

Call for four PhD positions for anthropological research on the socio-cultural meanings of cereals in Odisha (India)

As part of three interconnected and interdisciplinary research projects at the University of Groningen (the Netherlands) and the Frobenius Institute for Research in Cultural Anthropology (Frankfurt am Main, Germany), we offer four PhD positions (“Wissenschaftliche Mitarbeiter*innen”) in the field of anthropology (or related disciplines) to study the socio-cultural and religious meanings of cereals in Odisha (India) in the context of changing government policies and new global and local valuations of cereals in connection to discourses of bio-diversity, sustainability and food security or sovereignty.

Available positions/funding:

- two PhD positions at the University of Groningen (**Project A**), start: second half 2021
- funding for doctoral research in cooperation with an Indian university (**Project B**), start: as of now
- two PhD positions at the Frobenius Institute for Research in Cultural Anthropology (Frankfurt am Main) (**Project C**), start: 1 July 2021

Recruitment requirement:

- Completed MA degree in social and cultural anthropology (or related disciplines within the social sciences and humanities)

Expectations and tasks:

- Independent development and implementation of the research projects
- Long-term ethnographic field research (at least 12 months) in rural Odisha (India)
- Participation in lectures, workshops, conferences and joint publications
- Willingness for interdisciplinary work as well as cooperation with research partners in Europe and India
- Fluency in English (spoken and written)

For more details on the research projects, requirements and expectations contact the project leaders or consult the respective websites mentioned below.

Project Descriptions:

Millet, grasses grown mostly in Africa and India, used to be marginalized as “poor-man’s food”. Now they are globally regarded as crucial for the attainment of the UN’s Sustainable-Development-Goals due to their excellent nutritional and ecological properties. In order to promote millets, the Indian state of Odisha recently initiated the “Millets Mission” in regions inhabited by millet-cultivating indigenous peoples (Adivasis). However, agro-scientists and policymakers fail to recognize the cultural dimensions of food-crop production. While they now consider millets as salvage crops, the original Adivasi cultivators are considered backward and their cultures curtailed. This jeopardizes the sustainability of the policies. We argue, conversely, that bio-diversity depends on cultural diversity.

The policies entail new configurations and valuations of millets that relate people, crops, ideas and technology in novel ways. **Projects A and B** aim to investigate the full complexity of human engagements with millets in these changing circumstances. Understanding the conditions, dynamics and implications of crop selection is crucial for a sustainable future. We achieve this aim by integrating the approaches of anthropology and archaeobotany and by combining ethnographic and historical perspectives. Our societal aim is to challenge mainstream representations of Adivasi cultures, to explicate the consequences of the disconnection of crops and culture, and to facilitate constructive dialogue between stakeholders.

Project A: The project *“Salvage Crops, ‘Savage’ People: A comparative anthropological and archaeobotanical investigation of Millet Assemblages in India”* at the University of Groningen is funded by the NWO (Dutch Research Council) for four years. Project leaders are Dr. Peter Berger (Social and Cultural Anthropology) and Prof. Dr. René Cappers (Archaeology, Archaeobotany).

The two ethnographic sub-projects (each carried out by a PhD researcher) will involve long-term fieldwork among two Adivasi communities of Odisha that employ different traditional cultivation systems. Numerous communities inhabiting steep hills practice shifting cultivation. This type of non-irrigated cultivation uses one type of field, which is cleared in the forest and then cultivated for a number of years. It also involves intensive multi-cropping, that is, different kinds of millets are cultivated in the same field next to pulses, roots and fruits. Millets have been the single most important staple food for these communities. The situation is different on the Koraput plateau of Odisha, the site of the second ethnographic sub-project. Here, millet and rice are complementary traditional staple crops cultivated in different ways. While millets are grown on permanent dry fields, the specific ecological conditions of the plateau allow wet-rice cultivation in terraced riverbeds. While rice is a new crop among shifting cultivators, on the plateau rice cultivation is an ancient practice and together with millet cultivation deeply engrained in ritual and worldview.

Application:

The application will follow the procedures of the University of Groningen and the application has to be submitted online. The PhD students will be members of the [Graduate School of the Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies](#) and of the [Department of the Comparative Study of Religion](#).

Application will be online (website is in-the-making). In the meanwhile candidates can contact Dr. Peter Berger for questions: p.berger@rug.nl (but no applications via email)

Project B: The project *“From ‘poor man's food’ to ‘nutri-cereals’: emergence of a new millet assemblage in Odisha, India”* at the Frobenius Institute for Cultural Anthropological Research is funded by the DFG since January 1, 2021. The project focuses on three case studies based on long-term research to investigate the impact of India's new millet policy on different actors and communities. These are, first, the urban elites and their new consumption patterns with regard to millets, second, the impact on the tribal highlanders who are becoming the “guardians of millets”, and third, the farmers who have been producing millets for local markets for some time. To support the project team, we are looking for a person from India who would like to do a PhD at an Indian university and whom we can support for this purpose from project funds.

For an application please contact: Prof. Dr. Roland Hardenberg (hardenberg@em.uni-frankfurt.de)

Project C: The project *“ResourceCultures of Rice and Wheat in South and Central Asia: Religious and (agro)economic Dimensions of Cereals”* at the Frobenius Institute for Cultural Anthropological Research is part of the Collaborative Research Center (SFB 1070) “ResourceCultures” and is funded by the DFG for four years. Project leader is Prof. Dr. Roland Hardenberg (Social and Cultural Anthropology). This project focuses on two case studies based on long-term field research on rice cultivation in the south and west of Odisha, India. The first case study addresses rice cultivation in western Odisha, a region where the goddess Lakshmi is identified with rice and where various groups and NGOs are working to counteract the damage of the Green Revolution, drawing on religious practices and ideas. The second case study examines practices related to rice in an ‘ecological hotspot’, the tribal highlands of Odisha. Rice is also considered an embodiment of the goddess Lakshmi by these highlanders (Adivasis), and many different local varieties of rice are found in their fields to this day. In recent years, these have also become the subject of the activities of NGOs based on the religious practices of the highlanders.

For an application please contact: Prof. Dr. Roland Hardenberg (hardenberg@em.uni-frankfurt.de)