss the captivating anthropological journey of Dr. Nita Mawar. Her lecture, rich with insights from medical anthropology, bridges theory with lived experience and field action—a must-listen for those seeking to apply anthropological knowledge to real-world medical issues.

As I sit with my leg in a cast, reflecting on mobility, dependency, and care, I am reminded of the layered textures of healing—biomedical, traditional, emotional, and social. This issue of Anthro Bulletin is a tribute to those layers, and to the people—seen and unseen—who carry the knowledge, bear the pain, and offer us pathways to wholeness.

Myth of a 'Just War'

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

"An Unjust Peace is better than a Just war."

- Marcus Tullius Cicero

Dear Readers,

Anthropologists are not only students of humanism, human interactions, human consciousness, but are also equally engaged in disentangling humanitarian idiosyncrasies, hegemonic instincts and its consequences. On the morning of 13th June newspaper headlines described another narcissist attempt to change the world order by killing with impunity several scientists, Army Generals and innocent civilians in Iran by Israeli Airforce, proclaiming it to be a 'just war' that is likely to save the future of humanity from a probable nuclear holocaust and a hegemonic Islamist regime. On that morning, I said to myself- "Oh God", Why hunger for power is so blind??

Images of these strikes brought back memories of a premonition I had while driving from Isfahan to Tehran in Iran in 2012, when on an instinct I told my son, I hope western hegemonies and capitalist self-interest won't take away their spontaneous smiles. On this nearly 300 miles drive, we often saw happy families sitting in open green spaces, roasting kababs on small stoves, children playing merrily by the side of small tents and an atmosphere of peace and tranquility far removed from economic hardships that American sanctions had imposed on them.

I am a gender neutralist but was constrained to keep my head covered for those twelve days that I was there. Though women were mandated to wear hijab and politically and culturally marginalized by an orthodox Islamic regime, they worked quietly to carve a niche for themselves. Our host in Iran was a fitty plus woman entrepreneur who was running two schools and one of these was a play school and creche that catered to childcare needs of nearly hundred working mothers. Women drove without any fear at night. We were escorted to our guest house by our gracious fifty-two years old woman host after midnight. On our return journey a woman driver picked us from outside Milad tower in Tehran and drove us to the airport at 3am. I attended several exclusive women parties in the evenings, where young women wore attires of their choices and were as gregarious as women in any other liberal society could be. Many of these young women were working professionals and believed in an independent liberal ideology-a distinct form of cultural and religious feminism that manifested itself in anti-hijab movement in 2017. Literacy rate for women in the country over the years have risen from 84.87 in 2016 to 98.93 in 2025, despite being governed by an orthodox Islamic regime. Customary family law practiced by majority Shia Muslims in the country provide for 50% share for divorced women in husband's property. I wrote about these contradictions and inherent paradoxes in a society that is perceived with a different lense by western political hegemonies and by popular media in one of my publications in ASA monograph (52) published in 2016.

Strength of Iranian Women's movement is described by Iranian scholar Nayereh Tohidi (2016) by its "power of presence" and its "ordinariness" as observed in the details endorsed above. Public protests witnessed from 2017-2019 and again in 2022 after the death of Mahsa Amini are exceptions and not prioritized by internal Iranian women's agency. One of the reasons given for the so-called 'Just War' against Iran was the

need for 'regime change' as Islamic republic was unduly unjust to women and barbaric in its conduct towards those defying its orthodox religious dictates. Protests and call for regime change are legitimate demands of the citizens of the nations-states but when other nation-states try to do it by force, it tantamount to invasion. Regime change succeeds if the demand is organic and not maneuvered by external sources through force and violence. Shokoofeh Azar (www.INDIANEXPRESS.COM dated 28th June 2025) puts across pithily: *"We are on the brink of another revolution-of a return to the roots. After 46 years of theocratic oppression, Iranians are rising-not for religion, nor for ideology, but for identity and freedom"*.



What we saw from 13th to 24th June unfold in Iran in the name of 'Just War' thus becomes deeply problematic. Premise of 'Just War theory' is moral sanction to use military force for self-defense or for the protection of innocent lives (Bellamy,2006). Political theorists trace its roots to philosophical discourse of Aristotle and Plato that was further crystalized by medieval Christian theologian like Saint Augustine and Thomas Aquinas (Belter, 2013). Ancient Indian philosophy rooted in legendary scriptures, The Bhagavad Gita spells rules for Dharmayudhha while persuading Arjuna to fight for a virtuous cause but makes important distinction between the cause of the war and act of warfare. International Humanitarian Law in correspondence with the principles defined in the texts of the Bhagavad Gita distinguishes between *Jus ad bellum* implying a set of conditions before engaging in a warfare that tends to carefully map its consequences and *Jus in bello* that operates as a monitoring mechanism for the conduct of parties involved in the war. However, once a war begins, these distinctions tend to disappear, and ambiguity dominates. Warring nations fail to allude to the motive that prompted their action. Verse 47 in chapter 2 of the Geeta had cautioned: *"Your authority is in action alone and never in its fruits, motive should never be in the fruits of action, nor should you cling to inaction."* In this war as in any other war, consequences are traumatic. Its worst victims are innocent children and women. From an anthropological perspective, wars are instrumental in strengthening identity issues and become catalyst for a nationalistic agenda. It is important to assert, civilizations in their long histories of survival go through several revolutions but always bounce back reclaiming its identity and honor. Persia is more than 5000 years old civilization with rich tapestry of culture, language, arts and architecture. Isfahan is one of the cities that is a living monument to its rich heritage. As an optimist anthropologist, my firm belief is that man-made bombs of any size or capacity are not capable of destroying cultural histories and its resilience. Let us resolve to look for what prominent anthropologist Douglas P. Fry et.al (Humanities and Social Sciences Communications (2021) 8:17 <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-020-00692>) explore; Societies within Peace systems avoid war and build positive intergroup relationships.

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Rakhigarhi: Largest Urban Settlement of Harappan Civilization



By Rakhi Yadav

Abstract:

The article delves into one of the ancient cities of the Harappan Civilization, 'Rakhigarhi'. The purpose of this paper is to highlight the cultural continuity of the Harappan civilization at Rakhigarhi, from the Pre-Harappan to the Mature-Harappan phase with the help of material cultural and recent archaeological findings from the site of Rakhigarhi; such as settlement patterns, structure, artifacts, technologies and ancient DNA, etc. It also highlights the transformation of the culture from the early times to the contemporary time, through the research data of archaeological excavation conducted by ASI. This article also throws lights on the contemporary relevance and significance of the site. Why does it need to preserve this ancient urban settlement, and what makes it significantly different to the other Harappan sites in the Indian subcontinent?

Keywords: Urban Settlement, Harappan Civilization.

Introduction:

Rakhigarhi is one of the five urban centers of the Harappan Civilization in India. Presently, It is located at the centre of the Ghaggar Basin (Rigveda, Saraswati Basin) in Hisar district, Haryana. It is 160 Km away from the capital city, New Delhi. The site was first reported by Dr. Suraj Bhan, later investigated by the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) in 1997 to 2000. Rakhigarhi, as a name of the site, came after the extensive present day agricultural village which now overlies several areas of the site.

