

## #TIGER MARKINGS

# False Eyes For Display

White spots on the back of tigers' ears are constant visual guides for cubs and warning displays



Tigers possess a striking pair of white spots on the backs of their ears, commonly known as o'kelly or "false eyes." These markings are a distinctive and purposeful feature found across all tiger subspecies. Far from being decorative, these white spots function as constant visual signals, playing a crucial role in communication, tension signaling, and survival.

**Structure and Visibility of Ear O'kelly**  
Each tiger ear displays a bold white oval set against a dark black background. This high-contrast design ensures visibility even in dense forest, tall grass, or low-light conditions. The spots remain clearly visible from behind, regardless of whether the tiger is moving or stationary, making them an ever-present visual cue to other animals.

**Constant Visual Guide for Cubs**  
One of the most important functions of the white ear spots is to act as a visual guide for tiger cubs. When cubs follow their mother through thick vegetation, the white spots provide a clear focal point to track her movements. This constant visual marker reduces the risk of cubs becoming separated and enhances group cohesion during travel and hunting.

**Evolutionary Advantage**  
The persistence of these markings across all tiger populations suggests strong evolutionary value. By serving simultaneously as a guide for offspring, a warning display, and a tension signal, the white ear spots enhance survival, communication efficiency, and territorial stability.

The white spots on the backs of tigers' ears are a powerful example of how subtle physical features can carry complex meaning. Acting as constant visual guides and warning displays, they allow tigers to communicate tension, intent, and awareness without sound or movement. These markings are an essential part of the tiger's behavioural language, silent, visible, and highly effective.



Irawati Karve with human skulls at the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute of Anthropology, Human Heredity, and Eugenics in Berlin, 1928.

# A Rebel Mind

● Bulbul Joshi

In the landscape of modern Indian scholarship, Irawati Karve (1905-1970) stands out as a pioneering figure, an intellectual who challenged conventions, questioned dominant ideologies, and redefined the scope of anthropology in India. Often regarded as one of the first prominent women anthropologists in the country, Karve combined rigorous scientific inquiry with a deeply humanistic approach, earning her a lasting place in both academic and literary traditions.

**A Trailblazer in Anthropology**  
At a time when academia was overwhelmingly male-dominated, Karve emerged as a formidable scholar. She pursued advanced training in anthropology in Germany, where she worked under Eugen Fischer, a leading but controversial figure associated with racial science. Fischer served as her PhD supervisor, and during this period, Karve engaged in anthropometric research, including the study of human skulls, an area central to early 20th-century racial classification theories. She is known to have examined and analyzed a significant sample, often cited as around 149 skulls, comparing European and Asian racial features.

**Challenging Racial Science**  
Karve's exposure to racial anthropology did not lead to blind acceptance. Instead, it sharpened her critical perspective. She later questioned the very foundations of racial classification systems promoted by scholars like Fischer, whose ideas were aligned with the ideology of Nazism. These frameworks attempted to divide humanity into rigid hierarchies based on physical traits.

**Fieldwork Against the Odds**  
After returning to India, Karve joined Deccan College, where she continued her academic career and field research. At a time when women were rarely allowed, let alone encouraged, to conduct fieldwork, especially in remote areas, Karve broke barriers. She travelled extensively across rural and tribal regions of India, often taking her children along with her into the field. This was highly unconventional in an era

when both academic research and women's mobility were heavily restricted. Her use of mobile or field-based methods, including on-site data collection, reflected her commitment to firsthand observation and empirical rigour.

**A New Reading of the Mahabharata**  
Beyond her scientific work, Karve made a remarkable contribution to literary and cultural studies through her reinterpretation of the Mahabharata. In her celebrated book *Yuganta*, she approached the epic not merely as mythology but as a reflection of historical and social realities. Her perspective was groundbreaking. She treated the characters as real, complex individuals shaped by their circumstances, offering insights into the moral and political dilemmas of their time.

