

## Socio-Cultural Lifestyle of Tri-Natives: Gond, Bhil and Santhal

Om Prakash Kumar<sup>1</sup>, Amit Soni<sup>2</sup>

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### Abstract

Tribal lifestyle is deeply associated with their culture, art and craft. A larger mass of tribal people live in rural areas. In central India, the area of Vindhya, Satpuda and Aravali Mountain ranges, stretching from east to west in the states of West Bengal, Orissa, Jharkhand, Telangana, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Gujarat and Rajasthan form a big tribal belt. Gond, Bhil and Santhal are the three biggest tribal communities residing in this central tribal region of India. These three dominating groups are comparatively developed than other tribal groups of the area, though their overall economy is still based on agriculture and labor work resulting in economic backwardness. But, new generation is gradually, getting educated and exposed to salaried jobs and modern technology. Due to better communication, exposure, marketization and modernization their culture is changing with time and need. Though, they have strong bond with their indigenous culture, religion and art, which has kept their tradition and lifestyle intact with relevant changes. But, changing lifestyle and economy has affected their art and craft. Themes, raw material and technology are changing their forms, symbols and patterns. Paintings have shifted from walls to canvas and taken professional shape. Festive and regular enjoyment with dance and music had developed as stage performance. But, they have not at all lost touch with their roots and cultural awareness is again revitalizing their bond with traditional dance, music and other art and craft forms. Celebrations are still celebrated with tribal songs and dances within the village's open courtyard. There are also several cultural and culinary habits, languages, social structures inclusive of marriage, and varieties of consciousness.

**Keywords:** Culture, Tradition, Art, Craft, Social Structure, Change, Occupation, Cultural Awareness.

**Author's Affiliation:** <sup>1</sup>Assistant Archaeologist, Archaeological Survey of India, Agra, <sup>2</sup>Associate Professor, Department of Museology, Faculty of Tribal Studies, Indira Gandhi National Tribal University, Amarkantak Madhya Pradesh-484886.

**Corresponding Author:** Amit Soni, Associate Professor, Faculty of Tribal Studies, Indira Gandhi National Tribal University, Amarkantak, Madhya Pradesh-484886.

**E-mail:** [ethnomuseologist@gmail.com](mailto:ethnomuseologist@gmail.com)

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## INTRODUCTION

Unity in diversity is one of the most outstanding features amongst the population of India. The tribal culture of India, its customs, and practices interpenetrate practically all the components of Indian culture and civilization. From the Aryan, Dravidian to the Indo-Tibetan languages, Indian

tribal culture has also seen a significant blending of cultures among its people. It is regarded to be very vital to living within the tribal cultures of India, to comprehend their methods of life. Some of the tribal communities have similarities and yet are unique in their religious and cultural beliefs. The tribes in India certainly constitute the very basis of wonderful India! The cultures through which these

tribal communities persist are very patriarchal but also egalitarian in their viewpoint. However, certain tribal communities have progressively adopted the contemporary forms of society due to socio-cultural changes, where each one is acknowledged for his or her unique set of opinions and beliefs. A portion of the tribal population in India is still backward. In India a new dialect may be experienced virtually every new day; culture and variety amongst the tribal can also be appreciated from any terrain direction. These diverse tribes still inhabit the varied sections, especially the seven states of the North-eastern region and nearly every corner of the country. The specialty of the Indian tribes rests in their habits, cultures, and beliefs and, in particular, the harmony in which they survive in unanimity with nature. Tribal existence properly displays a well-balanced environment, a technique that in no way undermines the ecological balance. As the socio-cultural scenario is rapidly growing with modern day changes, it's high time to preserve sustainable part of vital cultural traditions to maintain eco-cultural balance which is the basis of long lasting sustenance of native communities.

The Census of India, 2011 has notified 705 scheduled tribes in 30 States/Union Territories in India. The total population of the scheduled tribes in India is 10,42,81,034<sup>1</sup> which forms 8.6 per cent of the total population of India. Gond, Bhil and Santhal are the biggest tribal groups of Western, Central and Eastern India which forms the biggest schedule tribe area of India. Their traditional economy was based on agriculture and forest produce. The population of these three tribes constitutes the major part of tribal population of India. These are settled big tribal groups, much exposed to modern culture. But, still their big chunk of population lives in rural areas and continuing their traditional culture and they are also exposed to modern technology, development programs, formal education and white color jobs along with religious conversion. Their culture is in transition phase and gradually changing. All this is resulting in change in their lifestyle with continuation of their sustained culture traits and art forms which need to be preserved and propagated.