The site consists of seven core mounds with the name RGR 1 to RGR 7. As per the detailed surface survey of the site and Ground Penetrating radar (GPR), the site's total habitation area calculated is above 550 hectares (1400 acres; 5.5 square km; 2.1 square miles), making Rakhigarhi the largest known Harappan site in the Indian subcontinent. Dr. Suraj Bhan in 1975 reported Rakhigarhi as a Harappan site in the subcontinent on the basis of ceramics found on the surface of the site mound number four RGR-4. After that the Archeology Survey of India conducted excavations of the site in three phases; 1997-1998, 1998-99 and 1999-2000. Between 1997-2000 under Dr. Amarendra Nath, during these excavations seven mounds were identified at Rakhigarhi. Later excavations of ASI between 2012-2016 and 2018-2019 under Dr. Vasant Shinde, the surface survey by Dr. Shinde and the Deccan College Post Graduate and Research Institute team, brought to light two more habitation mounds

at the site, termed as RGR-8 and RGR-9. Recent ASI excavations at Rakhigarhi between 2022-Present were conducted under ASI additional director general, Dr. Sanjay Kumar Manjul. As per the site's archeological findings and discoveries, it is the biggest urban settlement. Rakhigarhi was added among the five iconic sites, announced in the Union Budget 2020, Government of India. The ASI, the state and the central governments signed an MoU in 2022 to develop the Rakhigarhi Museum, which will be the world's largest museum dedicated to Harappan culture. To inform people about the importance of the archeological site Rakhigarhi, promoting the cultural and historical importance of the site, the department of Archeology, Haryana state and Archeology Survey of India every year in December celebrates two days of Rakhigarhi Mahotsav at Rakhigarhi. Where they conduct heritage walks to discuss the archeological findings and discoveries from Rakhigarhi, and promote the cultural importance of the site.

Rakhigarhi : From Early-Harappan to Mature-Harappan Phase:

Archeological excavations at Rakhigarhi have provided evidence of rich material culture of Harappan civilization from the Early to the Mature Harappan time periods, human burials and the recovery of ancient human DNA has been a notable discovery. Rakhigarhi is the only well known site which provided DNA evidence of Harappan time. Archeological discoveries have also revealed the cultural continuity of Harappan civilization at Rakhigarhi from early to mature Harappan phase, as the site was abandoned during later Harappan time.



Figure: Excavated Mound, Rakhigarhi
(Picture Courtesy: Rakhi Yadav)

Initially Dr. Suraj Bhan identified Rakhigarhi as a Harappan site on the basis of ceramic connections to Harappan civilization. The Ceramics played an important role in studying the early Harappan phase (5500- 2600 BCE). During ASI excavation between 1998-2001 under Dr. Amrendra Nath, the mound RGR-2 at Rakhigarhi exposed celled mud-brick structures with thick mud brick foundations. The later excavations at RGR 2 under Dr. Vasant Shinde (2012-16) shows that many cultural remains from the mound were Mature Harappan phase such as seals, terracotta animal figurines, bangles, beads, cakes, a toy cart frame, semi precious stone beads, weights, shells, bone tools, gold foils, tiny beads, etc. All these material cultural remains show the cultural continuity of Harappan civilization at Rakhigarhi.

Significance of Rakhigarhi:

Rakhigarhi covers 550 hectares that makes it the largest Harappan site in South Asia, it is bigger than the initially discovered Harappan sites like Mohenjo Daro (300 ha) and Harappa. The cities like Harappa and Mohenjo Daro are situated in present day Pakistan. Rakhigarhi is one of the five urban settlements like Harappa, Mohenjo Daro, Ganweriwala, Dholavira, but only Dholavira and Rakhigarhi are in India. The Harappan initially established urban settlements mostly around the Indus river and its tributaries, but Rakhigarhi is one of the sites which is situated at the centre of the Ghaggar River Basin . As per the Rigvedic text its old name was Saraswati, so we can also call it the Saraswati Basin of India. Rakhigarhi is one of the significant sites as per the Dr. Vasant Shinde, the evidence of cultural transformation found from the site i.e from the early agrarian settlement (6000 BCE) to climax of urbanisation; pit dwelling house, timber house to well planned urban town and well structural bricks house, street and the best drainage system of Harappan civilization. Not only this the transformation is also in material culture such as crafts, technology, from ceramic to terracotta crafts like animal figurines, Bengal, toys, and Harappan pottery. The Rakhigarhi is one of the best examples of cultural transformation from early agrarian settlement to urbanisation in the Indian subcontinent. Rakhigarhi is one of the urban centers of Harappan Civilization which is situated in the centre of the Ghaggar River Basin of the Indian subcontinent. The significance of the site is its vast expansion of 550 hectares, the largest Harappan urban settlement in South Asia, the evidence of cultural transformation.



Figure: General View of Rakhigarhi Village; General View of Rakhigarhi Village
(Picture Courtesy: Rakhi Yadav)

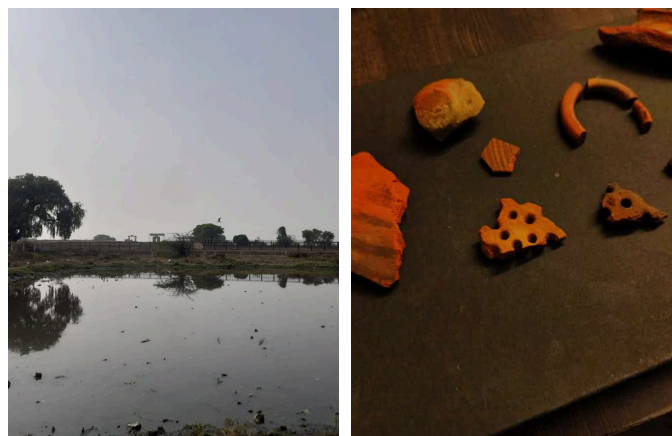


Figure: Artificial Water Body at Rakhigarhi Site; Artifacts From Rakhigarhi
(Picture Courtesy: Rakhi Yadav)

Conclusion:

Harappan civilization has almost 2000 sites discovered, yet among them, the five well planned urban settlements are Harappa, Mohenjo Daro, Ganweriwala, Dholavira and Rakhigarhi. Rakhigarhi is the largest Harappan site in south Asia. To preserve its uniqueness and significance, the state archeology of Haryana and Archeology Survey of India recently started to celebrate the Rakhigarhi Mahotsav every year in December at Rakhigarhi Village, for promoting the culture of the largest Harappan site.

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Kantha Stitch



By Swastika Mukherjee

Kantha Stitch is a traditional form of hand embroidery practiced mainly in West Bengal and East Bengal regions by women artisans. It forms an essential part of Indian cultural heritage.

Kantha work, first mentioned in a 500-years-old book "*Chaitanya Charitramrita*," written by a Bengali poet Krishnadasa Kaviraja. He wrote in this book about *kantha* stitch that mother of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu sends a handmade *Kantha* to his son by the pilgrims. The term "*Kantha*" refers to quilt which comes from Sanskrit word "*Kontha*". Generally old worn out clothes are used to make *kantha*.

