

## **INNOVATIVE SCIENCE PROJECTS TO PRESERVE TRIBAL CULTURE**

- Traditional and modern practices are merging, creating a renaissance in tribal communities. This article explores how innovative science projects are empowering and preserving tribal heritage.
- India's unity amid diversity is remarkable. It has the world's second-largest tribal population, with 8.9% of its people classified as tribal (2011 Census). These tribal communities have rich traditions and unique lifestyles. Innovative science projects are helping preserve their heritage, offering hope for the survival and revitalization of ancient customs in an era of globalization and modernization.
- Innovative science projects in tribal villages, from the Northeast to Central India, blend traditional wisdom with research, preserving indigenous knowledge and heritage amid environmental, socio-economic, and cultural challenges.
- India's Department of Science & Technology and Ministry of Environment support science projects to preserve tribal cultural heritage, promoting research, documentation, and conservation through various initiatives that blend scientific and traditional knowledge.

### **Efforts from the Department of Science & Technology**

- The Department of Science and Technology (DST), Govt. of India plays a significant role in preserving tribal culture through various science projects that integrate scientific research with cultural conservation efforts.
- DST supports projects to document and preserve tribal knowledge, involving researchers, anthropologists, and tribal elders. Digitizing and archiving ensure the continuity of tribal culture for future generations. For conserving tribal heritage, DST uses science projects with techniques like remote sensing, GIS, and 3D modelling to monitor, plan interventions, and raise awareness of heritage sites.
- DST integrates traditional ecological knowledge with modern science to protect biodiversity in tribal areas, promoting collaboration among scientists, tribal communities, and policymakers for sustainable resource management and cultural heritage preservation.
- DST's SATHI and SEED programs fund science projects promoting grassroots innovation, entrepreneurship, and social inclusion among tribal populations, empowering communities, and addressing local challenges with scientific knowledge.

### **Efforts by the North East Centre for Technology Application & Reach (NECTAR) under DST**

- NECTAR under DST supports tribal cultural heritage with technology applications. Projects include expanding honey production in Nagaland, eco-friendly yoga mats from water hyacinth, and promoting the bamboo sector through value addition and market linkages.
- In Northeast India, bamboo has medicinal, spiritual, and cultural significance. Used by traditional healers, it symbolizes resilience and growth. It is vital in Assam's Bihu celebrations and Nagaland's morung construction.
- NECTAR has supported the traditional pottery business in Asharikandi, Assam, preserving ancient 'Charei Taba Pottery' in Imphal-East Manipur, promoting sustainable livelihoods, empowering women, and tribal potters, and strengthening cultural trade.
- Technology Demo Centres (TDCs) raise local awareness about technology. A Bamboo-based TDC, in collaboration with BCDI Agartala, promotes the bamboo sector and market linkage. The NECTAR-BCDI Centre at BCDI Agartala offers training and skill development for the NE region and beyond.

### **Flute Technology of Culm Cutting or Stem Setting Technique**

- NECTAR's flute technology uses culm cutting to quickly regenerate bamboo, providing a sustainable source for flute-making. This method ensures a steady supply of bamboo, fostering a deep connection between craftsmen and the land, and sustaining tribal cultural heritage with economic benefits.
- As we know India is the 2nd largest producer of bamboo in the world. It is a natural, eco-friendly, sustainable, and renewable resource. Bamboo is capable of rapid growth and increases vegetation and forest cover. It is naturally strong material, worthy of use for diverse purposes.

## Gasifiers and Other Bamboo Products

- NECTAR developed bamboo processing for high-grade charcoal and activated carbon, useful as deodorants, disinfectants, medicine, and pollution absorbents. They also supported technologies for mechanized bamboo blinds, acrylic products, fibre-based hygiene items, and bamboo furniture.
- Gasifiers based on bamboo, has been developed to produce clean and renewable electricity and a range of valuable by-products such as high-grade charcoal. NECTAR has supported few gasifiers units in few places of NE.

## Bamboo-Based Technologies with a Green Material Approach

- NECTAR promotes bamboo-based construction to preserve tribal culture. A project developed bamboo sanitary and electrical products to replace plastic and metal. Supported by Atal Incubation Centre, they created bamboo taps, showers, and sockets, creating sustainable livelihoods and jobs, especially for disadvantaged groups in the Northeast. Bamboo composite materials are increasingly accepted, with 4.2 million sq. ft. already used in prefabricated structures.

### Bamboo-based S&T Projects

NECTAR has supported the development and commercialisation of bamboo-based S&T projects to preserve the tribal cultural heritage. Few projects are given below:

- Conversion of closed plywood units to bamboo ply;
- Composites of jute and plastics;
- Bamboo-based gasification for power generation & thermal applications;
- Bamboo-based charcoal making to utilise waste and meet rural fuel requirements;
- Edible bamboo shoot processing for low-fat high fibre dietary requirement;
- Bamboo pulp-based hygiene products for rural areas;
- Development/customisation of machinery according to available bamboo species;
- Development of fire retardant;
- Earthquake resistant and easy to install pre- fabricated as well as permanent bamboo-based structures for rural and urban housing, schools, hospitals, disaster mitigation for plain and high- altitude areas.

