

# Indigenous-Tribal Heritage and Innovation

**Location:** All-India Indigenous-Tribal Federation, Guwahati, Assam

**Date:** 7-9 August 2021, plus an optional 3-day trip at seminar's end.

**Cost:** ₹9000 = \$125 = €112

The All-India Indigenous-Tribal Federation is a nationwide association, where almost 10% of the population (over 100 million people) live in hundreds of ethnic communities throughout India. As elsewhere in the world, tribal peoples have unique struggles to maintain their identities and livelihoods. This seminar will address some of these efforts and success. Attendees will stay at the Northeastern Social Research Centre, a leading advocacy site for research, solidarity, and publication. We will participate in seminars with panellists from the big history conference and the indigenous-tribal communities. There will be field trips to nearby sites, including the Boroland tribal territories and institutions, as well as the Manas National Park.

For those who would like an extended tour after the seminar, we will travel to Nagaland to visit Kohima and hike into the highland Dzūkou Valley. The trip will end back in Guwahati, Assam, from where a departure may be made.

## Seminar coordinators:

Anjali Daimari, (Boro) AITF: [anjalidai@gmail.com](mailto:anjalidai@gmail.com)

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Barry Rodrigue, SSLA / IBHA: [rodrigue@archinets.org](mailto:rodrigue@archinets.org)



## All-India Indigenous-Tribal Federation

An organizational meeting for the All-India Indigenous-Tribal Federation (AITF) was held on Wednesday, 27 June 2018, at the North Eastern Social Research Centre in Guwahati, Assam. Delegates from ten tribes, as well as delegates who could not attend in person, drafted a mission statement and developed plans for expanding their activities throughout India.



AITF planners, 27 June 2018, left to right: Yangkahao Vashum, Mousumi Gogoi, Margaret Molomoo, Sweta E. Marandi, Jones I. Kathar, Peter Twiprasa, Carl Rangad, Demfu Daimari, R.K. Debbarma, Walter Fernandes, Banjar Ch. Brahma, Anjali Daimari, Satya Goswami, and Barry Rodrigue.

### Convening Committee:

Yangkahao Vashum, Convenor

Anjali Daimari

Rosemary Dzuwachu

Carl Rangad

R.K. Debbarma



Jones I. Kathar

Shweta E. Marandi

Margaret Molomoo

Banjar Ch. Brahma

**Consultants:**

Walter Fernandes

Barry Rodrigue

### Drafted Mission Statement

The All-India Indigenous-Tribal Federation is an organization that exists to protect and promote the rights, freedom, heritage and values of the indigenous-tribal people of India. It shall be the mission of the Federation to work towards the enhancement of the quality of life of its members in all aspects, including socio-economic, cultural, political and spiritual matters. It shall be a movement rooted in the rich values of the indigenous-tribal people of India. The Federation shall have the following goals and objectives:

1. To protect and promote the rights and freedom of indigenous-tribal people in India;
2. To preserve and promote their cultures, customs, values, and traditions;
3. To protect and enhance their economic interest and life;
4. To creatively engage in promoting and enhancing their quality of life;
5. To promote the interests and well-being of indigenous-tribal people in all aspects of life.

In addition, the Federation will seek to connect with other indigenous-tribal organizations around the world, so as to enhance their effectiveness and share their experiences.



## Background

This meeting was an outgrowth of discussions held at the Fireflies Intercultural Centre in December 2017 and the Symbiosis School for Liberal Arts in March 2018. It was proposed that formation of a national indigenous and tribal federation would benefit people throughout India. A model from which we drew is that of the Alaska Federation of Natives in the United States <<http://www.nativefederation.org/>>. The AFN was formed in 1966 and unifies dozens of indigenous organizations throughout Alaska and beyond. It is thought that a similar organization might be of advantage for the indigenous and tribal peoples of India. And so this meeting was called.

The original organizers were:

**Anjali Daimari** is a member of the Boro community. She has led the Boro Women's Justice Forum, which she founded; it is associated with the Asian Indigenous Women's Network. Anjali is a retired professor and has been representing her community at the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues. She may be reached at <[anjalidai@gmail.com](mailto:anjalidai@gmail.com)>.



AITF planning session, left to right: Banjar Ch. Brahma, Peter Twiprasa, Jones I. Kathar, R.K. Debbarma, Carl Rangad, Yangkahao Vashum.