With time, the hand embroideries are made on *kantha* to make it beautiful. The embroidery expresses the feelings of the artist. *Kantha* represents the hope and aspirations of a family. It is used for babies, worn as sarees, dhotis, Punjabis etc., also as bed sheets. It is also used as a wedding gift in some communities.

At first a picture is traced on the cloth and then it is filled with colorful threads. The motifs varies from culture to culture. They may be floral or graphical, influenced by the culture of the communities.

Under the British rule, many Indian handicrafts took backseat, though *kantha* continued to be practiced due to its cultural needs. Although from its humble beginning as a utilitarian form of embroidery to modern role in fashion industry, *kantha* flourished as a valuable part of Bengal. It became a potent pathway for women empowerment. Still *Kantha* work and *kantha* workers face threat of personalization.

Rural women of India in leisure time (after doing the household works and taking care of children) do handicrafts for their livelihood. Men help in marketing of the *kantha* products. On the basis of fieldwork in the villages of Yadavpur and Kasba of Birbhum district, W.B. by inventory work on 70 women *kantha* workers, I found that in despite of their intend input, financially they are not rewarded as they should be.

Challenges

- *Kantha* work is practiced by only the women of the villages. About all women know this artwork. Young girls also help their mother in completing the artwork. Generally, they do the work at early morning for about 2 hours and afternoon about 3 hours. Most of artisans are interested in making sarees because they get a better amount then other small works after the end of the work. They use this for meeting family expenses.
- *Kantha* workers are paid about 1500 to 2000 rupees per piece of saree and its takes 2 to 3 months to complete (the cost of the saree depends on the quantity of *kantha* work and they work about 4 to 5 hours per day, on calculating their hourly wage, its being found that their maximum wage is approximately Rs. 5 per hour only) This amount is truly unfair in comparison with the hard work they do on the sarees.
- The raw material they get from the manufacturer or by the distributor are their responsibility. Suppliers deducted money if the product gets damaged while the product is under the *custody of kantha* workers. Lack of security of materials is also a major problem for *kantha* workers.
- Suppliers do not provide the complete kit of tools to the *kantha* workers which is needed to do *kantha* work. For needles, frames, and scissors, etc., are paid additionally by the *kantha* workers. Suppliers provide only cloth and threads.
- Some manufacturers, for maximization of their profit, focused on quality compromisation with *kantha* stitch products. This affects in the demand of *kantha* products.
- On overiewing the buyer's response by me it has been seen that the demand of *kantha* product is in both National and International buyers, but the market price of *kantha* products are very high as compared to Indian buyers. So, the International buyers are more beneficial for *kantha* product suppliers.



Analysis

Thus we can say that *kantha* industry is in a dangerous situation. There are some more problems which lead *kantha* workers away from their artwork. These are-

- Lower wages according to the hard work and the time they invest in a *kantha* product insists the workers to do new work like packaging, tailoring etc. to get more remuneration than *kantha* stitch.
- *Kantha* workers suffer from low self-esteem, they consider *kantha* work as a work for undereducated people, so, their low self-esteem makes them lose their interest from the *kantha* work.
- The women *kantha* workers demands haat and facility of transportation and communication for independent marketing.

All these conditions affects to decreasing in women *kantha* workers. The inclusion rate of *kantha* artisans are lower than the exclusion rate of *kantha* artisans. The ray of hope in between of all these situation is that the women worker are getting support from SHGs. But they are not aware of the schemes for microfinance of government.

Recommendations

To overcome this situation, there are some suggestions on the basis of my inventory for the betterment of and *kantha* art :-

- Inclusion of *kantha* stitch as a skill based subject for Primary schools. By this step at the end of primary level, a young trained workforce of *kantha* stitch will emerge. This may also help in empowering youngsters, increasing numbers and the self-confidence of *kantha* workers.
- Increasing intranational market - *Kantha* products have limited access in all over India. It is mainly found in Shantiniketan. By increasing its market around the production place its accessibility will increase and help in increasing its consumers.
- Increasing facility of "Haat" - In the villages there is a huge demand of haat and melas. As women are workers they want to sell products themselves to get real remuneration.
- There should be a mutual understanding between consumers and producers on quality and cost of *kantha* products.
- There should be a universal yardstick for the wage of *kantha* workers. It will help in improvement of their wage.
- Suppliers should give security and a complete tool kit to *kantha* workers.

Kantha artwork is our cultural heritage and the women *kanth* workers are protector of this culture so, as a part of scholarly society, it is our duty to uplift them.



Figure: Kanthworkers of the research area showing their artworks.

Echoes of Revelation and Redemption: The Historical, Ethical, and Eschatological Dimensions of Yawm al-Arafah



By Subiya Asad

Introduction

Muslims across the world, and in India held Thursday, 5 June, 2025 as an important day of supplication and prayers. This day, *Yawm al-Arafah* or the Day of *Arafah* occurs every year- being that it is the ninth day of the pilgrimage of *Hajj*. This essay explores *Yawm al-Arafah* through three interrelated lenses. Historically, it examines the revelation of *Quran* 5:3 during the Prophet Muhammad's Farewell Sermon at Arafat and its implication as the moment of completion of the Islamic faith and traces other genealogical and prophetically significant events in Islamic history. The investigation continues through an Eschatological lens wherein the essay investigates the significance of *Arafah* as the "witnessed day" mentioned in *Hadith*. Through the lens of ethics, the essay explores the values that are emphasised on this day—repentance, humility, solidarity, and charity—as the moral imperatives of devoted Muslims. In conclusion, the essay will identify Mount Arafat as a liminal space wherein through ritual performance and the emotional catharsis that occurs resultantly, achieving in return a divine proximity.

'This Day I Have Perfected Your Religion': Theological Finality and Ritual Efficacy on the Plains of Arafah :- With layers of theological, genealogical, and prophetic significance, the Day of *Arafah* holds a prominent position in Islamic sacred history, and establishes its association with repentance, mercy, and the restoration of spiritual harmony. The Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) and his son Ismail (Ishmael) completed the construction of the *Ka'ba* on this day. Additionally, the *Ka'ba* is conventionally interpreted as a reconstruction of the first earthly sanctuary constructed by Adam and Eve. Islamic tradition thus traces the lineage of sacred history back to the primordial couple, who, after being kicked out of paradise, turned to Allah for forgiveness - as Milton alludes to in *Paradise Lost*- along with being reunited at the Arafat plain

The topography of *Hajj* from *Ka'ba* to the wide plain of Arafat, becomes then a living map of sacred memory. The relics, monuments, and ritual sites in the area serve as markers of prophetic legacy, transforming these spaces into sites of divine-human encounter where remembrance becomes a means to access the sacred.

Further, verse 5:3 of the Holy *Qur'an* states, "*This day I have perfected for you your religion and completed*

My favour upon you, and have approved for you Islam as your religion." Given to the Prophet Muhammad at Arafat on the ninth day of *Dhul Hijjah* in 10 AH (632 CE), this verse marks the completion of the religion. Known as 'The Verse of Completion', or *Ayat al-Deen*, it emphasises the universality and finality of the Islamic message and is a turning point from a theological and eschatological perspective.

