

tribal
faces in
india



triboal
faces in
india

bhil



A Bhil clad in his finest for the Toranmal festival. Boys and girls gather in large numbers during such festivals as they provide an opportunity for them to choose their partners.





bhil

The Bhil are one of the largest tribal groups, living in Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh and Rajasthan. The name is derived from the word 'billu', which means bow. The Bhil are known to be excellent archers coupled with deep knowledge about their local geography. Traditionally, experts in guerrilla warfare, most of them today are farmers and agricultural labourers. They are also skilled sculptors. Bhil has traditional medical specialists - Budwa (Shaman) Huvarki (traditional birth attendant) Vaidu (herbalist) and Had Vaidu (Bone setter) with some communities having male midwives. Bhil women wear traditional saris while men are dressed in long frock and pyjama. Women put on heavy ornaments made of silver, brass along with rosaries of beads and silver coins and earring.



munda



A Munda woman from Ranchi in Jharkhand wears a red-and-white gamcha (towel) wrapped around her head. The nose ring is typically worn only by older women.





munda

The Munda are a tribe belonging to the Chotanagpur plateau, spread across, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, Tripura and West Bengal. A Munda is defined by his/her surname, which is based on natural elements such as trees, animals and birds.

Mundas are fond of dance and music; their songs evoke nature in all its glory. Nupur (an anklet), is a special dance form involving wearing Nupur in ankles and dance in chorus. They observe many festivals, the most important being the Magha or Ba, a thanks-giving festival celebrated in spring. Since ancient times, the Munda have been wanderers and hunters; More recently they have become cultivators. Buried ancestors are treated as guardians spirits of the 'khunt' or the genealogical family, symbolized by sasandiri, the burial stone.



baiga



A Baiga woman of Mandla in Madhya Pradesh sports elaborate tattoos all over her body. In Baiga culture, specific body parts are tattooed with specific designs depending on the age.





baiga

The Baiga, meaning sorcerers, are one of the particularly vulnerable tribal groups and are spread across Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Bihar, Odisha, West Bengal, Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh,. Traditionally, the Baiga lived a semi-nomadic life and practiced slash - and - burn cultivation. Now, they are mainly dependent on minor forest produce for their livelihood. Bamboo is the primary resource that they use to build houses as well as household items such as fans and baskets.

Known for collecting honey using traditional techniques, the Baiga also have an in-depth knowledge of folk medicine. They have a rich cultural heritage with unique styles of music, dance and dance dramas. After a death in the family, the Baiga just leave the house and build another. Tattooing is an integral part of Baiga culture—every age and body part has a specific tattoo reserved for the occasion.



Kokna



A Kokna man with a gulel (boomerang) takes aim at an animal in Thane district, Maharashtra.





kokna

The Kokna are a major tribe found in Gujarat, Maharashtra, Karnataka, Rajasthan, Dadra and Nagar Haveli. According to anthropologists, the ancestors of the Kokna tribe were the primary inhabitants of the Konkan region and it is from their ancient dialects, that the present-day Konkani language has evolved. The Kokna are known for making masks, bamboo, wooden craft, brass and copper motifs. Kokna artists can craft ordinary wooden tobacco containers into beautiful works of art.

The tribe celebrate Bohada, the famous festival of masks, which is a combination of dance and drama, celebrated during March and April. Various facial expressions are intricately highlighted in the masks. The Kokna have their own traditional panchayat that solves disputes and conflicts within the community.



madia



An elderly Madia woman in Hemalkasa village in Maharashtra. Madia women wear heavy ornaments; at times, their ears are almost disfigured by the weight of the earrings.





madia

The Madia live in Chhattisgarh, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh and Odisha. There are two major groups: Bada Madia, mostly concentrated in the dense forest around the Laheri hills and the Chota Madia, that lives on plains. They are primarily, a hunting-gathering tribe,

The Madia are skilled in bamboo and takes special care while cutting so as not to damage the roots. Every Madia village has a ghotul (youth dormitory), where young boys and girls learn various life skills and several aspects of their culture, song, dance, and to play musical instruments. When a Madia man is engaged, he must carve a Mundha, a decorative wooden pillar to be kept in front of the ghotul during his marriage ceremony. The Mundha is perhaps the most superior example of skill in wood carving.



