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Topics Covered

- **Accept Aadhaar as identity proof, SC orders poll panel**
- **Ranking Pitfalls**
- **GST 2.0 could undermine dietary health**
- **India-China: the need for a broader settlement**
- Translated collection of Bhil folk tales to be put soon

Accept Aadhaar as identity proof, SC orders poll panel

Accept Aadhaar as identity proof, SC orders poll panel

Court asks EC to instruct Bihar officials to accept Aadhaar for filing claims or objections during special intensive revision of electoral rolls; they can verify authenticity of document submitted

Krishnadas Rajagopal
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Monday directed the Election Commission to include Aadhaar as the 12th “indicative” document that those seeking inclusion or exclusion of names on the electoral rolls of Bihar could file as proof of identity during the special intensive revision.

A Bench of Justices Surya Kant and Joymalya Bagchi clarified that the use of Aadhaar would strictly be as proof of identity, and not as evidence of Indian citizenship.

The EC officials are entitled to verify the “authenticity and genuineness” of the Aadhaar submitted to them, just the way they would do in the case of the

Go-ahead for Aadhaar

The Supreme Court has allowed the use of Aadhaar as proof of identity for special intensive revision of electoral rolls in Bihar

- The court takes note that despite its repeated directives, booth-level officers were refusing to accept Aadhaar
- It directs EC to publicise the order to inform voters that they can use Aadhaar
- Document should be used only as proof of identity or residence, and not as evidence of citizenship

The petitioners are also agreeing that Aadhaar is not proof of citizenship. Then why can't you add Aadhaar too in the list?

JUSTICE JOYMALYA BAGCHI
to EC



other 11 documents, the court noted in the order.

“Apart from passport and birth certificate, none of the remaining nine of the 11 documents you [EC] have listed for SIR are conclusive proof of citizenship. The petitioners are also agreeing that Aadhaar is

not proof of citizenship. Statutorily also Aadhaar is not proof of citizenship. Then why can't you add Aadhaar too in the list? This court has asked you several times to consider Aadhaar... Why are you not?” Justice Bagchi asked the EC's counsel, senior ad-

vocate Rakesh Dwivedi.

The court ordered the EC to issue instructions to officials, from Electoral Registration Officers to booth-level officers (BLOs), working on the ground in poll-bound Bihar, to accept Aadhaar from persons filing claims or objections. Approximately 65 lakh voters, out of a total 7.89 crore in the State, were excluded from the draft rolls published on August 1.

The deadline for filing claims to include names and file objections to exclude names for reasons such as death, permanent shifting, and duplication, was September 1. The EC, on September 2, clarified that these were welcome even beyond the deadline.

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Ranking Pitfalls

Syllabus :

GS 2 :Governance
GS 2 :Social Justice

Ranking pitfalls

NIRF should help improve both quality and equity in higher education

India Rankings (IR) 2025, based on the National Institutional Ranking Framework (NIRF), held few surprises. As in previous years, older public institutions with a history of academic excellence dominated the top spots. Since its inception in 2016, the number of participating institutions has grown significantly, from 3,565 to 14,163, and the scope has expanded from four categories to 17, spanning a wide range of higher education sectors. However, the ranking parameters are still far from perfect. Institutions are evaluated based on five key parameters: teaching, learning, and resources (30%), research and professional practice (30%), graduation outcomes (20%), outreach and inclusivity or OI (10%), and peer perception (10%). Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan is right in his scepticism about the peer perception parameter as this is feedback gathered from subject experts and employers. It can be subjective and prone to influence and prejudice, as it relies more on an institution's reputation than its actual reputability, often to the disadvantage of suburban or State-run higher education institutions. As it accounts for 10% of the total weight, it can skew rankings. A review is thus necessary.

As with any global ranking, the NIRF has its own set of flaws. While it claims to rely on verifiable metrics and third-party audits of research, it depends heavily on bibliometric data and self-declared inputs from institutions. Of concern is the treatment of the OI parameter. The NIRF booklet on the IR focuses only on outcomes related to regional and gender diversity. It conspicuously omits data on students who are economically and socially disadvantaged and with disabilities, despite these factors each having a 20% weightage within the OI component. The fact that OI is not adequately prioritised is evident: only Jawaharlal Nehru University and the All India Institute of Medical Sciences, New Delhi, are among the top 10 institutions with OI scores above 70. This is troubling as access to higher education remains restricted for marginalised communities. The NIRF must expand the scope of OI to include institutional adherence to communal reservation policies in faculty recruitment. Central institutions continue to fall short in filling vacancies for the OBC, SC and ST categories. Such affirmative action is crucial for India's progress as an egalitarian nation. Also, the IR must become more than just an annual, ritualistic event. Its insights should be used to address deep-rooted issues such as India's regional imbalances; shortage of faculty with doctoral qualifications outside the top 100 institutions; over 58% of management institutions reporting zero research publications, and the need for legacy institutions to mentor emerging ones. Above all, there must be action against institutions that submit false data. Without course correction, the NIRF risks becoming a mere ranking platform that allows private institutions to develop themselves as brands, doing little to improve the overall quality and equity in higher education.