The Day of *Arafah* also marks the occasion of the Prophet's Farewell Sermon which was delivered at *Jabal al-Rahmah* (the Mount of Mercy). The Prophet addressed a large gathering of pilgrims to state the foundational ethical and social principles. He emphasised on justice, equality, the sanctity of life, and importantly, the unity of the Muslim *ummah*. In this way, he not only reinforced the religious significance of the Hajj but also crystallised the moral vision of Islam. This made the Day of *Arafah* a day of both spiritual culmination and communal reflection.

Between Standing and Submission: The Phenomenology of Devotion and Collective Memory on *Yawm al-Arafah* :- So what happens on this day that is so ceremonious? Millions of pilgrims gather on the plains of Arafat, standing from noon to sunset in *wuquf*- an act of ritual surrender. Simply standing becomes an immersive moment of humility before the Divine that strips away worldly differences as everyone stands equal before God. The act dissolves the self as a collective rhythm of prayer, supplication, and reflection takes its place. *Yawm al-Arafah* thus offers a profound phenomenological experience of devotion. The standing at Arafat also triggers what Durkheim termed "collective effervescence," wherein the act of worship becomes a vehicle for social bonding and spiritual elevation. Pilgrims report feelings of emotional catharsis and deepened faith, reinforced by the symbolic association with the convergence of the stories of key figures of sacred history; Adam, Ibrahim, and Muhammad. In this way, *Arafah* becomes a space of intensified memory, reconnecting the believer to both prophetic legacy and divine mercy in turn creating a collective memory. For those elsewhere in the world, or not on pilgrimage, *Yawm al-Arafah* is marked by fasting from dawn until sunset, engaging in prayer, reciting *Qur'an*, giving charity, and making abundant dua. This extends the sacredness of Arafat to homes and communities across the globe.

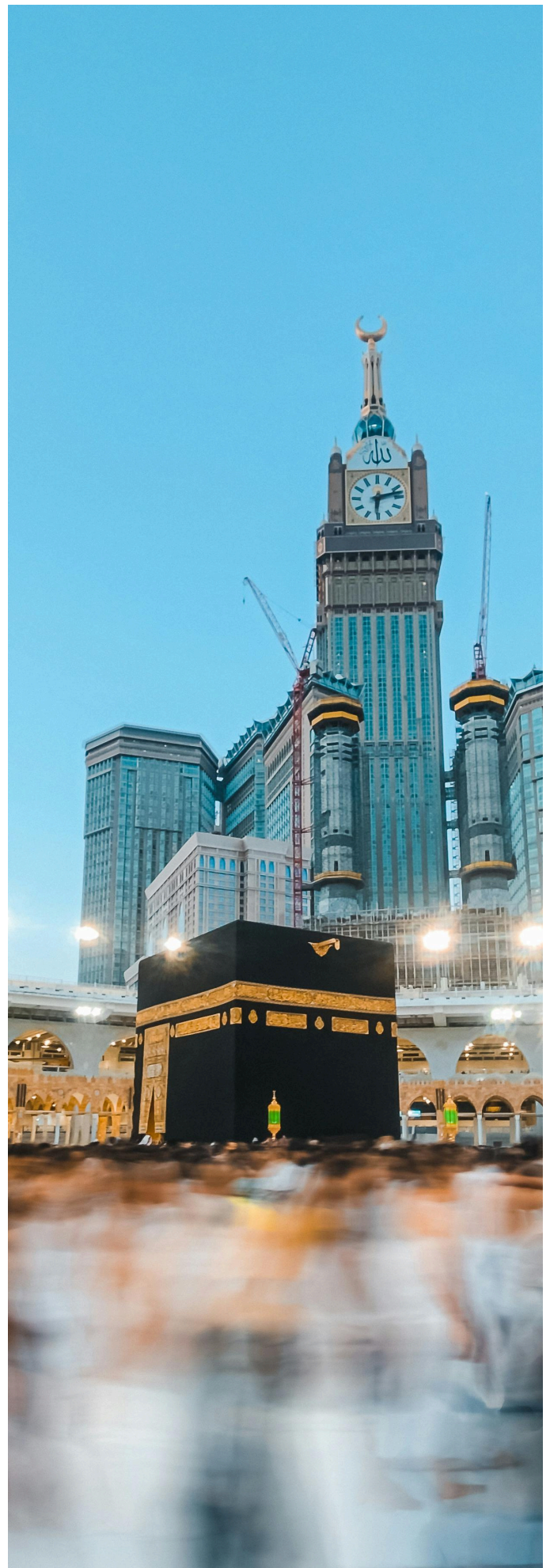
Mount Arafat as Liminal Space: Ritual Performance, Emotional Catharsis, and Divine Proximity in Islamic Practice :-

Anthropologist Victor Turner described liminal spaces as boundaries between the mundane and the holy, the material and the divine. In *Wuquf*, wearing the white, unstitched *ihram* garments which resemble burial shrouds, pilgrims lose their social identity, hierarchy, and status, making them indistinguishable from one another. All pilgrims stand equally before God in a state of *communitas*, or egalitarian unity, which is fostered by this shared anonymity, according to Turner. This makes Arafat an apt example of a liminal space. This is supported by Arnold van Gennep's tripartite model of rites of passage—separation, liminality, and incorporation. Pilgrims, having left behind the routines of their lives, immerse themselves in prayer, supplication, and emotional vulnerability. They refrain from worldly indulgences and focus solely on repentance and divine connection. Buitelaar's analysis underscores this emotional intensity, noting how pilgrims frequently describe feelings of catharsis, rebirth, and divine proximity—an experiential purification whereby sins are symbolically shed and spiritual rebirth is embraced.

Anthropologically, Arafat's liminality is both spatial and existential. Pilgrims report a sense of dislocation from the mundane and entrance into a sacred temporality where divine mercy feels palpably near. Conclusively, Mount Arafat functions as a sanctified liminal arena—ritually, socially, and spiritually—where the boundaries between self and community, and between human and divine, are temporarily dissolved in sacred encounters.

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Ritual and Remedy: The Pharmacopoeia of the Forest



By Dr Shubham Tiwari

My interest in this topic surprisingly grew during my recent trip to Amarkantak. I saw a woman being exorcised while out for a morning stroll in the nearby village of Lalpur. After being paralyzed, she sought therapy from a tribal healer, often known as a shaman or *Vaidya*. Interestingly, Spikenard (*Nardostachys jatamansi*), a sacred plant, was used in the ceremony by the healer. His extensive understanding of herbal medicine and its ceremonial use gave her new outlook. It sparked my interest in ethnobotanical understanding and intergenerational awareness of traditional socio-medical concepts.