**Rhaikwchak Debbarma** is a member of Debbarma community. He is a faculty member of the Tata Institute of Social Science, Guwahati Campus, Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies in Assam. RK writes especially on issues relating to space, place and politics. His e-mail contact is <[rkdebbarma@gmail.com](mailto:rkdebbarma@gmail.com)>.

**Rosemary Dzuwichu** is a member of the Angami community. She is Head of the Department of English at Nagaland University and former Director of its Women Studies Centre and the Centre for Mass Communication. Rosemary is also advisor to the Naga Mothers Association. She may be reached at <[rosedzuwichu@yahoo.com](mailto:rosedzuwichu@yahoo.com)>.

**Carl Rangad** is a member of the Khasi community. Retiring as Director of Horticulture in the Meghalaya Agriculture Department, he manages the North East Slow Food and Agrobiodiversity Society. Carl played a central role in the 'Shillong Declaration', which was presented at the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues in 2016. His e-mail is <[rangadco@gmail.com](mailto:rangadco@gmail.com)>.



**Dharamsing Teron** is a member of the Kabri community. He co-founded the Centre for Karbi Studies in 2013, which he directs. Elected to the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (1989-1996) and the Assam Legislative Assembly (2001-2006), DS edits the series, *Karbi Studies*, which seeks to preserve and encourage oral traditions. He may be contacted at <dst\_ka@yahoo.com>.

**Yangkahao Vashum** is a member of the Tangkhul community. He is Associate Professor and Head of Department at the Eastern Theological College, Jorhat, Assam. Ahaao earlier served as the Dean of the Tribal Study Centre, Executive Editor of the *Journal of Tribal Studies*, and Dean of Post-Graduate Studies. His e-mail address is <yvashum@gmail.com>.

#### **Consultants:**

**Walter Fernandes**, S.J., Ph.D. is Senior Fellow of the North-Eastern Social Research Centre in Guwahati, Assam. He obtained his post-graduate degree in Philosophy from the Aloisianum in Gallarate (Italy) and his Ph.D. in Social Sciences from the Catholic University of Paris (France). A prolific scholar and publisher, his recent focus is on tribal issues in North East India. His e-address is <walter.nesrc@gmail.com>.

**Barry Rodrigue**, Ph.D. is Professor of Anthropology at the Symbiosis School for Liberal Arts, Symbiosis International University in Pune, Maharashtra, where he serves as Faculty-in-Charge of the SSLA Collaborative for Asian Ethnography. A metis of French / Algonquin ancestry from North America, he lived in Alaska for twenty years, working on indigenous cultural preservation and issues of social justice. His e-address is <rodrigue@archinets.org>.

For more information about the AITF, please contact:

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# Eco-Spirituality and New Global Needs

**Location:** Fireflies Intercultural Centre

**Date:** 7-9 August 2021

**Cost:** ₹6500 = \$90 = €80.

Siddhartha and Shabin Paul, Centre coordinators, will introduce a discussion on 'Spirit, Society and Cosmos: Planetary Citizenship' and 'India: The World's Spiritual Laboratory'. There will be seminars, in which panellists from the big history conference and from the community will present their thoughts and promote discussion, along with a tour of art and architecture on the forested hilltop of Fireflies. We will visit farmer initiatives in the area, such as Sahaja Samrudha, an organic farmer marketing co-operative in Anekal, and a predominantly women-managed program for low-carbon, sustainable agriculture in Ramnagaram.

## Seminar coordinators:

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## Pipal Tree / Fireflies Intercultural Centre

Dinneplaya, Karnataka, India

<<http://pipaltree.org.in/>>

Pipal Tree / Fireflies Intercultural Centre engages in projects of community empowerment for tribal peoples, dryland farmers, and Adivasi children. It works with programs like the Children's College, Food Sovereignty, and Livelihood Sustainability, seeking to create personal, social and ecological symbiosis that can lead to sustainable development practices. In the past, development was focused on approaches that underscored social justice, but, today, we have added the challenge of climate change along with other important issues. The survival of the human species demands that we immediately adopt a nurturing and respectful attitude to our planet. This calls for a new vision of sustainable development.