Santhol



A Santhal woman in Jharkhand wears a sari in the traditional style. The tribe's culture is depicted in the paintings and artworks on the walls of the typical Santhal house.





santhal

The Santhal are the largest and one of the oldest tribes in India, They are spread across Assam, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Odisha and West Bengal. From time immemorial they have cleared forests, tilled the land and produced food for subsistence. They are also well-versed in the art of hunting and sericulture. The Santhal system of governance, known as Manjhi-Paragana, can be compared to local self-governance. Panchayats are a common feature, with clusters of 50-200 villages forming mega panchayats.

Dancing and singing as a group is an integral part of Santhal culture. One of the most studied tribal religions in the country. Santhals worship Marang Buru or Bonga as supreme deity. The weight of belief, however, falls on a court of spirits (Bonga), who are believed to handle different aspects of the world and who must be placated with prayers and offerings in order to ward off evil. A characteristic feature of the Santhal village is a sacred grove on the edge of the settlement, considered the home of spirits.



Ka Thakar



A Ka Thakar woman in Thane, Maharashtra. Ka Thakar women wear a two-piece sari; one parts forms the skirt and the other is tucked at the waist and draped over the head.



Ka thakar

The Ka Thakar, together with Ma Thakar and Thakar, are primarily found in Thane, Raigad, Pune, Ahmednagar and Nashik districts of Maharashtra. Traditionally, the Thakars lived in the hilly forest areas of the Sahyadri range but are now found all over the state. A Thakar settlement is called a Thakarwadi. The Thakars are small cultivators, gatherers of minor forest produce, occasional fishermen, daily-wage labourers and are also skillful bamboo artisans.

The Thakars have a rich tradition of folk dance and songs. Their celebration of Diwali is rather unique. On this occasion, they light lamps made from a fruit called Chibra, which are placed on a stand made of dung.



worli



“A warli man playing Tarpa (musical instrument) in Thane district. Warli are nature worshipers and have a deep respect for wild life”



warli



The Warli are spread across Thane, Nashik and Dhule districts of Maharashtra, Valsad district of Gujarat, Karnataka Goa and the Union territories of Dadra & Nagar Haveli and Daman & Diu. The Warli are small-scale cultivators and cultivate rice, pulses and vegetables. They also sell toddy, mahua and fuel wood to their tribesmen and neighbouring communities for a living.

Warli are nature worshippers. Warli art stems from their belief system shaped by their centuries-old subsistence on forest land. The Warli did not have a written word until recent times and their art was a way of transmitting their belief systems from one generation to the next. Their drawings revolve around community traditions, the tools they use and their association with nature.



Koli dhor



A Koli Dhor woman in Thane, Maharashtra. Although their traditional vocation was the tanning of cattle hide, many are involved in agricultural pursuits nowadays.





koli dhor

The Koli Dhor live mainly in the Sahyadri range of mountains forming part of the Western Ghats and are principally found in the districts of Thane, Nashik Dadar and Nagar Haveli, Rajasthan, Karnataka, Gujarat and greater Bombay. The Koli Dhor derived their name from the word 'dhor', meaning cattle. Although their traditional vocation has been the tanning of cattle hide, increasingly, today many are involved with agricultural pursuits.

The Koli Dhor settlements are known as wadi. The houses are square or rectangular huts built on a layer of earth with or without plinth. The material used consist of sticks, bamboos, wooden poles, rice hay, mud and cowdung plaster. As a majority of them are poor and landless, they migrate to nearby cities and towns to work as daily labourers and return to their villages only in June, to work as agricultural and daily-wage labourers.



birhor



A Birhor woman with her daughter in Hazaribaug district Jharkhand.



birhor

The Birhor are a nomadic hunting-gathering tribe found in Jharkhand and neighbouring areas of Chhattisgarh, West Bengal, Odisha, Bihar and Madhya Pradesh. They have been classified as a particularly vulnerable tribal group. Tribe members practice shifting cultivation.

Birhor live in small settlements called *tanda* at the edge of the forest. Expert hunters, they use nets and snares for catching small animals and birds. Nets made of strong fibre spread from tree to tree are used to trap monkeys. They also collect honey. The practice of barter still exists. The Birhor religion presents a mixture of animism, animatism, naturalism, worship and belief in spirits.



Korku



A Korku man plays the traditional flute called Bhugadu in Khandwa district in Madhya Pradesh. During Diwali, the men go from door to door, playing the flute.





Korku

The Korku are mostly found in the Khandwa, Burhanpur, Betul and Chhindwara districts of Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, and adjoining Melghat region of Maharashtra. They live in small groups of huts made of grass and wood. Every household has elevated stage in the front of the dwelling, which is used as a storage space of farm produce and cattle feed. The Korku are primarily cultivators. While they share the love of the forests with the Gonds, they are also excellent agriculturists and have pioneered the cultivation of potato and coffee.