This experience compelled me to start visiting him regularly to learn about his knowledge of plant lore and how it is used in ritual healing. Soon after, my investigation led me to Domri Tola village, where I recorded the shaman's Ayurvedic methods, which were firmly rooted in traditional knowledge of the area. The spiritual value of sacred plants in ritual healing, the difficulties this age-old practice faces in modern times, and the relationship between ecology and mysticism are all explored in this writing on the mysterious field of Gond shamans' botany. This writing showcases the cultural diversity of the Gond tribes, one of the most well-known indigenous groups in central India. It is set in the ethereal setting of Amarkantak, the sacred source of the Narmada River where the Vindhya and Satpura ranges meet. Based on in-depth discussions and information sharing with the healer, the findings provide a unique window into a dying legacy of ceremonial healing and sacred botany.

In keeping with the traditional rural way of life, the observation begins at daybreak since the healer often departs by midday with his buffalo into the forest. I had to get up early the following morning to ask, as these locals most likely go out into the far-off forests early in the morning. Since the shaman's daily schedule involved leaving for the forest with his buffalo by midday, I started my observation work with a calculated decision. The smell of burning wood and several medicinal plants filled the air as I arrived at his modest home. The shamans were already occupied with their morning tasks, using a mortar and pestle to painstakingly grind materials while seated on the porch. Recognizing my presence, he welcomed me with a gentle smile, indicating openness to my presence.

The shamans kindly took the time to show me the many therapeutic herbs he utilized. I found it remarkable that he was revered as an informed elder and that his knowledge of traditional medicine seemed to be deeply ingrained in the village community's collective awareness. Fortunately, a young male patient (around 24–25 years

old) presented while he was there. He had sought treatment from the shamans for the severe agony he was feeling and the leg damage he had acquired in a little bike accident. The patient had previously had a painkiller injection from a local physician (a quack doctor), which was especially remarkable in this case. One thing is made abundantly evident by this entire scene, particularly when considering primitive rural tribes: in addition to basic modern medical care, there is a pre-existing association with witchcraft and occultism. It is also evident that individuals in these tribes can move fluidly between different healing systems, including modern and traditional ones. Let's go back to the instance when the same young man was treated. The young man was treated by the shamans using a previously created medicinal paste, which he said was composed of Benazir, Shatavari, Tejrak, Spikenard (*Nardostachys jatamansi*), Arjuna bark (*Terminalia arjuna*), and other locally gathered wild herbs. After that, he gave him a decoction that had jaggery and other therapeutic ingredients. He offered me the same concoction to drink as well; it was a sensory experience with a strong, distinct scent. Sitting on the shaman's mat, I began to inquire about indigenous pharmacology, as well as other vital aspects of the ethnomedicinal process involved.



Therefore, I asked him some specific questions. I told him that I saw you and other *vaidyas* here, and I found that ethnomedicine, as well as other *tantric* and *mantra* processes, you use in the treatment of various diseases. Regarding this, I had many questions. For example, for jaundice (Jaundice), I found references to remedies such as *haldi-fool* (turmeric flower). Can you elaborate on their preparation and treatment system?" This line of questioning was aimed at obtaining detailed information on specific treatments and their application, moving beyond my general observational understanding to a more exact knowledge and expertise of these individuals. I found his expertise; he began explaining the process in a way that, for toothaches, he treats his patients with medicinal herbs called *Superudapi* and *Sonamukhi*. Whereas for pus in the ear, they use a forest herb called *Barmasiya*. If someone has jaundice, they use a monsoon herb called *Charmukhi*, which the patient must take with water for a few days. To treat his patients' jaundice, he used *mantra* chanting, turmeric flowers, and *Laljadi*. Additionally, he uses a variety of medicinal plants to treat his patients, particularly for ailments known in the local languages as *Pathri* (stone), *Bhagandar* (piles), *Magojra* (gastric), *Ghatbandhan* (tonsils), and *Mejkuliya* (dumb). He boils a plant called *Koliha Jojhil* and makes a solution of it, which he then gives to the patients to drink. He treats diseases with indigenous medicinal herbs such as Shankarijatha, Khar-Kharwa Paan, Jathaja, and the stem of the Aathooth tree. He also uses Shatavar, Tejraj, Sanjivani Booti, Gajaparashan, JalKumbhi bark, Dahiman bark, Korkot, and Arjun tree bark for strengthening bones and addressing weakness.

On the other hand, he utilizes the local herbal remedy known as Saja Ki Gofri to ward off snake and scorpion venom. *Nigodi* root is massaged for headaches, and a local remedy called *Pathin* is blended in the stomach and consumed. This investigation into the mysterious field of Gond shamans' botany highlights the challenges this age-old discipline faces in the modern world, while also illuminating the profound spiritual value of sacred plants in ritual healing. A holistic view of health, where environment and spirituality are closely connected, is highlighted by the complex interaction between mysticism and the environment. It is shown that these traditional healing methods may still be used even in cases when modern biomedical treatments are easily accessible. By combining decoctions and topical herbal remedies, the shaman's therapeutic method exemplifies a complex, culturally based system of ethno-medicine that is both adaptable and successful. These results underscore the pressing need for a comprehensive scholarly examination of traditional medical practices. These kinds of investigations are essential for bridging the epistemic gap between conventional and modern medical systems as well as for maintaining extensive, frequently verbally conveyed compilations of information. The depth and complexity of these therapeutic traditions suggest a wealth of traditional medical knowledge that should be meticulously documented and critically analyzed. By doing this, we may look at the possible benefits of these traditional methods for modern healthcare while also fostering a deeper appreciation for them.



Dr. Nita Mawar



Interview by Saba Farhin

Dr. Nita Mawar, B.Sc. (Hons) and M.Sc. in Anthropology, also earned her PhD in Anthropology as SRF, ICSSR from the Department of Anthropology, University of Delhi, and holds a PG Diploma in Bio-Ethics from IGNOU. She played a pivotal role as a founding member and as Senior Research Officer and Head of the Social and Behavioural Research Division at ICMR-NARI from its commencement in 1992 until her retirement as Senior Scientist and Director-In-Charge in 2014. Earlier, she served at ICMR-NIV, Pune (1991-92), ICMR-NIRTH, Jabalpur (1984-90), and still earlier NIHFW and ORG N Delhi. While at NARI received training at JHU at Summer School for Epidemiology Baltimore, at Natal Univ.- Harvard Univ. training on Ethical Issues in International Health Research, Durban and Post-Doctoral Training at Yale University.

Her work has spanned tribal health, maternal and child health, and the social and behavioral dimensions of HIV/AIDS among women, youth, and vulnerable populations. She led and collaborated on national and global research projects, including partnerships with NACO, Min of HRD (Youth Affairs), WHO, and NIH-Yale, and spearheaded a notable NACO funded mother-adolescent reproductive health intervention in the context of HIV/AIDS with UWA Pune collaboration.