**Women Through a New Lens**  
One of the most striking aspects of *Yuganta* is Karve's perceptive analysis of female characters. Her interpretations of Kunti and Draupadi stand out for their psychological depth. Karve portrayed Kunti as a woman navigating difficult moral choices, rather than simply an idealized mother figure. Draupadi, in her reading, emerges as strong, assertive, and deeply human, marked by dignity, anger, and resilience. These interpretations reflect Karve's own position as a "rebel woman," challenging traditional narratives and offering fresh, empathetic perspectives.

**Legacy of a Rebel Scholar**  
Irawati Karve's legacy lies in her courage to question established norms, whether in science, society, or literature. From critically engaging with European racial theories to conducting fieldwork under challenging conditions, she consistently pushed boundaries. Her life and work continue to inspire scholars across disciplines. By blending scientific rigour with cultural insight and moral inquiry, Karve not only advanced anthropology in India but also demonstrated the power of independent thought. In doing so, she secured her place as one of the most remarkable and forward-thinking intellectuals of modern India. Many books have been written about her, but this one is with the help of people close to her.

Urmilla Deshpande and Thiago Pinto Barbosa lay out in *Iru: The Remarkable Life of Irawati Karve*

the arc of her life as an opportunity to engage with a whole host of questions about 20th century Indian society, the academic world, caste, gender, and much more.

Iru begins with Karve's remarkable journey to Berlin in the 1920s, where she would end up disproving a racist theory about skull sizes in defiance of her supervisor, Eugen Fischer. It ends with a series of ruminations from Karve, grappling with the nature of societal violence and how each one of us is implicated in it. In between, Iru paints a picture of Karve's life, scholarship, and writing without shying away from the less celebrated aspects of her work, such as applying German-inspired tools of physical anthropology on Indian subjects, that have mostly been discarded by the discipline today.

Deshpande, an author who is also Karve's granddaughter, and Barbosa, a postdoctoral researcher in the Institute of Anthropology at Leipzig University, collaborated to create a nuanced portrait of Karve as an important figure of 20th century Indian thought. CASI Managing Editor Rohan Venkat spoke to Deshpande and Barbosa about their unlikely collaboration, what it was like to engage with Karve's complex legacy, the impact of Eurocentrism in social sciences, and how they settled on "critical fabulation" fact-derived storytelling as the form for this biography.

**Rohan: Is there an elevator pitch for the book?**

Urmilla: The book is about Irawati Karve, who is my grandmother and the subject of a case study for Thiago's dissertation. We came to it from these two different sides and we were just incredibly lucky to meet each other and be able to collaborate on this. It's about her life, her work, an exploration of the sort of person she might've been, because she died when I was seven, and Thiago never met her. It's an exploration, trying to put together who she might've been from everything that we could find.

**Rohan: Tell me about the form you chose: "critical fabulation."**

Thiago: Critical fabulation is an idea coined by Saidiya Hartman and also used by Projit Mukharji. It comes from the discussion of what historians do about the fact that we cannot find any documents about the millions of women who were in the slave trade and who happened to



Irawati Karve, pioneering Indian anthropologist and the subject of Iru.