Key Takeaways from the Article

Introduction

- Launched in **2016**, the **National Institutional Ranking Framework (NIRF)** provides annual rankings of Indian higher education institutions.
- By 2025, participation has expanded to **14,163 institutions across 17 categories**, making it India's most comprehensive ranking exercise.
- However, concerns remain regarding its methodology, inclusivity, and actual impact on systemic improvement.

Limitations of Current NIRF Rankings

- **Overemphasis on peer perception (10%)** – reputation-driven, subjective, and often biased against suburban/State-run institutions.
- **Data reliability issues** – heavy dependence on **self-declared inputs** and **bibliometric data**, despite claims of third-party audits.

- **Narrow scope of Outreach & Inclusivity (OI) –**
 - ◆ Focused only on gender and regional diversity.
 - ◆ Ignores **economically & socially disadvantaged groups and students with disabilities**, despite weightage in framework.
- **Inequitable faculty representation** – Central institutions often fail to fill reserved posts for OBC, SC, ST categories.
- **Research deficit** – Over **58% of management institutions report zero publications**; faculty shortages outside top 100 institutions.
- **Regional imbalance** – Concentration of high-ranking institutions in metro/urban areas, widening rural–urban divide.
- **Risk of commercialization** – NIRF may become a **branding exercise** for private institutions rather than a tool for systemic improvement.
- **False data issue** – Lack of strong penalties against institutions that manipulate figures.

Reforms Needed for NIRF to Fulfil Its Purpose

- **Revise methodology:** Reduce peer perception weight; increase focus on measurable and verifiable parameters.
- **Strengthen Outreach & Inclusivity (OI):**
 - ◆ Include economic & social disadvantage, disability data.
 - ◆ Track **reservation policy compliance** in admissions & faculty recruitment.
- **Enforce accountability:** Penalize institutions submitting false data.
- **Encourage equity & mentorship:**
 - ◆ Legacy institutions should mentor emerging ones.
 - ◆ Support capacity building in regional & State universities.
- **Faculty quality improvement:** Incentivize recruitment of **PhDqualified teachers** outside top institutions.
- **Research ecosystem:** Improve funding and encourage publications across all disciplines.
- **Move beyond annual ritual:** Use NIRF insights to guide **policy reforms in higher education**.

Conclusion

- The NIRF has created a culture of competitiveness in Indian higher education, but its **methodological gaps limit its impact**.
- For India's aspiration of becoming a **knowledge economy and egalitarian society**, rankings must go beyond reputation and brand value.
- **Reforming NIRF to integrate quality, equity, and accountability** will make it a powerful instrument for systemic transformation rather than a ritualistic exercise.

Practice Question

Q. Critically examine the limitations of the National Institutional Ranking Framework (NIRF) in improving quality and equity in higher education in India. Suggest reforms to make it more effective. (150 words)

GST 2.0 could undermine dietary health

GS 2: Governance

GS 3: Economy

GST 2.0 could undermine dietary health

On September 22, India will simplify its GST rates into two main slabs, 5% and 18%, with a special 40% bracket for "sinful" and ultra-luxury goods. Many everyday foods get cheaper. For example, pizza bread will drop from 5% to zero and a long list of sugar-based products, including sugar-boiled confectionery, chocolates, jams, fruit jellies, will move from 12-18% to 5%. Aerated and other sugar-based drinks, by contrast, will move to 40%.

While policymakers have framed GST 2.0 as being more rational, a public health lens suggests affordability gains could bypass the goal of healthier consumption. For example, pizza bread can be made of whole wheat flour, refined flour (maida) or sourdough. Sourdough bread should be more affordable because it's healthier, yet maida will also be more accessible now even though it's unhealthy. Similarly, slashing GST on confectionery pulls in products that are nutritionally the opposite of what India's non-communicable disease (NCD) strategy needs.