With over 50 peer-reviewed publications and contributed in edited books including Editing a Volume for Eastern Journal of Medicine in 2011 as a lead Editor. Dr. Mawar has contributed extensively to areas like HIV stigma, youth sexuality, and yoga interventions for PLHIV. She has presented at numerous National and International conferences, including International AIDS Society Conference at Japan, A-PAC at New Delhi, Chiang Mai, Melbourne, four GWI events in Turkey, South Africa and Geneva. A lifelong member of UWA Pune, UIAF and FERCI, IAS etc. She has held significant leadership roles in IFUWA, and the Graduate Women International (GWI), serving in capacities such as Treasurer, Vice President, Joint Secretary, and Project Development Committee Convener for GWI. NACO identified her to lead at NARI as Nodal centre for training health professionals on HIV/AIDS counselling in three states, Rajasthan, UP and J&K in 1999 when counselling was a key component with HIV testing.

Now retired, Dr. Mawar remains active in public health through teaching, participating in ethics committees, including Chairing an EC of an NGO, being in advisory board memberships, and continuing her commitment to mentoring and empowering future public health professionals.



In this insightful conversation with Dr. Nita Mawar, a distinguished anthropologist and public health researcher with over five decades of experience, we delved into her inspiring journey dedicated to advancing community health, well-being, and ethical advocacy.

Looking back at your journey from studying anthropology to leading social and behavioural health research at ICMR-NARI, what key moments or decisions shaped your path as a researcher and anthropologist?

I completed my MSc way back in 1975 and yes, it feels like 50 years ago !! That same year, the International Population Conference in Geneva highlighted the urgent need to focus on women's status and health to improve population policies. The message was clear: empowering women in health and decision-making is essential for national development. That idea stayed with me. At the time, I had just registered for my PhD at Delhi University and was working at the National Institute of Health and Family Welfare (NIHFW) under Dr. Amita Burden and Dr. PK Datta, DU. After discussions with my mentors at the Anthropology Department, we decided to explore women's fertility behavior and their ability to make decisions, i.e. how social patterns and perceptions influenced their reproductive choices.

This marked the beginning of my lifelong engagement with women's health and empowerment. Around then, we at ORG N Delhi were part of a multi-country study funded by the International Labour Organization (ILO) that examined women's decision-making status in India. I was fascinated by the complexity of what actually enables a woman to make decisions, is it health, financial independence, social recognition, family support, or her own self-worth? We soon realized how women often remain silent contributors, particularly in

agriculture. Despite working from morning till evening, they rarely receive monetary payment, only in kind or through services. Without money in their hands, women lack decision-making power, not just in health but in all family matters. They are systematically excluded from critical conversations and choices. To address this, we conducted studies in both rural and tribal areas in MP. Our findings showed that women contribute equal hours of labour as men, though the nature of their work might differ. Still, because their contributions are rarely monetized, they go largely unrecognized. We published these findings in the *Journal of Social Change* in the 1990s, documenting the work hours of men, women, and children, and the meagre returns they earned. One case that stayed with me was that of a 7-year-old girl who couldn't go to school because she had to care for her sibling while her mother worked. These stories offered powerful insight and were cited in later research. We also evaluated the Community Health Volunteer program, initiated by Health Minister Raj Narain. Women were being paid just ₹50 a month. Through fieldwork in three states, we recommended reclassifying them as "volunteers" instead of "workers," given the token remuneration and their work and a related service. These inputs helped reshape how such roles were structured. Throughout my career, we've believed in feeding research back into the system like sharing it with policymakers, administrators, and the communities themselves. That feedback loop is vital for real change.

Later, I spent over three decades on HIV/AIDS research. In 1986, I worked on the University Talk AIDS program in late nineties. Our study based on mixed methods showed that students learned better about sexuality and reproductive health from external educators, as regular teachers were often reluctant to speak openly. We presented this to the Ministry of Human Resource Development, and policies were promptly updated. We also studied prevention of mother-to-child transmission (PMTCT) of HIV, highlighting how timely intervention during delivery or breastfeeding can prevent infection. Our qualitative research emphasized the need for continued postnatal care, which informed service improvements. Most recently, I've worked on HPV vaccine access formative study. It's rewarding to see a few vaccines now in the process of being integrated into national health initiatives proof that when research aligns with community needs, it drives real impact. In all my work, I've focused on three stakeholders: service providers, policymakers, and the community. Whether beginning with grassroots realities or top-down directives, the goal has always been the same, which is to connect the two and ensure interventions are both effective and meaningful.

Your work has spanned diverse areas from tribal health and women's issues to HIV/AIDS and bioethics. What do you consider your most impactful contribution to the field, and why?

When discussing ethics in service delivery, I'd like to share a study we conducted with Yale University on how healthcare providers treated HIV-positive patients in both outpatient and inpatient settings. We aimed to understand stigma, specifically from providers including doctors, nurses, ward boys, and even through interactions involving patients' families. To assess this, we developed the Implicit

Association Test (IAT) to measure stigma among healthcare providers. We found that doctors, viewing HIV as a fatal disease, especially before antiretroviral drugs like AZT were available, tended to deprioritize these patients, not necessarily out of stigma but for practical reasons. In contrast, nurses and ward staff often disclosed patients' HIV status to others, leading to breaches of confidentiality and reinforcing stigma. This highlighted the urgent need for training programs focused on ethical care and confidentiality. Ethics in HIV care extended beyond treatment to managing sensitive disclosures, even between spouses like for instance, whether a woman should tell her husband about her status, or vice versa. These were complex issues with serious implications. Working closely with national organizations and government bodies, we helped improve ethical standards in care through training at national and international levels.

The success of India's National AIDS Control Program (NACO) owed much to this collaboration between researchers and implementers, fostering mutual learning and effective programs. From an anthropological standpoint, a key lesson was the power of collaboration, not just producing theoretical work, but ensuring research translates into real-world change. That's where the true impact lies. Ethics is crucial because it upholds individual rights. In the context of HIV/AIDS, ethics involves not only delivering services but also protecting people's right to safeguard themselves. In the early years of the epidemic, stigma considered the third epidemic along with misinformation, and insensitivity caused significant harm, both in India and globally. In the U.S., stigma was especially linked to the "4 H's": Homosexuals, Hemophiliacs, Haitians, and Heroin users. These groups were unfairly targeted, with homosexuals particularly facing violations of their rights. I recall writing an article on this issue while working in government. At the time, Section 377, which criminalized same-sex relationships, was still under debate. I was advised not to mention it, but I insisted, saying, "Let me write, and you do what you need to do." As an anthropologist, I believe in presenting facts truthfully, even if editors choose to alter or omit parts. We respect that as it's their role. While we aim to communicate honestly, we also acknowledge their editorial rights. This balance between presenting facts and respecting others' responsibilities, is at the heart of ethical work. In the end, mutual respect is just as important as the message itself.

During your leadership at ICMR-NARI and in various collaborative projects, what were some of the key milestones and challenges you encountered, and how did your background in anthropology shape your approach?

One of the key experiences I had while working in a medical institute as a social scientist was understanding the importance of equal partnerships in research. It wasn't easy at first. Often, research in medical settings followed a top-down approach, where we were simply expected to fill out questionnaires or collect data, hand it over, and let the rest be handled by others. But meaningful research happens when all collaborators, medical and social scientists, work as equals.