Pipal Tree was established in 1984 by a group of alternative development practitioners and socially engaged thinkers. Its coordination centre is located in an ecologically inspired setting, 30-kilometers south of Bengaluru. It has residential apartments, a dining hall, an auditorium and other facilities where up to 100 people can conduct workshops and interactive sessions. The 10-acre campus is filled with plants, trees, birds and sculptures on themes of eco-spirituality, which narrate the stories of a diverse yet holistic ecosystem. This organizational setup and infrastructure is maintained by 40 staff members, including its field office in Kabini, Karnataka.

Pipal Tree / Fireflies engages in many projects, such as:

- Setting up workshops to foster team bonding, interactive workplace dynamics, channelling passion into work, etc.
- Community outreach through -

#### 1. The *Global Rural*

*Adaptation Initiative* is a

network that look at problems arising in rural communities as a result of the onset of climate change. It seeks to create awareness of climate change and simultaneously promote remedial measures so that food and livelihood security in rural areas is promoted and protected. Pipal Tree is presently the convener of GRAIN.





2. *Climate South Asia* provides a forum for critical discussions on different aspects of climate change. It seeks to encourage dialogues on the way climate change is likely to affect our region.

3. The *Children's College* is a learning community at the Nagarhole forest area near Mysore (four hours from Bengaluru). It provides a sanctuary for Adivasi children whose parents' lives were disrupted by the construction of the large Kabini water reservoir and by forest conservation laws that claim human beings who live in the forest are a threat to flora and fauna.

4. *Meeting Rivers* is a global peace forum for inter-religious and secular initiatives.

5. The *Livelihood Sustainability Project* helps to set up means for livelihood through existing skills among Tribal communities and amplify incomes for the farmer community.

- Ecological regeneration, sustaining an ecological balance in the neighbourhood.
- Expressive arts and work on partnership publications by sharing knowledge through international dialogues held every February, the *Fireflies Dialogues*, as well as our fieldwork.
- Pipal Tree / Fireflies works with students on social and environmental issues through educational programmes that are regularly convened. These programmes are organized around themes of development, social and environmental empowerment, and Indian culture and social life.

Their director, Siddhartha, also is a co-coordinator of the India Association for Big History and a founding member of the initiative to engage with the *Multiverse Story and Our Common Humanity*.





## Landscape and Adapting Heritage

**Location:** Kachchh Heritage Arts Music Information Resources (KHAMIR), Kukma, Taluka Bhuj, Kachchh, Gujarat

**Date:** 7-9 August 2021, plus an optional three-day trip at seminar's end.

**Cost:** ₹9000 = \$125 = €112

KHAMIR is a regional handicraft institution that encourages innovation among the peoples of Kutch. In addition to empowerment of traditional artisans, KHAMIR also seeks to develop new uses for old skills. Designs of the Indus Valley Civilization from 4000 years ago continue in handspun and handwoven fabrics, while traditional sword makers to the Kingdom of Kutch forge high-quality kitchen utensils and pocket knives. Attendees will stay at the KHAMIR craft centre, where they will see professionals at work and participate in seminars with panellists from the big history conference and the Kutch community. There will be field trips to nearby production sites in villages, as well as to the Kutch Museum, the Aaina Mahal Palace, the Shrujan Living & Learning Design Centre, and the Smritivan Earthquake Park.

For those who would like an extended tour after the seminar, we will travel by bus to the Harappan site of Dholavira for an overnight stay. After a visit with the Archaeological Survey of India, we will then proceed to the village workshop of Anwar Hussain Shaikh, whose family are hereditary bead makers, in a tradition dating back to the Indus trade with Mesopotamia and the Mediterranean. We will continue on to Balasinor Fossil Park, one of the world's largest dinosaur sites. The trip will end in Ahmedabad, Gujarat, from where a departure may be made.

### Seminar coordinators:

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## Kachchh Heritage Arts Music Information Resources (KHAMIR)

Kukma, Taluka Bhuj, Gujarat, India

<<http://www.khamir.org/>>

Kachchh Heritage Arts Music Information Resources (KHAMIR) is a joint initiative of Kachchh Nav Nirman Abhiyan, the Nehru Foundation for Development, and the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII). It was set up in 2005 as an education, training, demonstration and interpretation facility for craft, environment and heritage conservation under a programme of the State Government of Gujarat in the west of India.



KHAMIR has a campus in Kukma, a half-hour south-east of Bhuj. It includes offices, workshops, a craft shop, dormitories, a kitchen, and a dining area. Kachchh lies in the realm of the ancient Indus Valley Civilization, so many of the crafts promoted by KHAMIR descend from this vibrant tradition and its successors. The intermingling of cultural styles is dazzling.