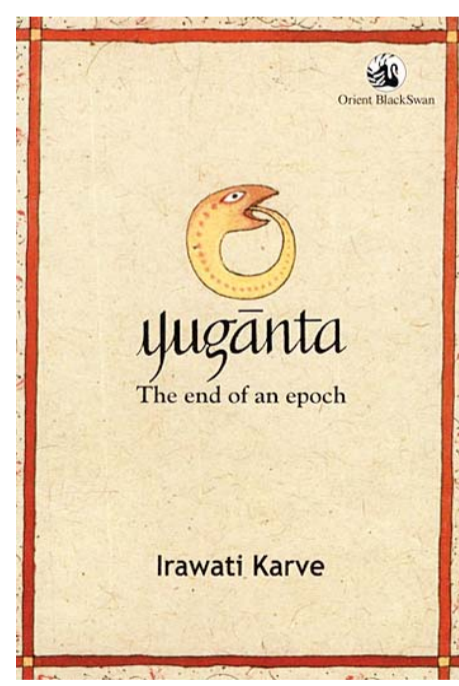
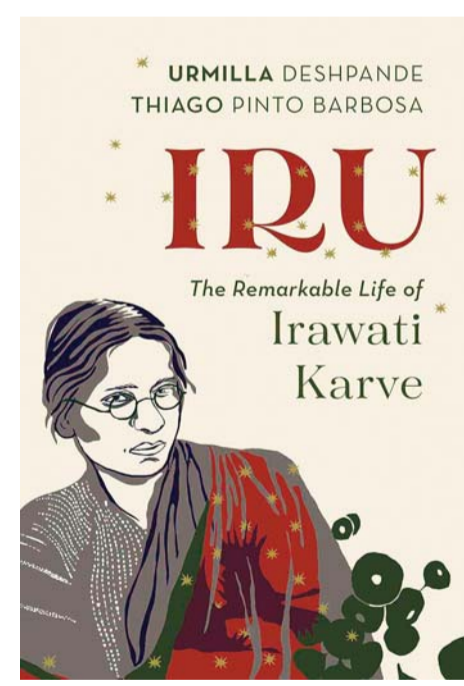
## World Rainforest Day

The rainforests are keeping our planet alive. They're home to half the world's animal species, they provide us with freshwater, and are essential for keeping our climate stable. Yet every second, on average, a half-hectare is lost, while each year, 78 million hectares of precious rainforest are destroyed. As more and more rainforest is removed, the surrounding wildlife habitats and homes of indigenous people are also more significantly disrupted. That's why World Rainforest Day has been created to take decisive action to combat deforestation, reduce the effects of climate change, and protect our rainforests for future generations.

## #IRAWATI KARVE

have died in crossing the ocean, or very much on thinking about the put to work in America. Do we not write history about them because the knowledge is not there? How do we fill those gaps in history that are important, because those stories need to be told? We need to develop ways of being able to craft narratives with the little material that we have, but still be able to tell a story somehow. This is the principle, this idea of crafting stories that are still based on very solid research.

And that's what we did. We did thorough research, we researched in archives, we interviewed many people, people who knew her, ex-students, ex-colleagues, we read all her texts, many different texts about her too, and we gathered different stories. Urmilla and I would meet in Berlin and go for walks, going to the places where she lived, where she studied. I have a long engagement with the history of the institution where she did her PhD in Berlin because I was working there. Based on all those facts, we allowed ourselves to be creative in forming a narrative that was still based on the real facts, but to try to make a biography that would still be more accessible to the reader and somehow try to get as close to her as we could in this portrayal of this person.



**Rohan: Urmilla, you talk specifically about your mother (the writer and poet Gauri Deshpande) and her fraught connection to Karve as well.**

Urmilla: I think Thiago interviewed my aunt (Karve's daughter) who, when I said I wanted to talk to her, she said, "I don't want to talk about my mother anymore," which is fair; she's 90 years old and talked about her mother her whole life. But yes, I did have to engage with the way my mother dealt with her mother. I think for Thiago, it was different because he really spoke to people who knew her and her colleagues and her students, and so, he got a very different picture of her. And yeah, I can hear the admiration that some of these people had for her, what influence she had, from listening to his interviews and his work. It was strange, because this is someone I knew of course, and yet found out that I entirely didn't know her.

**Rohan: What is Irawati Karve's legacy within the academy?**

Urmilla: That was in a time where maybe one might have thought Nazis are monsters. Similarly, today we might think of fascists as monsters. But she goes on to say they're human, and the implication of this statement is quite profound. Also, in thinking about racism, about labeling a person racist or non-racist, I think there are different ways to be racist and different ways to be anti-racist. And sometimes, the same person can have contradictory positions in this discussion, right?