Even while I was at NIHFW and at ICMR-RMRC Jabalpur, we were independently developing research programs. So it took some time and effort to help others understand that we wanted to create an independent department, one where we could contribute collaboratively but also lead our own projects. Medical teams welcomed our expertise, especially in developing good research tools and qualitative components, but we wanted more than that. We also wanted the space to conduct our own research. Eventually, we reached a win-win understanding. We needed the medical doctors to help us identify patients and share clinical insights, laboratory scientists for lab reports, while we could contribute important behavioral and social dimensions to improve patient outcomes. Working together as equals was essential, and from an ethical standpoint, that balance of power in research was non-negotiable.

I was fortunate to establish the Social and Behavioural Research Division as an independent unit from the very start. The Director-General of ICMR in 1984, Dr. Ramalingaswami also recognized the importance of social sciences in health research, thanks in large part to his wife's influence which he only acknowledged at RMRC, Jabalpur 1st SAC meeting in New Delhi. I must also acknowledge the support Dr. Mrs Ramalingaswami, from JNU's Community Medicine Department, Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU), whom I had invited at NIV during Social Science Congress in Pune. This support, anthropology gained a strong foothold within ICMR. About 40 years ago, it was ensured that each ICMR institute has an independent Social and Behavioural Research department, not merged with any other discipline. That independence still continues today in most institutes. For me, this experience reinforced an important lesson: effective collaboration must happen on equal footing. We must learn from each other. That ability to maintain parity in interdisciplinary work has been one of my strengths, and as an anthropologist, I'm proud of what we achieved.

What advice would you offer to young anthropologists and public health researchers who aspire to make meaningful contributions in today's rapidly evolving research landscape?

As an anthropologist, one of the most important thing is to recognize where we can meaningfully contribute. We can support basic science research by gathering data, conduct community-based studies involving multiple stakeholders, and even participate in clinical trials. One example I'm particularly proud of is a pioneering Randomized Clinical Trial (RCT), a gold standard in health research which we conducted, the first in the world, using Yoga as the sole intervention for people living with HIV (PLHA) in 2011. This study emerged in response to a need expressed by HIV-positive individuals themselves. At that time, if their CD4 count was high(>400cu.mm), they weren't eligible for antiretroviral treatment. So they asked: "Why can't we still maintain our health through other means?" That's how the idea of Yoga intervention came up. We designed and conducted the trial, and it was eventually published (IJMR 2015).

The intervention showed measurable improvements based on WHO Quality-of-life Test for HIV patients with six domains measured at start of study and at three monthly intervals. The yoga intervention showed statistically significant improvement in scores of participants' level of independence domain, physical domains, and also in their psychological, social domains in intervention group compared to the control group. Convincing stakeholders to conduct this kind of study at an ICMR institute took time. People questioned why we were proposing Yoga when drug trials were the norm. But eventually, it was understood that Yoga could act as a powerful support, even alongside medical treatment, helping prolong wellness and improve quality of life.

This experience highlighted the importance of making logical arguments and engaging with stakeholders. Sometimes it takes lobbying and using the right networks and resources to get support. Thankfully, at ICMR, we have a Scientific Advisory Committee that includes not just medical scientists but social scientists as well to review our research work at various stages. That kind of interdisciplinary platform helps shape research priorities more inclusively.

Another important body we engaged with was the Ethics Committee. Earlier in early nineties, there was a perception that social science research didn't require ethical review because we weren't drawing biological samples. But I argued that even anonymous surveys intrude on people's privacy. where a consent is a must. We're asking personal questions and promising confidentiality so ethical oversight is essential. Eventually, this viewpoint was accepted, and ethical review for social science became standard from the start when Ethics Committees were formed.

We also take dissemination seriously. Once research is completed, we report findings not just to policy-level stakeholders but also to the community where the study was conducted. In our informed consent process, we promised participants they would know how their data was used and we made sure to fulfill that promise. At the same time, when presenting our findings at conferences, we were careful to ensure that individuals living with HIV were always anonymized, confidentiality maintained, never stigmatized. Protecting participants' identity and respecting their autonomy is a core responsibility of a researcher.

All of this reinforced a critical principle: researchers must remain accountable to all levels of stakeholders, especially the communities we study. Ethics is not just a box to check; it's a guiding force in all our work. I was fortunate to deepen my understanding of these principles through a formal course in bioethics, offered through IGNOU and sponsored by my institute as part of a NIH program. That experience helped ensure that we continue building ethical, inclusive, and impactful research practices.

From Tradition to Transition: Younger Generation, Lifestyle, and Health among the Toto Community of West Bengal, India



By Subhrajyoti Das

Toto is a numerically small and primitive tribal population in India. They live in an isolated village named Totopara, which is under the Madarihat Police Station, Alipurduar district of West Bengal. Totopara is divided into 7 small hamlets or gaons, such as Panchayat, Mitran, Puja, Mandal, Subba, Pakha, and Dhumsi. According to the 2011 Census of India, the total population of the Toto community was 1387 (males: 737 and females: 650). However, now the number has increased to nearly 1600. The Toto people are known for their unique cultural practices and lifestyle behaviours, shaped by the environment and cohesive social structure. Historically, the Totos led simple lifestyles. They were primarily dependent on agriculture, hunting, fishing, and gathering fruits and vegetables from the nearest forests. The community has traditionally followed simple dietary habits, which include locally grown crops such as rice, vegetables, and fish from the rivers.

Therefore, physical activity is an important part of their life, as the community engages in agriculture, fishing, planting, carrying loads, hunting, and communal labour (they are mainly engaged in cultivation on their own land, but sometimes they also help their relatives with cultivation).

They have a strong sense of bond within the community, which is expressed in many forms, such as helping their relatives and neighbours with one another's work, and this involvement in different activities makes physical activity more common among the villagers. In this way, physical activity plays a crucial role in maintaining the overall health of Toto people.

Social solidarity is reflected by their engagement and participation in different festivals and rituals such as birth, marriage, death ceremonies, household and community worship and many other rituals which are performed at different times of the year. These rituals strengthen their interrelationship and also reflect their unique cultural identity. Daily interaction and the practice of reciprocity reinforce their bonds and promote communal harmony. They happily take and share responsibilities, and this kind of socio-cultural behaviour plays a key role in maintaining social solidarity among the villagers. In recent decades, like many other tribal communities of India, unlike older generations, the younger generation of this community has experienced a significant change in their lifestyle, due to exposure to modernisation, improvement in education technology and interaction with the nearest town (Madarihat) and states. Modern means of communication, which include television, the use of smartphones, help to connect with social media, thereby leading to broader

societal changes. This shift towards a modern lifestyle is impacting their overall health status, leading to an increase in risk of non-communicable diseases like obesity, hypertension, stroke, type 2 diabetes, dyslipidaemia, etc., among the youth compared to their parental generation.

Over the last two decades, it has been observed that the younger generation of the Toto community has been increasingly exposed to the forces of modernisation. The spread of education, access to modern technologies, and increased migration to other states have enhanced connectivity. There has been a noticeable change in daily habits and cultural practices. The move towards a market-based economy has replaced traditional dietary habits with processed foods and junk foods, and high-calorie snacks. At present, many educated persons of this population are engaged in different kinds of work, both in the private sector and the government sector. Many young Totos are working as day labourers and seeking education outside their village, leaving behind their traditional agricultural lifestyle and practices. Thus, their social norms and cultural practices are gradually changing due to the influence of social media, mass media and interaction with their neighbouring communities.