### ***Objectives of the Study***

This paper aims to study the social and cultural life styles of Gond, Bhil and Santhal tribes. Vibrant arts forms and cultural heritage are represented by these tribal communities in their different native states in India were studied with following objectives:

- To highlight the socio-cultural changing status of Gond, Bhil and Santhal tribal community and their lifestyle.

- To trace out the promotion of tribal and folk art & culture of Gond, Bhil and Santhal.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

To fulfill the research objectives, an exploratory and analytical review strategy was adopted in this study based on the available literature. The primary goals of this study, as the title suggests, was to study and analyze social and cultural life styles of Gond, Bhil and Santhal tribes in India and the way their tribal art culture and heritages have been maintained and represented in their way of life and sustenance. Factual information is collected from the secondary online and offline literary sources.

## **DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS**

Although this research explores the socio-culture life style of Gond, Bhil and Santhals i.e. how they live, their tradition and art forms along with their current life style, cultural changes and religious conversion causing drastic changes in belief system and way of life. The cultural and social lifestyles of Gond, Bhil and Santhal are eminent in itself. Each tribal group has its own ethnicity and culture. These are the biggest tribal groups in South Asia and probably the globe. Gond is the largest, Bhil is the second largest and Santhal is the third largest tribal community in India.

### ***Gond Tribe***

The term Gond refers to the tribal peoples of India's Deccan Peninsula. They are found throughout central India, specifically in the states of Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Telangana and Orissa. They were traditionally identified with hills and uplands throughout the Deccan Peninsula as Koitur, which means "hill people." The Satpura Hills, Maikala Range, Son-Deogarh uplands, and the Bastar plains are home to a large number of Gonds. In addition, many Gond tribes live in the Garhjat Hills in northern Orissa.

Gonds are found in whole Chhattisgarh, especially in the Bastar region with various subgroups namely, Abujmadia, Dandami Madia (Bison Horn Madia), Muria, Dhurwa, Dorla and Koya.<sup>2</sup> In Madhya Pradesh, Gonds inhabited the dense forests of the Vindhyas and Satpura, mountain ranges, centralized in the forested areas of Bastar and Mandla region near the origin of Narmada River at Amarkantak from centuries. They are spread in a very vast area of central India with a number of subgroups and clans

carrying varied cultural attributes. Their cultural and social practice shows an immense amount of ethnicity. Gonds are culturally pronounced in the central part of India as ethnic culture and social lifestyles. The primary province became referred to as Gondwana for the reason that Gonds reigned here. As many as four separate Gond Kingdoms – located within the northern, primary, and southern parts – are stated within the *Ain-I-Akbari*.<sup>3</sup> Gond dynasties ruled four kingdoms in India between the fifteenth and mid-eighteenth century (Garha-Mandla, Deogarh, Chanda, and Kherla). With the 1740s, the Maratha control extended into the Gond territory.

“Gond Art” is a shape of people and tribal

portray carried out via way of the Gonds, one in all the most prominent tribes of India, in the main from Madhya Pradesh and may be discovered with inside the wallet of Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, Chhattisgarh and Odisha. The Gonds have a long history of artistic expression, including pottery, basket weaving, body tattooing, and floor painting. Although, Gond is considered as progressive tribal community and being an agrarian group retains a significant amount of land, but are still classified as scheduled tribe and comparatively backward then caste groups, suggesting that they require special social and financial assistance. Gonds enjoy festive time with music and dance as shown in Figure 1.

Dances retell events from Gond mythology in



**Figure 1:** Gond Women’s Dance (Craft Museum, New Delhi)

some cases, in collaboration with Dandari dancers (Dandami-Madia Gond). Dances are completed in fact for fun at unique periods. The 'Dhulia' subgroup of Gond is a professional musician caste, whereas Pardhan (bards) subgroup of Gond preserves folklore, myths, and history, handing down traditions from generation to generation. Furthermore, people enjoy gathering on full moon nights to sing and dance. Women and men both appreciate wearing hefty silver jewelry. Women should also wear colored glass bangles and marriage necklaces made of little black beads. They frequently tattoo their bodies. Paintings were their principal form of expression in their culture. Figures 2 (a) and (b) indicate that the Gonds have a rich artistic

legacy that includes terracotta figurines, basket making, body tattooing and floor painting. They use purple and black paint to create designs on the walls of their homes. These drawings frequently represent animals, birds, human characters, hunting, dancing and have distinct periods. The Gonds create their own musical instruments with local natural resources. Gond subgroups of Bastar, make creative carved and colored memorial pillars out of wood and stone for their dead ancestors. Carved entrances and doors are frequently used to embellish houses.