**Rohan: It's something that both of you engage with, not just on the question of race, but also on feminism.**

Urmilla: I always wondered why my mother didn't talk about her mother (Irawati) as a feminist, because that was not her experience. And that's really important to me. Although Irawati may have been a certain way ideologically, she did not follow those things through in her own personal life.

**Rohan: It also shows up in the work. In one portion, you have a reference to wife-beating while out in the field.**

Urmilla: That was in her Marathi essay, where she was clearly talking about it being widespread. She said, look, as an anthropologist and as a social scientist, I know and I see that this happens and this is widespread everywhere, that's all I'm commenting on. I'm not trying to say it's good or it's bad, because clearly it's bad, I mean, she said, I shouldn't have a comment on that. You know it's a bad thing. But I am saying that it's absolutely widespread and we shouldn't act as if it doesn't exist, it exists everywhere. And she was trying to prove that. She did have a nuanced way of looking at things, for sure, but sometimes, I think it frustrated her that she was saying the obvious thing. At one point, she talks about her being introduced always as some man's appendage, wife or daughter

One of the most striking aspects of *Yuganta* is Karve's perceptive analysis of female characters. Her interpretations of Kunti and Draupadi stand out for their psychological depth. Karve portrayed Kunti as a woman navigating difficult moral choices, rather than simply an idealized mother figure. Draupadi, in her reading, emerges as strong, assertive, and deeply human, marked by dignity, anger, and resilience. These interpretations reflect Karve's own position as a "rebel woman," challenging traditional narratives and offering fresh, empathetic perspectives.

very remarkable and could still be articulated for a lot of progressive thinking today, such as her attention to the situation of women in Indian society. She formulated some theories about the origins of caste difference, which are still debated today. And I think some of it also needs critical attention because some of her ideas are being picked up by geneticists in the US, sometimes rather uncritically. And of course, question of the national cohesion and diversity in India is something that she wrote about.

**Rohan: Was there a fear that you would find yourself explaining or apologizing for the more criticized bits of her work?**

Thiago: If I would have had the impression that we wanted to write a hagiography, I wouldn't have been in this boat. I think we connected very well on this. The way the book ends, I think that's the antagonism of an apology, because it actually ends with, and people have interpreted this differently in some of the reviews, on this kind of confessional, philosophical rumination, where she sees herself very implicated in bigger processes of societal violence. And that's something that



Irawati Karve with human remains from the Mesolithic period, Langhnaj, Gujarat, 1944.

she does also talk about her relation to those German scientists who did happen to be Nazis after she left Germany. When she writes about (German anthropologist and Nazi social scientist) Eugen Fischer when he's very old, I think for his 80th or 85th birthday, the word she uses to describe him is humanity. That's a positive word. Because I think that was in a time where maybe one might have thought Nazis are monsters. Similarly, today we might think of fascists as monsters. But she goes on to say they're human, and the implication of this statement is quite profound. Also, in thinking about racism, about labeling a person racist or non-racist, I think there are different ways to be racist and different ways to be anti-racist. And sometimes, the same person can have contradictory positions in this discussion, right?

**Rohan: Tell me about the presence of French anthropologist Louis Dumont, his space within Indian anthropology and the dialogue between him and Irawati.**

Thiago: Because I'm also from Brazil, I was a bit scandalized by when I went to Germany. That's something, thinking about Eurocentrism, that I will take with me through my life. And that's why I also thought Irawati's case was interesting to think about because she was an Indian person in Berlin in the 1920s, and being trained in this very Eurocentric school.

What Dumont said of Karve's book, *Kinship Organization in India*, demolished Karve's international career. In the critique, you can sense that very old French male anthropologist using a sarcastic, very bitter tone, really taking the whole thing apart and calling her this Brahmin lady from Maharashtra, and also emphasizing the gender, which is a little detail, but very telling. And then asking the question of whether she is mixing all these different things, history with the reading of mythology and ancient text with anthropology, what is this? Is this even the proper anthropological method? Is this a Brahmin method? He made the same critique with other Indian anthropologists.

