Astrobatrachus Kurichiyana Frog

Recently a **starry dwarf frog, named after constellation-like markings** on it and **Wayanad's Kurichiya tribe**, has been discovered in **Wayanad district, Kerala.**

Features of the Frog

- It is about **2cm to 3cm long** and is the **sole member of an ancient lineage**, a long branch on the frog tree of life that researchers have classified as a **new subfamily, Astrobatrachinae.**
- **Dark brown with a bright orange underbelly** and speckled with **pale blue dots**, the frog camouflages well in wet leaf litter.
- It is **Nocturnal.**
- Scans of its skeletons showed it to be completely different from any other similar-sized frog seen in Wayanad, some of its physical characteristics (such as its triangular finger- and toe tips) closely resembled frogs in South America and Africa.
- However, Genetic studies revealed that its closest relatives are the Nycibatrachinae group of frogs that dwell in the streams of Western Ghats, and the Lankanectinae frogs of Sri Lanka.

- Researchers still do not know its life cycle, the sound of its call or whether the species is threatened or endangered.

Kurichiya Tribe

- The tribe is also known as **Malai Brahmins** or **Hill Brahmins.**
- They are the **second largest adivasi community in Wayanad district** . They stand at the top of the caste hierarchy among the hill tribes of Wayanad.
- The community was named **Kurichiya by the Kottayam Raja for the community's expertise in archery**. The name is derived from the phrase **'kuri vechavan',** which means **'he who took aim'.**
    - It is also said that the name `Kurichiya' is derived from the **kuri or the sandalwood paste** that they apply on their foreheads and chests as a custom.
- They are **land-owning communities**, and follow a **matrilineal household system.**
- They followed **slash and burn (shifting) cultivation** known as **Punam cultivation.**
- **Nellukuthu Pattu** is their art form.

Significance

- India, once part of Africa, split from Madagascar about 89 million years ago and drifted northeast. Its long isolation as an island **provided fertile ground for the evolution of new life forms** and may have sheltered species that disappeared elsewhere.
- Finding ancient lineages like Astrobatrachinae **can help fill in in the region's distant biological past** and may answer the perennial question that whether peninsular India's frogs are the descendants of African ancestors or they first originated in Asia and then moved south.