Review food labelling rules

In this context, India's lacklustre food regulation apparatus assumes greater significance. Without trustworthy food labelling, blanket affordability gains can tilt demand in favour of unhealthy products.

The 40% bracket for aerated and sugar-based beverages is a public health win. Modelling and real-world studies have found similar taxes have reduced consumption in Asia and Africa by 2.5-19% and nudge reformulation, especially when accompanied by labels and advertising restrictions.

However, the GST revamp also moves a bevy of sugar-based calorically dense and nutritionally poor foods to the 5% bracket. Price cuts without warning labels expand access but do not help shoppers tell healthy and unhealthy foods apart.

India's front-of-pack labelling (FOPL) debate has been stalled



Vasudevan Mukunth

Policymakers have framed GST 2.0 as being more rational, but a public health lens suggests that affordability gains could bypass the goal of healthier consumption

since a 2022 draft. In July this year, the Supreme Court gave the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) three months to finalise recommendations and indicated a preference for warning labels over health star ratings. In August, the regulator convened a key meeting on labelling. A public health consensus published earlier this month also called for warning labels, the use of WHO-SEARO or ICMR-NIN thresholds, and a science-led process insulated from industry capture.

These thresholds are cut-offs that determine which products must carry a warning label and thus prevent noisy over-labelling. To this end, India needs thresholds that are category-specific, per-quantity, and sugar-sensitive. A 10 g/100 g sugar limit means different things in beverages (which are consumed in larger volumes) versus solid snacks. WHO-SEARO's Nutrient Profile Model (NPM) addresses this by applying category-based limits for total/added sugars, sodium, fats and saturated fats, and flags any non-nutritive sweetener use.

Per-quantity is required to avoid "per serving" warnings, which allow manufacturers to shrink serving sizes to evade warning thresholds. Per-100 g or -100 ml is more comparable on the shelf and the global FOPL norm.

Health and pricing policy

If India adopts a mandatory "high in" warnings system with robust thresholds, GST can also be differentially applied to compliant and noncompliant products. This way, labels can serve as an enforceable bridge between health policy and pricing policy. Products breaching any "high in" threshold – sugar, sodium or saturated fats – shouldn't enjoy the 5% rate even if they are staples in marketing terms. This could avoid the current mismatch between penalising sugary beverages while discounting sugary foods. Likewise, if beverages become more expensive but confectionery becomes cheaper, consumers,

especially adolescents, may substitute one sugar source for another. A threshold-linked structure can close that gap.

Role of advertisements

Food advertising also plays a key role in linking tax cuts with changing consumer behaviour. Since 2020, FSSAI rules have banned ads or the sale of HFSS (high in fat, sugar, salt) foods within 50m of schools. The 2022 Central Consumer Protection Authority guidelines restrict misleading ads and impose due diligence on endorsers. The ASCI Code, updated in July, also applies content rules and disclosure norms across media platforms.

Yet India lacks a comprehensive HFSS advertising regime. In Chile, for example, anything bearing a "high in" sign can't be advertised to children on TV or online during specific hours. Evidence shows that child-directed as well as time-based restrictions are more effective than programme-based limits. India should move in that direction and make ad restrictions across TV, print, and social media contingent on FOPL status.

GST 2.0 won't improve Indians' health by itself. Instead, the country needs mandatory FOPL warnings with thresholds aligned to the WHO-SEARO NPM and ICMR-NIN 2024 norms. Second, the GST treatment should be contingent on FOPL status: "high in" products should be taxed 18% or more while compliant products should be taxed 5% or less. Third, the rate cuts shouldn't discount confectionery and desserts while also hiking drinks. Fourth, if a product carries any "high in" warning, it can't be advertised to children, can't be advertised during peak child-viewing hours, and should have restricted placement options on media platforms. Finally, the government should redirect sin-tax revenues to NCD prevention, labelling enforcement, and monitoring reformulation practices.

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Key Takeaways from the Article

GST 2.0 Structure

- New GST slabs: **5% and 18%**, with a **40% bracket** for “sinful”/ultra-luxury goods.
- Many foods become cheaper: e.g., **pizza bread (5% → 0%)**, chocolates, jams, jellies, confectionery (12–18% → 5%).
- Sugary & aerated drinks move to **40% bracket** → positive for public health.

Public Health Concerns

- Blanket tax cuts make both healthy (sourdough) and unhealthy (maida bread, confectionery) products cheaper.
- This contradicts India’s **NCD (noncommunicable disease) prevention goals**.
- Risk: consumers may **substitute sugary drinks with cheaper sugary foods**.