A few groups have been more successful in preserving their language, especially the Potharia Korku (from the Vindhya mountains). Korku is one of the 196 languages termed endangered by UNESCO. The community has a distinct cultural heritage. The traditional healing methods are still widely practiced. The Korku regard their dead as Gods. To commemorate the dead, they install a memorial pillar, which is called Munda.



pahari korwo



*A pahari korva woman with
her son in Jashpur district
Chhattisgarh.*





pahari korwa

Pahari Korwa are mainly concentrated in Jashpur, Sarguja and Raigarh districts of Chhattisgarh. They are a branch of Kolarian tribe and speak Mundari language. They live in the deep forest areas and treat all ailments from wild forest products on the basis of knowledge gathered by their ancestors. They have a rich heritage as is evident in their fairs, festivals, music and dance forms. They celebrate different religious and cultural festivals with their music and the usage of musical instruments like *dhank*, *daffi*, *mandar*, mridang, nagada, drum and timki are seen in their tribal songs. The Paharia Korwa typically follow a nuclear family structure.

They collect forest produce such as *sal*, *mahua*, *gum*, tendu leaves, amla, harra, bahera etc. During the monsoons, the Paharia collect forest roots, leaves and vegetables. In recent times, they have been farming but mainly using their traditional techniques. Fishing and hunting are also practiced as occupations.



abhuj maria



*An Abhuj Maria woman
in Bastar, Chhattisgarh.
Members of this unique
tribe live a life of complete
isolation from the outside
world.*





abhuj maria

Abhuj Maria live a life of isolation from the outside world. A sub-tribe of the Gond, they can be found in the secluded enclaves of Narayanpur tehsil in Bastar, Chhattisgarh. They are one of the few tribes that has managed to keep their quintessential culture alive. Members of the tribe love to adorn themselves with multiple iron rings strung around their necks.

The Abhuj Maria are mainly slash - and - burn cultivators, though they also practice some form of settled cultivation. Korsa and kolha (types of millets) and rice are their main output. The tribe's main festival is Kaksar, which is celebrated in June. The other important festival is Kudin, which is marked to honour the clan Gods before the beginning of the harvest season.



bison horn maria



A Bison horn Maria man playing a musical instrument in south Bastar Dantewada district. They have unique custom of wearing a distinctive Headdress during marriage dances or in other ceremonies.





bison horn maria

Bison Horn Maria are located mainly in the Bastar region of Chhattisgarh, Maharashtra, and Madhya Pradesh. The tribe's name is derived from a distinctive head-dress, made from the now-extinct wild bison, worn during wedding ceremonies. Nowadays, the head-dress is made from cattle horns. Their introvert nature makes them live inside dense forests. They practice shifting cultivation method of agriculture and collect forest produce for survival and worship a variety of Gods.

The Bison Horn Maria worship a variety of Gods. On the outskirts of every village is enshrined the God of the clan, which is believed to protect the village.



gond



A Gond woman picking the Mahua flowers in forest in Bastar district. The Gonds are one of the most famous and important tribes in India.





gond

Gonds, one of the largest tribal groups in the world, are mostly found in Chhindwara district of Madhya Pradesh, Bastar district of Chhattisgarh and parts of Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Jharkhand, Karnataka, Telangana, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal and Odisha. Gonds are subdivided into four tribes namely Raj Gonds, Madia Gonds, Dhurve Gonds and Khatulwar Gonds. Their staple food are two kinds of millet: kodo and kutki. Rice is mostly consumed during festival feasts. Gonds believe that earth, water and air are ruled by Gods.



kamar



*A kamar woman carrying
a basket in Griyaband
district Chhattisgarh.*



kamar

The Kamar live in the hills, valleys and forests of central India, primarily in the Raipur and Rewa districts of Chhattisgarh, and Madhya Pradesh. Most of the Kamar earn their living by making bamboo handicrafts, which they sell or trade for rice, tea and liquor at the weekly markets. Farming is the secondary occupation, followed by gathering forest produce, hunting and fishing.

The larger Kamar villages are located near the foothills or deep in the forests, while the smaller settlements are found along roadsides. The typical dwelling is a two-roomed mud hut. Most huts have a shed for socializing and a small garden as well as a cattle shed. Each household has a family god in the form of iron chains decorated with peacock feathers.



Photo credit:

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