KHAMIR has developed a strong relationship with local artisans and facilitates a full range of handcraft activities, ranging from provision of raw materials to promotion of crafts in the market, through a variety of outreach methods. KHAMIR considers it essential to use approaches that address issues of all Kachchh-based crafts with appropriate strategies to help the handcraft sector. Presently, KHAMIR works with hundreds of regional artisans, including wool spinners and weavers; potters; leather-workers; bell-founders; silver jewellery-makers; rogan, block, bandhni, and batik textile-printers; lacquer-workers, and reha knife-makers. The numbers of cooperating crafts are growing.





The objectives of KHAMIR are to:

Promote conservation of the environment, natural and cultural heritage, traditional arts and crafts, music, knowledge and skill sets, as well as preservation of sustainable livelihoods by setting up educational, training, demonstration, interpretation, and other facilities in Kachchh.

Revitalize, reposition and promote local and traditional crafts of Kachchh in order to generate a viable and sustainable source of income for artisans.

Bring under a common roof collective and individual excellence in art, craft and culture, so as to foster conditions to ensure the best creations.

Disseminate information on regional traditional arts, crafts and knowledge, as well as to organise discussions on issues related to Kachchh.









# Science and Changing Society

**Location:** Homi Bhabha Centre for Science Education / Tata Institute for Fundamental Research, Mumbai, Maharashtra

**Date:** 7-9 August 2021

**Cost:** ₹9000 = \$125 = €112

The Homi Bhabha Centre for Science Education is a national centre of the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research. It encourages scientific literacy throughout India and is also a graduate school for science education at the PhD level. Attendees will stay at the Centre's campus and participate in seminars with panellists from the big history conference and the Mumbai science community. There will be field trips to the Caius Research Laboratory at St. Francis Xavier's College to see how green biotechnology is being employed to conserve artefacts at the Heras Institute of Indian History. The museum staff of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Vastu Sangrahalaya (CSMVS) will demonstrate how Maharashtra is engaged in the global network of knowledge sharing. There will also be a tour along streets of Mumbai, a nature walk through Sanjay Gandhi National Park, and an engagement with musicians of Mumbai.

## Seminar coordinators:

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## Homi Bhabha Centre for Science Education

Tata Institute for Fundamental Research, Mumbai, Maharashtra

<<http://www.hbcse.tifr.res.in/>>

The Tata Institute of Fundamental Research (TIFR) is a National Centre of the Government of India, under the Department of Atomic Energy.

Established in 1945 on the initiative of nuclear physicist Homi Bhabha and funded by the Tata Group, it grew to engage in basic research in physics, chemistry, biology, mathematics, computer science, and science education with campuses in Mumbai, Pune, Bengaluru, and Hyderabad. TIFR also is constituted as a university that awards graduate degrees.



The Homi Bhabha Centre (HBC) for Science Education is a National Centre of TIFR. It began in the 1960s as a community service project by TIFR scientists to share their knowledge with young people and encourage them to help empower other students. Its mission is to encourage the growth of scientific literacy throughout India, from primary school through post-graduate education. HBC also serves as a graduate school for a PhD programme in science education.





# Agrarian Life and Renewal

**Location:** Tarumitra, Friends of Trees

**Date:** 7-9 August 2021

**Cost:** ₹6500 = \$90 = €80

Several of the founders, including Margaret Molomoo, Robert Athickal and Sweta Marandi, will open with a discussion about Tarumitra, a forest bio-reserve that began as a student movement to protect the environment in 1990. Tarumitra includes unique Laurie Baker architecture, solar grids, and an organic farm, where indigenous and modern practices are merged in ingenious ways. One new initiative is for biological renewal through fungi. These small lifeforms were the first 'world-wide web' and are put to use to help heal our countryside, our bodies, and the Earth. Attendees will participate in rice paddy upkeep and forest seed collection for the genetic nursery, interact with visiting school groups, make eco-bricks, and celebrate a woodland version of the Rakshabandhan festival. There will be seminars in which panellists from the big history conference and the community will share innovative knowledge and experiences. There also will be a field trip to nearby historical and cultural sites, including a crossing of the Ganga River from Digha Ghat.

