

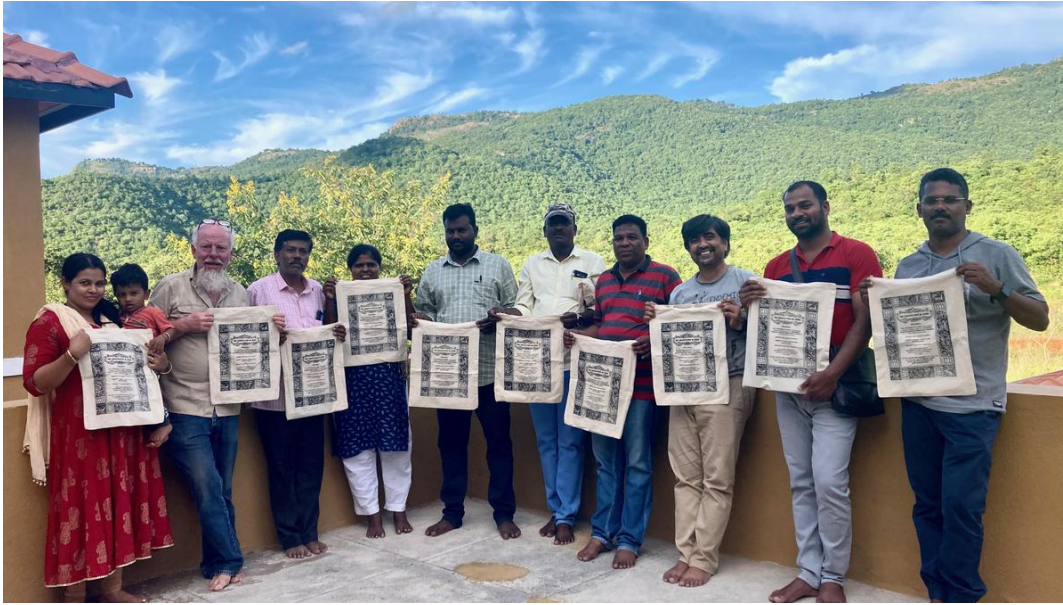
South Indian Adivasi Knowledge Centre to be launched in B.R. Hills

This new centre, Kaanu, which means evergreen forest, aims to be the first ever knowledge centre on South Indian Adivasi past, present and culture

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Kaanu workshop Muntipalya. | Photo Credit: SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Kaanu, a South Indian Adivasi Knowledge Centre, will be launched at the Tribal Health Resource Centre (THRC) at BR Hills, Karnataka on Sunday, August 25.

Prashanth N. Srinivas, a medical doctor and public health researcher working at the Institute of Public Health, Bangalore's field station in B.R. Hills, says that Kaanu, which means evergreen forest in both Kannada and

Soliga language, “aims to be the first ever knowledge centre on South Indian Adivasi past, present and culture: a tree of knowledge.”

Three branches

According to him, Kaanu will have three branches: a library, where publications on and by tribal communities of Karnataka, Kerala and Tamil Nadu can be consulted by interested researchers and the general public; the Kaanu annotated bibliography, with over 1,200 works on historical and contemporary works on the South Indian Adivasi world and a book co-written by South Indian Adivasi and non-Adivasi scholars. “It is the Kaanu library that will be formally inaugurated this Sunday,” he says, adding that the Kaanu annotated bibliography will come online in September and can be accessed at no cost from all over the world. The book, says Srinivas, is still in its preliminary stage.

This initiative, the brainchild of a collective comprising of leaders and scholars from several South Indian Adivasi communities as well as non-Adivasi researchers having a long association with them, has its genesis in a writing workshop held at the foothills of BRT, in Muntipalya, says Srinivas. While the idea of a South Indian Adivasi Knowledge Centre (SIAKC) circulated for years among them, they came together in June 2023 during that workshop, he says. “The launch of Kaanu now is the result of one more year of hard work.”

So, why the need for an initiative like this? “While the history and the actual living environment of the bigger Adivasi communities in the Central Tribal Belt and to a lesser extent the North East are well documented, much less is available on the smaller Adivasi groups in the deep South,” says Srinivas. Outside of their own communities very little is known, he believes. “Even what is known is often inaccessible, scattered among a handful of university libraries and specialised websites,” he says. Also, the Adivasis’ own perspective is often absent, he points out. “In these circumstances, bringing together and making available scholarly and local knowledge is a laudable aim.”



Kadar of Cochin 1952 Ehrenfels. | Photo Credit: SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Adivasi perspective

Speaking about Kaanu, Dr. C. Madegowda, a scientist with the Ashoka Trust for Research in Ecology & Environment, says, “As a scholar I feel there is a lot to learn from history of our people and how it’s been written largely by

non-Adivasis. With many of us Adivasis engaging with the scholarship about us, there is an opportunity to critically examine how we have been represented in literature.”

Madegowda, who is also the secretary of the Zilla Budakattu Girijana Abhivruddhi Sangha, a community welfare organisation, firmly believes that there is a need for a space that allows debate and discussion on these issues locally. “We hope Kaanu can emerge as such a space,” he says.

For more information on Kaanu, the collective can be addressed at infokaanu@gmail.com .