From the figure 2, it can be seen that Gond artwork is a unique shape of the Gondian, one in all the most prominent tribes in principal India, particularly

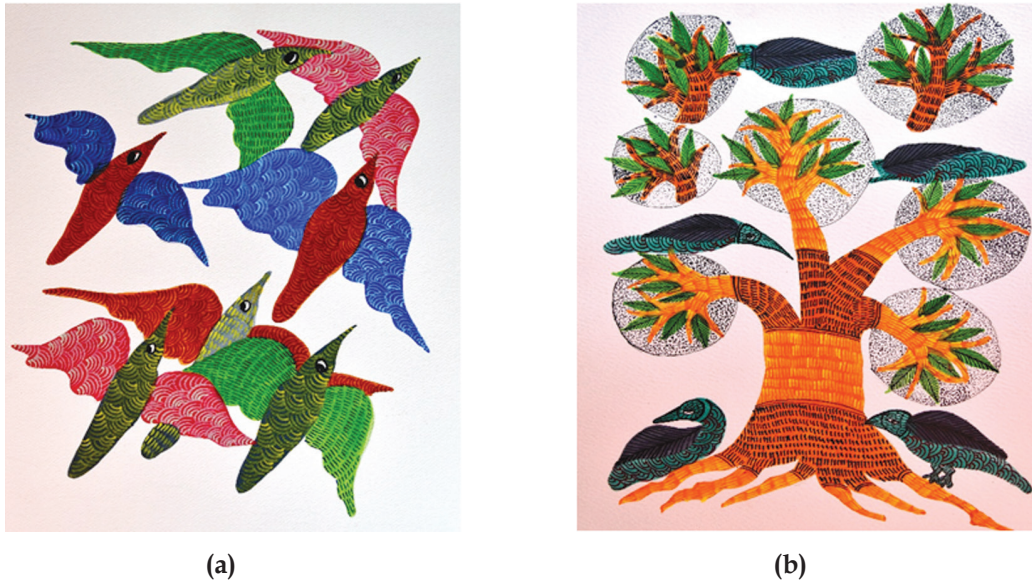


Figure 2: Gond Paintings (Craft Museum, New Delhi)

Madhya Pradesh, and undoubtedly embodies the essence of tribal artwork. Gond's figurative, brilliant and mystical cultures have been initially painted at the partitions of the residence, repeating the customs of Mesolithic ancestors who lived in caves. The Gond artists have developed their own devices to artwork with several modern mediums and substances over the years.

Today, many Gond's figurative art and artists have moved to paper and canvas, bringing one of the maximum particular and uncommon cultural artwork as paperwork into the highlight and our hearts and homes. Lineage mapping is visible in the works of artifacts and cultural arts. Against this background, painting on partitions and flooring changed into a part of Gond's own circle of relatives existence, in particular a few of the Pradhans, as it is miles executed with inside the production and protection of every residence the usage of neighborhood colorations and substances along with the charcoal, colored soil, plant sap, leaves, and cow dung. Images constitute tattoos or a minimum variety of human beings and animals. Over time, the decline of agricultural existence and social safety brought about the reality that Pradhan commenced to indulge in labor work and alternative sources of livelihood including artworks as profession.

The patterns are the sturdiest element that a particular Gond painter uses as her/his seen identity and character expression. For the Gond painter, patterns are their identity on artistic paperwork, now not rhetorical devices as commonly decided through town artwork viewers. Macro and micro picture graph types of leaves, pores and pores and skin and

textures of trees, ears of corn, more young paddy shoots, crescent moon, are some of the hundreds of patterns they appropriate into the pictorial language.