Food Labelling Gaps

- India lacks **trustworthy food labelling** → consumers can’t easily distinguish healthy vs. unhealthy foods.
- **Front-of-Pack Labelling (FOPL)** debate stalled since 2022.
- Supreme Court (2025) asked **FSSAI** to finalize rules; preference for **warning labels** over star ratings.

Thresholds for Warning Labels

- Need **category-specific, per-100 g/ml thresholds** (not per-serving) for sugar, sodium, fats.
- WHO-SEARO Nutrient Profile Model recommended.
- Prevents industry tactics like shrinking serving sizes to avoid warnings.

Role of Advertising

- Current restrictions:
 - ♦ HFSS foods banned within 50m of schools.
 - ♦ Ads cannot mislead (Consumer Protection Authority, 2022).
 - ♦ ASCI Code (2025) updated for content rules.
- Still **no comprehensive HFSS ad regime**.
- Example: **Chile bans child-directed ads** for “high in” products during TV/online peak hours. India should adopt similar measures.

Recommendations

- Make **FOPL mandatory** with WHO-SEARO/ICMR thresholds.
- Link **GST rates to nutritional profile** (healthy foods cheaper, unhealthy costlier).
- Avoid giving tax cuts to **confectionery & desserts** while taxing drinks heavily.
- **Ban advertising** of products carrying “high in” warnings to children and during peak child-viewing hours.
- Redirect **sin-tax revenues** toward:
 - ♦ NCD prevention,
 - ♦ Label enforcement,
 - ♦ Monitoring industry reformulation.



India-China: the need for a broader settlement

Syllabus :

GS 2: International Relations

India-China: the need for a border settlement

Special Representatives were appointed by both nations, proposed by Prime Minister Vajpayee, solely for the purpose of settling the border issue. However, even now, a decade later, the boundary remains as indeterminate as ever

WORLD INSIGHT

Manoj Joshi

Since his visit to China as External Affairs Minister in 1979, Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee had harboured a keen desire to resolve issues with China and Pakistan. His 1979 visit to China was the first by a senior leader since the 1962 India-China war, and it set in place the process of normalising India-China relations. However, despite Deng Xiaoping's (the then leader of China) offer to make a deal on the border, the Indian side indicated that it was not yet ready to do so.

And so, two decades went by and relations between the two countries did get onto an even keel as they set about attempting to build peace on the Line of Actual Control (LAC), even as they built ties in other areas.

The Vajpayee factor

Vajpayee's period as Prime Minister saw rapid ups and downs in the Sino-Indian relationship.

Following the nuclear tests of 1998, which Vajpayee said were needed to counter China, Sino-Indian relations reached their nadir. Beijing became party to the UN Security Council Resolution 1172 to penalise India for the tests. However, they soon reconciled and in April 1999, the two sides held another Joint Working Group (JWG) meeting, the first in 20 months.

During his visit to Beijing in 2003, Prime Minister Vajpayee proposed that the two sides needed to give a political push to their border talks. The Chinese agreed and the two sides decided to appoint Special Representatives (SR) who would lead the process. As a measure of the importance India attached to the initiative, the Prime Minister appointed his principal secretary and National Security Advisor Brajesh Mishra as the Indian SR. The Chinese appointed Dai Bingguo, a senior politician and diplomat whose effective job was as National Security Advisor to President Hu Jintao. Insiders told this writer, that Prime Minister Vajpayee wanted the border issue to be settled as soon as possible, perhaps in a matter of years. But he lost the 2004 elections, and even though the SR process continued, it lost the invaluable support that the Prime Minister had provided.

The major achievement of the SRs, and a quick one, was the agreement of 2005 outlining "the political parameters and agreed guidelines for a border settlement between India and China."

The Political Parameters agreement has, so far, been the only negotiated document between the two sides on their boundary dispute.

The Political Parameters agreement

This was an extremely significant agreement, the essence of which suggested that the two countries would swap their claims – New Delhi would agree to the Chinese retaining Aksai Chin in Ladakh, while Beijing would concede the Indian claim on Arunachal Pradesh.

The preamble of the agreement noted that the two sides were convinced that "an early settlement of the boundary question will advance basic interests of the two countries and should therefore be pursued as a strategic objective." This makes it clear that the boundary issue was now frontloaded to the Sino-Indian dialogue.