## Seminar coordinators:

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## Tarumitra, Friends of Trees

Patna, Bihar, India

<<http://tarumitra.org/>>

Tarumitra is an NGO based in Patna, Bihar, which focuses on promoting ecological awareness. It started in 1988, when students set in motion the Forum for Environment, which evolved into Tarumitra. Located in a twelve-acre forest planted by the students, this biodiversity hotspot is home to over 450 varieties of trees and plants native to the Ganges plain. A genetic nursery, students have taken nearly 40,000 heritage saplings and rare plants to propagate in their home areas.



Tarumitra has joined hands with similar organizations to set up bio-reserves like the one in Patna in other parts of India, and similar initiatives have begun in Gujarat, Meghalaya, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, and Kerala. They also take part in international summits on environment. In 2005, Tarumitra received Special Consultative Status (ECOSOC) from the United Nations.





Tarumitra welcomes interns from many universities in India and abroad to work with the school children who participate in their ecological programs. Interns have come from 23 of the 29 states of India, as well as from the United States, Belgium, Zambia, Germany, Switzerland, Honduras, Mexico, Ecuador, Panama, El Salvador, Columbia, Guatemala, and Bolivia. They can take short or long assignments in environmental education, organic farming, advocacy, environmental campaigns, and social-media networking. The University of Zamorano in Honduras, for example, sends interns for up to six months.

Tarumitra interns work on a variety of special projects, such as:

- Setting up workshops on the theme of Earth-building, which often involves engaging with both scientific and eco-spirituality initiatives.

- Community outreach to 200+ high schools in Patna for their students to come for an eco-exposure program inside the bio-reserve.



- Ecological regeneration by restoring the ecological balance in local communities. This is done by interacting with neighbourhoods to clean up their environment as well as to organize ecological outreach programs. For example, they developed garbage dumps into roadside gardens maintained by schools or plant nurseries.



- The bio-reserve has almost a hectare of organic cultivation for rice, pulses and vegetables, which is maintained by high school and university students who learn by doing sustainable, natural, and heritage farming practices.

- While there are limited art installations, artists recognize the entire bio-reserve to be an integral and organic expression of nature art.

- Tarumitra has been organizing Big History workshops regularly since 2005 with teachers and students. Director Robert Athickal is an active member of the Indian Association for Big History and the Asian Big History Association, and is a founding member of the Multiverse Narrative Network.



The Tarumitra campus has accommodation for 50 students at a time, including private rooms for interns working with visiting students. A dining facility provides fresh food to residents. A 400-bed hospital is close by with which Tarumitra has a healthcare agreement. The railway station is eight-kilometers away and the airport five-kilometers. In this way, Tarumitra is a very accessible and centrally located.



# Gender, Environment and Social Transformation

**Location:** Jan Abhiyan Sanstha [Society for People's Initiatives], Shimla, Himachal Pradesh

**Date:** 7-9 August 2021

**Cost:** ₹12,000 = \$167 = €151

Shimla lies in northern India, in a forested highland of the western Himalayas, along the Tibetan / Chinese border. It served as the capital of Punjab and as the British summer capital of India. After Independence, it became the capital of Himachal Pradesh, when the new state was formed in 1971. Shimla is the commercial, cultural and educational centre of the region, with a dynamic and diverse population, reflecting the geopolitical transformations of modern India.



## Seminar Coordinators:

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## Jan Abhiyan Sanstha (JAS)

In Himachal Pradesh, land acquisition and development projects, from hydro-power to limestone quarrying, have significantly impacted livelihoods. Women traditionally kept their households together through their knowledge of sustainable agriculture, but this family dynamic is now undergoing much change.

Jan Abhiyan Sanstha (JAS) and others have come to support women, organizing against land seizures and projects that displace families from their ways of life. Our seminar will engage with rural communities that see an alternative model to that of large-scale industrial development. This seminar will bring together people to share their visions of social change and engage in an exciting dialogue of mutual empowerment.

There will be a visit to Shakrori, an agricultural village where JAS has maintained a field office. The Satluj River, which flows through Shakrori, is a major tributary of the Indus River and has been the target for dam-building and industrial development.

The Koldam hydro-project placed a dam upriver of Shakrori, which altered water access and impacted livelihoods. This ecological tour will help us understand changes made by industrial projects, as well as the apprehension of the agricultural communities.







We will also trek into the Karsog valley, an area celebrated in the Mahabharata, and known for its apple, plum and pear orchards. We will participate in cultural programmes that include folk songs, theatre and dance. Heritage walks will be guided through Shimla.