### *Bhil Tribe*

The Bhil, Bhilala, Barela and Patelia form the second largest tribal group in India after the Gonds, which is consisted of 45 sub-groups, according to the 2011 Census (Census of India 2011). The Bhil and the related subgroups have their major concentration in the adjoining states of Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Gujarat and Maharashtra which form the Malwa region. According to Soni and Soni<sup>4</sup>, different tribal groups, which are related to Bhils, have their own individuality, cultural distinctiveness and ethnic solidarity. The members are conscious about their group affiliation, group identity (ethno-centrism) and position ascribed by birth. The Bhils and the Bhilalas have got ubiquitous spread in the whole area. Owing to the incessant cultural contact and interaction with other neighboring groups, they are refining their values, modifying their customs and some of them are claiming to be the Rajputs (Thakurs).<sup>5</sup>

The rich cultural lifestyle of the Bhil of Madhya Pradesh is manifested in their rituals, songs and dances, deities, tattoos, myths, lore and traditions. Their houses are plastered and decorated with clay-work called Mitti-chitra and other works of art. Their houses screen a natural feel of aesthetics. The Bhil also has numerous forms of marriage that allow couples the freedom to choose their lifestyle (Figure 3). According to Renuka Pameché<sup>6</sup> has studied the

social and cultural factors of the Bhil and the method of forming the elite within side the Bhil Tribe.

The socio-cultural enterprises of the Sarnia paharias, Mai paharias, and Knmarbhag have been

noted by Verma.<sup>7</sup> He studied various aspects of tribal life cycle of Bhils, including pregnancy and childbirth, puberty, widow remarriage, the role of women in society, religion, village councils, and



**Figure 3:** Bhil Tribe (BAJSS Museum, New Delhi)

political organizations. The Bhils of Madhya Pradesh have a rich cultural lifestyle that is reflected in their rituals, songs and dances, network deities, tattoos, stories, and traditions. Their homes demonstrate a natural sense of beauty. Every year, the walls are plastered and adorned. Mitti-chitra, clay-craft is their indigenous work of art for decoration and other purposes and its ingredients are basic, homemade pigments applied on Neem twigs with cloth brushes or cotton swabs, taken from the leaves and flora of diverse plants. When a baby is born, he or she is ceremoniously welcomed into Bhil society. The child is placed on a cornstalk heap. The paternal cousin chooses the child and refuses to give it to the mother until presents are presented. The fact that they are touching the grain soon after the start is fortunate, as is the baby's giggle.

The Bhil also provides a variety of marriage arrangements that give couples the flexibility to select their lifestyle. At births and marriages, songs are sung to invoke the virtues of the old, ancestors, and deities. During each festival, the Bhils perform the Garba and invite the goddesses to join them with their singing. When a Devi is asked if she can dance

while her son is sobbing, she often responds that she can't. Bhil's gods and goddesses play an important role in daily life. Among the Bhils of Jhabua, painting a portrait of Pithora is a highly treasured tradition. The Lekhindra, the traditional painter, paints Pithora's horses and presents them to the Devas. According to legend, the residents of Dharmi Raja's country had forgotten how to snort, sing, or dance. Pithora, the prince, then embarks on a horseback expedition to the temple of the goddess 'Himali Harda', to whom he presents his laughter, songs, and dances once more.<sup>8</sup>

The narrative of Bhil's introduction is depicted in the artwork on the Pithora wall. Pradeep Kumar Bose<sup>9</sup> doubts the validity of categorizing Indian tribes' stratification styles only based on caste hierarchy or 'Sacred' hierarchy or department. This is seen within the framework of Gujarati tribes. The tribal populace in the contemporary marketplace and manufacturing structures and their incorporation into current political structures are proven local versions in occupations supported by use of indigenous as well as locally available modern equipments. Some Bhils trace their ancestors to

Eklavya, the archer from the Mahabharata, while others remember that Valmiki, the author of the Ramayana, was a Bhil. Traditionally, the Bhil people's paintings would be used to decorate the clay walls of their village huts. Beautiful images are most likely painted with Neem sticks and unique twigs, using natural dyes. Turmeric, flour, vegetables, leaves, and oil were utilized to generate high-quality colors for interesting paintings on floors and walls, which were painted in a Bhil-created language to convey their experiences. Hence, Bhil's community has various kinds of painters with different styles and

patterns (figure 4).