Furthermore, Article II stated that the settlement would be arrived at from



Moving on: Prime Minister Narendra Modi meets Chinese President Xi Jinping on the sidelines of the BRICS Summit, in Kazan on October 23, 2024. ANI

"from the political perspective of overall bilateral relations." The two sides would move away from a purely technical or historic-legal solution. Article VI said that "the boundary should be along well-defined and easily identifiable natural geographical features" that the two sides agree on. This was the issue which had plagued the 1980s talks between the two nations.

However, the key clauses of the agreement were articles IV and VII. Article IV said that the two sides would give due consideration "to each other's strategic and reasonable interests" within the framework of their commitment to "mutual and equal security". Article VII declared that in arriving at a settlement, "the two sides shall safeguard due interests of their settled populations in the border areas."

A common-sense reading of these two articles suggested that the two sides were likely to strike a deal on a largely "as is where is" basis – Aksai Chin's real strategic importance was to China, and settled populations were specific to India in Arunachal Pradesh. The task for the SRs was now to work out "an agreed framework" that could provide the basis for the "delineation and demarcation" of the Sino-Indian boundary. Having lost the initial momentum, by 2009, the SR's task had been expanded to cover the gamut of Sino-Indian relations.

In June 2007, at the sidelines of a meeting in Berlin with Indian External Affairs Minister Pranab Mukherjee, Chinese foreign minister Yang Jiechi appeared to resile from Article VII. Yang told Mukherjee that the "mere presence" of populated areas would not affect China's claims on the Sino-Indian border.

In other words, China was reasserting its claim on Tawang, the most significant town in Arunachal Pradesh, and a major

centre of Lamaist Buddhism.

All talk, no play

Despite all this, the SRs continued their work. At the end of the term of the Chinese SR Dai Bingguo, an informal meeting was held between him and his Indian counterpart Shivshankar Menon, and the two sides recorded the summary of the consensus that the two sides had been able to achieve. We have no record of what these points were, but in March 2013, Wei Wei, then Ambassador in New Delhi, wrote in *The Hindu* that the two sides had "reached an 18-point consensus on the resolution framework." This was confirmed by Menon following his retirement and he also revealed in an interview that the work of the SRs in working out a framework for a border settlement had been done; all that was left was the political go-ahead to implement it on the ground. Yet, as Dai noted in his memoir *Strategic Dialogues*, China continued to insist that India concede the Tawang area to them as part of any settlement. Some of the decisions that had been taken were revealed, but only in passing. During the Doklam crisis of 2017, it was revealed that the two sides had agreed on the "basis of alignment" for the Sikkim-Tibet border, essentially the watershed between the Teesta and the Amo Chu river. They had also agreed that wherever the border had trijunctions with third countries the latter would be consulted before its finalisation. This involved Myanmar, Bhutan, Nepal and presumably Pakistan.

But a decade later in 2025, the SRs are still soldiering on. On August 19, they held their 24th round of talks. In the preceding decade, India-China relations had seen many ups and downs – the 2014 border incidents in Chumar, the 2017 Doklam crisis, the 2018-2019 détente, and the 2020 crisis. Between 2019 and 2024, they

did not meet formally even once. But then talks were taken up following the instructions of Chinese President Xi Jinping and Prime Minister Narendra Modi after their summit in Kazan at the sidelines of the BRICS meet last year.

The way ahead

The last round of the SRs in August 2025 importantly reiterated the decision of the two sides to move ahead with their discussions to work out a "reasonable and mutually acceptable framework" for settlement of the boundary based on the 2005 Political Parameters agreement.

Taking up where they left off in 2019, the two SRs also decided to set up a special expert group to move ahead for an "early harvest" agreement, which is essentially the settlement of the Sikkim-Tibet boundary. Another task set up by the SRs is to work out new border management methods to replace the ones that failed to work in 2020.

As we have noted, China and India have the basics of an agreement needed to work out their border alignment. At present, unfortunately, both sides are continuing with their military buildup on either side of the LAC. Efforts to build down military deployments, such as the agreement of 1996, have failed to do the needful. Both countries continue to pay a high price for their deployments in defending what could become a normal international border following an agreement. Yet, that final push for settlement has not come and it will only come when the political leaderships of the two countries jointly accept that there is nothing to be gained, and possibly a lot to be lost by allowing the border to remain unsettled.

The writer is a Distinguished Fellow at the Observer Research Foundation, New Delhi. This is the third part of a three-part series on India-China border relations.

