

ANTHROPOLOGICAL SURVEY OF INDIA BUILDS TRIBAL HUT REPLICAS TO PROMOTE UNIQUE HERITAGE

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From a distinctive beehive-shaped hut of the Jarawa tribe, to a Shompen hut crafted with leaves of *jungle supari* with a cage for wild pigs built beneath it, and a Nicobarese hut made using the thin stems of local cane covered by thick dry grasses -- each offers a peek into the lives of tribal communities that most Indians will never see. In a first-of-its-kind bid to showcase the heritage of tribal communities, especially those of Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs), the Anthropological Survey of India (AnSI) has recreated the huts of several communities at its different regional centres.

The effort has drawn praise from several quarters, including Prime Minister Narendra Modi. "Laudable effort, which will spread awareness of India's glorious tribal culture and traditions," Mr. Modi said on November 3, commenting on a tweet by the Ministry of Culture, which said the initiative would help promote "cultural heritage and optimise unused spaces".

These huts have come up outside five regional centres of AnSI in consultation with the local communities, M. Sasikumar, Joint Director of AnSI told *The Hindu*, adding that researchers and scientists have worked on constructing them during the entire month of October.

Mr. Sasikumar said that the huts are not only authentic in design, and built using the same materials used by the tribal people, but also contains artefacts which they use, thus offering a rare glimpse into the lives of these communities who reside in locations which are not easily accessible to others.

For instance, the traditional Jarawa hut, called a *chadda*, has traditional baskets, bows and arrows, and other artefacts used by the community. The Shompen hut contains a store of a paste made using the pandanus fruit which members of the tribe eat when there is shortage of food. Both the Jarawa and Shompen communities are PVTGs living in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. While the population of Shompen people is said to be less than 300, there are about 500 members of the Jarawa tribe.

Many huts of the Nicobarese tribe built in the traditional beehive shape were submerged by the tsunami that hit the islands in 2004. Building these huts is also an attempt to revive such traditional craftsmanship and maintain the cultural heritage of the tribe.

Other huts at the regional centers include the replica of a Dorla tribal community's home at Jagdalpur in Chhattisgarh. Members of the community participated in plastering mud over the bamboo wattle or slender twigs used for the side walls, while using date palm leaves to thatch the hut.

At the regional Centre in Mysore, anthropologists had invited the people from the Betta Kuruba tribal community to construct their traditional hut. In an attempt to bring out the beauty of the *Khasi* culture, the AnSI regional office at Shillong erected traditional monoliths in the office premises, including the *Mawbyinna* or *Mawnam'* which consists of three upright stones with a flat table stone in front, and the *Maw Shongthait* which are flat table stones, accompanied by vertical stones which serve as seats for weary travellers.

“The zonal anthropological museums of AnSI are important tourist destinations and the construction of these tribal huts and a monolith within the museum premises will help to increase the interest of visitors and bring out the essence of indigenous traditional tribal culture,” Mr. Sasikumar added.

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