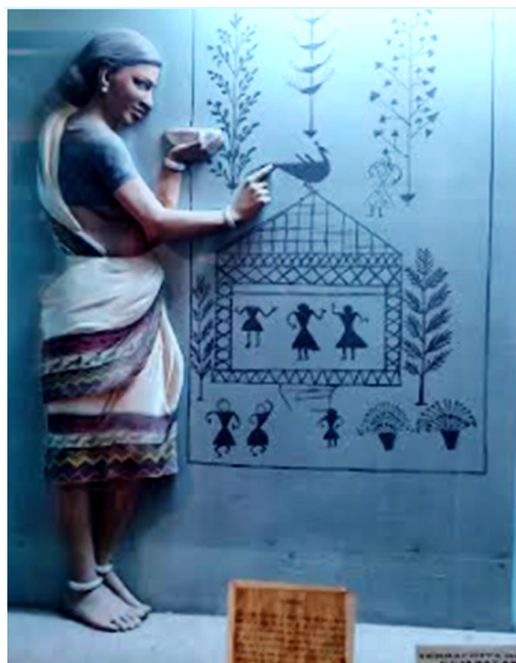
Bhil paintings typically include enormous, unaffordable figures of familiar characters in earthy, but excellent hues, with an overlay of uniform dots in a variety of patterns and colors that show out sharply against the background. A Bhil painting's dots aren't randomly placed. They're patterns that could represent everything from ancestors to deities, depending on what the artists want to convey. Because the patterns are created entirely by the artists' hands, each Bhil artist's artwork is unique,



(a)



(b)



(c)

**Figure 4:** Significance of Dots and Colors in Painting (BAJSS Museum, New Delhi)

and the dot patterns can be counted as an identity of an artist's characteristic style. Bhil paintings are spontaneous and primal, the result of a long relationship with nature. The Bhils are a farming group whose lives revolve around the earth with

which they collaborate. The more great fantastic paintings are unique because they have been passed down over generations; with most painters learn traditional art form from their parents. Bhil art is frequently ritualistic as well.

Every artwork tells a storey about the land through pictures of people, animals, insects, deities, and festivals. Inside the stories, the Sun and Moon are common characters. Bhil art is used to convey legends and tales. During festivals, these pieces of art are even given as gifts to gods and goddesses. The Bhils, like all other adivasis, prefer to live close to nature. Their economy is primarily reliant on agriculture, and if the rains fail, they suffer greatly. The sowing season is always accompanied by apprehension. When the monsoon stops, Bhils and their families relocate to Bhopal, Kota, and Delhi to work as construction laborers. Vyas <sup>10</sup> outlines the tribal progress in Rajasthan in particular. They, like others, want money in cash to support their living. However, given their socio-cultural tradition, it must no longer be on the price. It is relatively difficult to lose traditional beliefs in order to gain financial benefits.

### *Santhal Tribe*

The Santhals account for more than half of West Bengal's total ST population (51.8 percent). Santhal is India's most important Hindu religious belief Adivasi

community, with strongholds in Jharkhand, Bihar, West Bengal, Madhya Pradesh, Assam, Tripura, and Orissa. They communicate amongst themselves of their language referred to as Santhali having now a recognized script 'Ol-Chiki'. Earlier they were using scripts of different regional languages. At an equal time, they were used to talking in Bengali with the outsiders once they visited their village. In general, those human beings are peace-loving & pleasant with the out of doors visitors. Figure 5 shows the Santhali lifestyle, wearing, musical instruments, dance, etc.

The Santhals smoke tobacco and drink mahua and tadi liquor and date palm juice to propitiate their Gods and Goddesses. They also offer the mahua fruit, wildflowers, and give up results to the jaher deities. Festivals of Karma and Makar Sankranti are celebrated with pomp and ceremony for prosperity and happiness. Magh-sim determines that the month of Magha (January February) marks the surrender of the year. Sahara, the cattle festival celebrated in November, is one of the leading essential fairs of the Santhals. Dancing is only one activity in their lifestyle they possess in their blood. Hence, Santhals love dancing and singing to enjoy and they are well



**Figure 5:** Lifestyle of Santhals (BAJSS Museum, New Delhi)

trained in dancing. One of their famous dance form is named as Dasai. The Santhal tribes do this dance during all particular fairs and occasions. This dance is well-known and shows the way of life or traditions of the Santhal people. The primary enchantment of the Dasai dance in Jharkhand is done with the colorful costumes worn by the dancers. Whereas traditionally during other dances and in general daily life the Santhal males wear dhoti with turban and female dancer wear Saree.