She has a chapter about the legacy of Dumont for Indian sociology and anthropology because he was this gatekeeper figure, editing the first very internationally known journal of sociology, *Contributions to Indian Sociology*. And that review came out in the first edition of that journal.

**Rohan: I wondered if you might be anticipating similar pushback from critical biography?"** that sort of thing.

Urmilla: I can answer this in just two examples. There are two people in my family who I love very much, one is a young white man, one is an older white man. But they read the

first chapter and they were like, "What is this? This is not how biographies are written." But beyond that, I wasn't expecting pushback or anything else because I'm honestly amazed and shocked at how far this book has gone.

**Rohan: What else would you recommend to readers who are interested, including your own work?**

Urmilla: If someone wants to go further into scientific racism history, that would be Thiago's book that's coming out. And if someone wants to read more about Irawati's work, I'm actually working on translations of her Marathi essays, which are going to be with Speaking Tiger. And then I'm still working on my novel, which one day, I will complete, so there's that. And I'm working on a new translation of *Yuganta* after that.

**Thiago: I think from my side, my book that is coming out called *Racializing Caste: Anthropology Between Germany and India* and the *Legacy of Irawati Karve (1905-1970)* looks at the more critical aspect of Karve's work and thinks about the impact of this German school of racial anthropology. Besides that, I was very fascinated by the work of Projit Mukharji, who is now at Ashoka University in Delhi. He wrote this book called *Brown Skins, White Coats: Race Science in India*, where Karve is also featured along other scientists from India. I'm now still reading something that I think is also interesting to think about the context of Berlin in the 1920s and in Nazi times, as well as from the 1930s on, called *Racism and the Making of Gay Rights: A Sexologist, His Student, and the Empire of Queer Love* by Laurie Marhoefer, which is about the work of Magnus Hirschfeld, a German psychologist, and the complications of, limits to, or the contradictions of being anti-racist but, at the same time, being racist. This book really is a biography of Hirschfeld and his Chinese lover and student, and through these two biographies, the book thinks thoroughly about legacies of racism, also in connection to a discussion about queerness and gay rights. And I think the book does that in a very nuanced way as well, while also showing aspects of life in Europe in the 1920s and 1930s.**

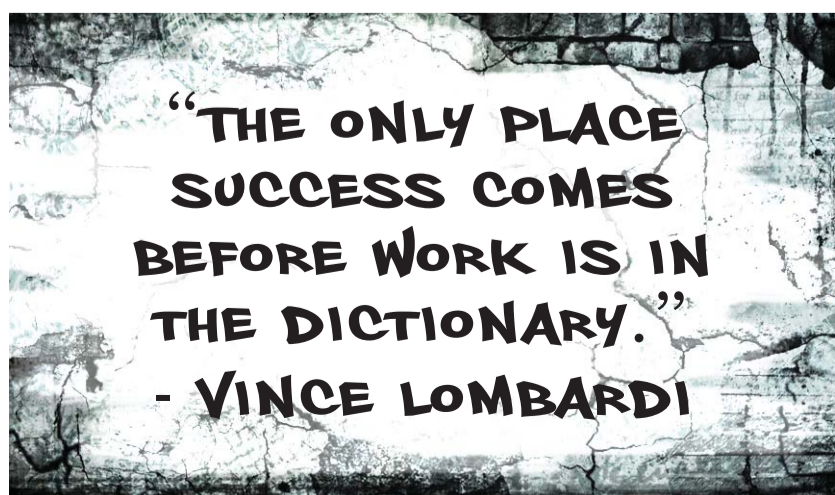
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## THE WALL



## BABY BLUES



By Rick Kirkman & Jerry Scott

## ZITS



By Jerry Scott & Jim Borgman