THE GIST

Prime Minister Vajpayee during his visit to Beijing in 2003 proposed that the two sides needed to give a political push to their border talks. The Chinese agreed and the two sides decided to appoint Special Representatives (SR) who would lead the process.

Shivshankar Menon revealed in an interview that the work of the SRs in working out a framework for a border settlement had been done; all that was left was the political go-ahead to implement it on the ground.

However, China continued to insist that India concede the Tawang area to them as part of any settlement.



Translated collection of Bhil folk tales to be put soon

Translated collection of Bhil folk tales to be out soon

Abhinay Lakshman
NEW DELHI

The Union government's recent initiative to bring out a translation tool for tribal languages is helping bring out a translated collection of folk tales of the Bhil tribe in Madhya Pradesh.

The collection, in Hindi, will feature stories of inter-caste love, caste discrimination, *guru puja* and the celebration of theatre.

In the compilation, titled *Anuvad*, a recurring theme in several stories appears to be a narrative where casteism is defeated through arguments such as "caste was never a part of Sanatan Dharma", or "there is no caste in Manusmriti, it was introduced", and that caste differences should be set aside because "all Hindus are the same".

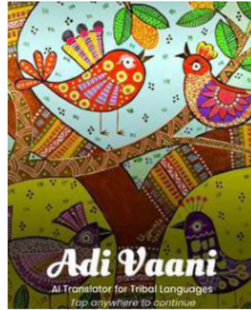
The e-booklet will be made available on the Tribal Affairs Ministry's *Adi Vaani* website and the app. Other stories talk about farmer distress, faith healers, and worshippers of Lokmata Ahilya Devi, the

Narmada, and Sant Singaji.

A story about inter-caste love titled *Jaativaad Khatam Karo* (end casteism) speaks of Basant and Palasi, who live in a beautiful village, where the only problem is that of casteism. While Basant's caste location is not revealed in the story, it says Palasi is Dalit and Basant is of a "higher" caste. Basant, an attendance marker at a factory, falls for Palasi, a worker, but the villagers object to this. The villagers, led by the Pandit, stop Basant to confront him about the *ad-harm* (sacrilege).

Basant stands his ground, enraging the Pandit, who forces Basant to argue with him in a public square. In this dialogue, the Pandit argues that caste is part of Hindu religious texts, while Basant argues that caste was never part of the Manusmriti but that it was inserted in made-up *shloks* (verses) later in the form of a "conspiracy".

He goes on to argue that inter-caste relations are not wrong "because all Hindus are the same", pos-



The e-booklet will be made available on the *Adi Vaani* website and the app.

iting that "casteism" goes against the "Varna system", which is based on *karma* and not on birth.

The Pandit listens to Basant, changes his mind, and declares him "innocent", calling him a "protector of faith".

Another story is about a fierce night-long street play competition where a "Vanvasi" audience is won over by the protagonist's theatre group, which starts playing the roles of "Vanvasis" on stage, speaking their language and dancing their dances.

These tales have been collected from oral story-

telling traditions of the Bhil community in regions of Madhya Pradesh, with some of them referring to the Nimar region of the State.

Vague timeline

The stories do not mention the year in which they take place, but some of them have vague clues indicating that they are taking place in a modern world, with the mention of cars and roads, and characters who are police officers and district officials.

Officials told *The Hindu* that such folk tales from Gondi, Santali, and Mundari communities have also been translated and will be made available soon.

In a story titled '*Guru Puja*', Samandar, a hard-working schoolteacher in a village, is preparing for *Guru Purnima*. As preparations are under way, the crowd is stunned into silence by a visibly drunk policeman, who is beating a child. When stopped, he threatens violence and casts against the teachers, children and guests, and vandalises the idol that

was supposed to be worshipped. Samandar works up the courage to confront the policeman, stands his ground, and ensures that he runs away. When the students see their teacher defending their lives, they say they will now worship him as their guru. At this point, Samandar posits that they should instead worship "the guru of gurus" – the "*bhaagwat* flag" – a religious flag, typically yellow or saffron in colour. He says, "This flag represents our culture and civilisation. It is a vehicle for our nation. Our Sanatan culture is reflected in this. This is our guru."

According to the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh's V. Bhagaiah, the RSS considers the "*bhagwa dhwa*" (saffron flag) its guru. Author Arun Anand, who has studied the RSS, further writes that this concept originated when RSS members wished to consider founder K.B. Hedgewar as their guru, but Mr. Hedgewar had purportedly suggested they worship the saffron flag as their guru instead.