It is vividly clear that the younger generation has an increased affinity toward a modern lifestyle; there is a noticeable change in their dietary habits, physical activity level, and cultural practices, which is significantly affecting their overall health. As a result, among the younger generation, cardio-metabolic health has been disrupted from an early age. It has been observed that lifestyle diseases like overweight, obesity, hypertension, diabetes, dyslipidemia, etc, are more prevalent among the younger generation compared to their parental generation. But the noticeable thing which is fascinating is that the parental generation is still practising their traditional lifestyle, which is reflected by their overall health, dietary habits, and physically active way of living.



Figure 1: A community worship

Acknowledgements: I express my heartfelt gratitude to the Toto community of Alipurduar, West Bengal, for their trust, cooperation, and invaluable participation during my fieldwork. I am also sincerely thankful to my supervisor, Dr. Mithun Das, Associate Professor, Department of Anthropology & Tribal Studies, Sidho-Kanho-Birsha University, Purulia, for his consistent support, guidance, and encouragement throughout my doctoral journey.



Figure 2: Demsha
(Toto's worship place)



Figure 3: The younger generation is so far from their traditional lifestyle



Figure 4 and 5: The Parental generation engaged in their traditional lifestyle

BOOK REVIEW

Raising Children: Surprising Insights from Other Cultures by David F. Lancy

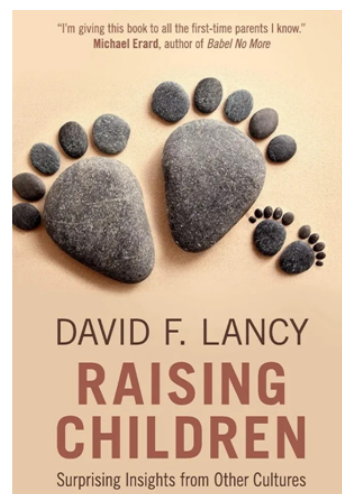


Book reviewed by Dhuri Saxena

Do you ever ponder if there's a single, perfect blueprint for raising kids, something that transcends every cultural boundary? I certainly do! In the book *Raising Children: Surprising Insights from Other Cultures*, author David F. Lancy blends his vast ethnographic knowledge of infancy across cultures in this extensive and fascinating book, capturing the many experiences of children worldwide. This book is special to me because I believe reading it will be of great value to anthropology students as well as to parents and anyone who wants to understand child-rearing practices around the world.

David F. Lancy, born in 1945 in Pennsylvania, U.S., studied at Yale and the University of California, is an American anthropologist and a Professor at Utah State University. With decades of ethnographic fieldwork experience worldwide, he has closely observed how children are raised in different societies and cultures. The book is divided into 9 chapters, with each offering a fresh perspective on parenting through a cross-cultural lens. Lancy starts with a captivating anecdote from a Nomadic hunter-gatherer society in Southern Thailand, the "Maniq" community, who

believes that 'trying to shape a child's behaviour will make him/her ill'. What caught my attention, though, was a simple but powerful disclaimer in the very first chapter: "There is no such thing as a perfect child," and "Children are raised in all sorts of ways, and they just turn out fine." The author then analyses why parents from different cultures confer different meanings to childbirth, from abandoning or denying personhood to a newborn to more positive positions in which children are actively desired. He vividly illustrates how the industrial revolution, particularly in the last hundred years, has dramatically transformed the way children are nurtured and raised. The book covers everything from 'Infant attachment',



'Alloparenting' and 'Foster Parenting' to 'Swaddling'. It also explores how toys, play, and the idea of "child happiness" are shaped by culture and how, over time, parents have become obsessed with raising unique individuals. The author also talks about how the role of fathers in child-rearing has changed drastically now that gender roles in most societies are not the same. The author's most thought-provoking argument is that childhood, as we understand it today, is not a universal concept but rather a relatively recent cultural invention shaped by historical and societal influences. This book not only presents this informative perspective but also encourages readers to reflect deeply and consider viewpoints about how they want to raise their children.

As a postgraduate student of Anthropology, I found this book enriching and thought - provoking, especially due to its wealth of ethnographic data and engaging style. The author skillfully uses examples, cultural contrasts, and even film references like "Inside Out" and "Zootopia" to maintain interest. However, while claiming global insights, much of the statistical focus remains U.S.-centric, making it more of a Western vs. non-Western comparison than a truly global one. I would also suggest readers explore Lancy's more detailed work, *The Anthropology of Childhood: Cherubs, Chattel, and Changelings*, which he refers to as the parent book of this one, to understand how to use their anthropological knowledge.

REFLECTIONS ON ANTHRO BULLETIN

Ko Kha - Example of ancestral worship from Thailand



By Dr. Subhash Walimbe

Recent issue of the Anthro Bulletin of the AIF (May 2025) - (https://anthroposindiafoundation.com/documents/newsletters/AIF_AnthroBulletin_May2025.pdf) highlights fascinating aspects of ancestral worship which triggered twelve-year-old memories of my research projects in Thailand. It was in May 2013 when I visited the village of Ko Kha, in the central part of Lampang province of northern Thailand. Earlier, in 1999, Dr. Somsak Pramankit, Thai anatomy professor, claimed to have found skull fragments of *Homo erectus* in this locality, along with some stone artifacts, and he locally typified the fossil, as Lampang Man (sometime referred to as, Kokha Man). The find is stated to be chronologically fitting in the time frame of 500,000-400,000 years BP. It was stated that in many features the Ko Kha fossil is comparable to the skull fossils of Sangiran-II (Java Man) and Peking Man.

Many scholars have raised doubts about its phylogenetic status. Still the fact remains, he is the earliest known inhabitant of the region. It is not surprising that the local inhabitants respect him as their forefather, and guardian too. They have erected a 'temple' for him on the village boundary. This gentleman greets the visitor in jean attire, with an acheulean tool in one hand. Everyday morning milk, meat, fruit, water-bottle, and beer-bottle is offered to him (नैवेद्यम्). Village folks seek his blessings in family rituals and functions.

It is not an age-old tradition, just 25-year-old, but a good example of how the ancestors deserve to be respected. In a way it may be compared with our veergala (वीरगळ) tradition (hero-stone tradition) where memorial stones are erected to honour those who died heroically.

I agree with Dr. Sunita Reddy, when she says, ancestral worship is often based on the belief that ancestors continue to exist in a spiritual form after death and influence the living. Indeed, they are spiritual guides and a spiritual link between the living and the dead, emphasizing continuity of life beyond physical death.





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--
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PAST EVENT

For our Distinguished Guest lecture series, an online lecture was organised and delivered by **Dr. Nita Mawar** on June 26th 2025, 6:30 pm onwards.

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

YouTube live Link - **Click here**



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3. Student Internship Programme (2025-26) at Kerala State Planning Board.

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4. Klassik Stiftung Weimar Fellowships 2025

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