Santhal fairs are related to numerous agricultural

sports activities, and a few are associated with the looking for and collecting of forest produce, as they are agriculturists. Eroksim, Harihar-sim, Iri-Guldi-sim, Jantar, Sahara, Magha-sim, and Baha, related with agricultural operations, are their most important fairs. The beginning of spreading the seeds within the fields is marked by Erok-sim. At the moment of seedling budding, Harihar-sim is determined. Iri-Guldi-sim is dedicated to presenting the deities with the best millet crop. Jantar is a festival of the initial first fruit-ingesting of the wintry climate rice plant life to

calm the hill, God, which takes place in September. The cattle festival, Sahara, is held in November and is one of the Santhals' most important fairs. They worship cattle to increase their riches of cattle. Magh-sim concluded that the year's surrender occurs during the month of Magha (January-February). During the Baha festival the Santal dance (figure 6) and sacrifices the most important Mahua fruit, wildflowers, to the Jaher deities. Karma and Makar Sankranti festivals are celebrated with pomp and ceremony in the hopes of bringing prosperity and happiness.

Santhals are not only deeply rooted in their culture but also they are expert and known for their

paintings. They do paintings using primary colors, riddled with leafy patterns in the foreground, background and borders. The Santhal paintings are marked by a directness and innocent simplicity in the depiction of birds, animals and insects. In Birbhum district, Santhals have a unique historical past of artwork and craft. In the village, there are cottage industries, amongst which potteries, wood works and dress material are remarkable. Some in their conventional crafts and paintings have scarcely been changed nowadays under the effect of modernization. It has been explored that most effective 17.5% of the villagers exercise their conventional artwork & craft, and as a whole lot



**Figure 6:** Santhals in Baha Festival (BAJSS Museum, New Delhi)

as 82.5% are not inquisitive about nurturing their talent on this matter.

“Though the different aspects of santal way of life have shown a differential rate of change, yet the interrelationship of various aspects in the dynamics of change has not led to disintegration of santal culture as a whole. In considering the dynamics of santal culture change, however, it is apparent that material and economic factors must be given an equally important place with that of individuals. It is the interaction between the individual and the material and economic situation in which he finds himself and that provides the driving force for cultural change. A number of changes have come only because the material conditions of the santal had been so desperate that they became anxious to try means to improve their economic condition. Only for this reason many a Santhals have migrated

from their original places and have settled down in the places where they could earn more.”<sup>11</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Different conventional artwork & crafts are related to the everyday lifestyles of tribal network and are interim part of tribal life and culture. The villagers produced their craft and paintings, each for adornment functions of their homes and promoting in the market. They rejoice in their fairs and rituals in the course of the year carrying their conventional dresses. These celebrations are made with tribal songs & dances within the village's open courtyard as with beating drums of numerous kinds locally called Madol, Dhol, Mandar, etc. Tribal songs and dances are eternal part of their culture and lifestyle.



Gond, Bhil and Santhal have enormous local forms of songs and dances which preserve their distinct cultural attributes and also dynamically unite them with strong bonding.

With time and changing needs tribal lifestyle and art forms are also changing. Dress pattern, instruments, raw material, themes, patterns and practices are changing with technology and marketization. Mural painting are developing as professional art forms over paper and canvas as per the market demand. As portray of tribal culture paintings are preserving tribal culture in visual forms. As an art it is still providing happiness to artist and viewers and as profession it has become source of livelihood. Same is happening with various craft forms as they are growing as per market needs. In rural areas tribal people of central India are still enjoying and practicing their festivals and fairs with colorful dress, songs and dances. Though, the tribal dance troupes are also professionally doing stage performances. This is preserving tribal performing art with slight changes and working as a means of additional earning. Thus, it is realized that the tribal lifestyle and art forms of Gond, Bhil and Santhal are changing with development, modern technology, communication, exposure, economy and occupation, but still preserving their culture due to strong bond with traditions and belief system. Being three biggest indigenous groups of India and also comparatively developed and exposed to formal education and salaried jobs, Gond, Bhil and Santhal are well aware about preservation of their culture, language, art and craft.

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