## Blending Technology with Bamboo Faucets

- Indian tribal societies traditionally use bamboo for handicrafts, house construction, irrigation systems, and faucets. Hilly villages still transport water via bamboo pipes.
- Bamboo faucets can be made in small setups with special machinery and trained artisans. Non-corrosive bamboo lasts longer than metal, replacing plastic and metal. This project engages traditional artisans and creates employment in tribal areas.
- NECTAR has been extensively promoting Bamboo industry to protect tribal culture by supporting entrepreneurs through creation of marketing linkages, organising skill development training, bridging gaps between bamboo growers and industry for quality and sustainable supply of raw material to respective processing units.

## Bamboo Water Tower

- Bamboo Water Towers, traditional in tribal cultures, store rainwater for community use during dry seasons or droughts, utilizing local resources ingeniously.
- Bamboo Water Tower is designed with modern science applications to harvest water from the atmosphere including rain, fog, dew, etc. providing an alternative water source for communities that face challenges in accessing drinkable water.

- Cherrapunjee, famous for high rainfall, faces water scarcity in winter. Mean annual rainfall: 11856 mm, 157 rainy days/year (2011-2020). Bamboo Water Tower project in Ramkrishna Mission School, Cherrapunjee.
- Villagers and local community own and operate Bamboo Water Tower, aiming to empower the local economy through training, construction, water management, and agricultural applications.

### Low-Cost Water Treatment Plant

- Kameng and Maklang, villages under the subdivision of Lamsang, Manipur, experience a severe shortage of potable water. The poor quality of water in these villages is a vital issue that has a major impact on the physical, mental, and economic health of the families, thus affecting the survival and prosperity of the villages that threatens.
- A study looked at how people and water sources are connected in two villages. Water from ponds, often untreated, affects drinking water quality. Testing showed contamination, leading to waterborne diseases in Kameng and Maklang villages. Poor water treatment and old sanitation worsen the situation, resulting in low-quality and quantity of drinking water.
- NECTAR funded a project for low-cost water treatment plants in both villages, using roughing and bio sand filters. The goal is safe water distribution with minimal initial cost and maintenance. The plants treat pond water with indigenous techniques using affordable materials.

### Skill Development & Employment Generation

- NECTAR has also initiated programmes for skill development of rural masses for self-sufficient and sustained livelihood where bamboo is playing major role to enrich the fabric of tribal culture. 30 million man-days per annum had been generated in various activities especially construction and mat making.
- NECTAR supports bamboo-based livelihoods in bamboo-growing regions by providing skill development training, machinery for bamboo stick production, and upgradation training in various bamboo-related skills.
- Government's efforts in preserving tribal culture through science projects are commendable, but more inclusive, community-driven approaches are needed, respecting tribal rights and autonomy. Collaboration among stakeholders is crucial for sustainable cultural conservation.

### Efforts from the Ministry of Environment, Forest, and Climate Change

- Government-led projects empower tribal communities, blend traditional knowledge with modern practices, and support afforestation, biodiversity conservation, and sustainable resource management through initiatives like GIM.
- Traditional Ecological Knowledge Documentation scheme preserves tribal culture with scientific input. Projects document, preserve, and use indigenous knowledge, collaborating with tribal elders, researchers, and local institutions.
- Biodiversity Conservation and Sustainable Livelihoods program integrates conservation with tribal livelihoods through forest ecosystem restoration, NTFP-based enterprises, and eco-tourism, reducing dependency on forest resources.
- Community-Based Forest Management, like Joint Forest Management (JFM), involves local tribal communities in forest protection, afforestation, and regeneration, fostering ownership, stewardship, ecological restoration, and community development.
- Climate Change Adaptation and Mitigation projects tailor strategies for tribal communities, promoting climate-resilient agriculture, renewable energy, and community-based disaster risk reduction, enhancing adaptive capacity, and minimizing adverse impacts.
- Capacity-building and awareness campaigns for tribal communities focus on environmental science and conservation practices, offering training on sustainable land use, waste management, and biodiversity conservation.

- Preserving tribal culture in India mixes traditional and modern methods like digital documentation, language apps, cultural mapping, VR/AR, and community media, respecting autonomy, and heritage.
- Science projects in India preserve tribal culture by combining traditional knowledge with research and capacity building, contributing to socio-economic development and environmental conservation in Northeast India.

### THEYYAM: THE TRIBAL CULTURE DANCE

- Theyyam is North Kerala's extraordinary worship of God, derived from "Daivam" meaning God. Practiced for centuries, it embodies people's faith through art, combining face painting, dance, and music. Known as Kaliyattam or Theyyamkettu, it is native to the Kolathunadu area, now Kasaragod, Kannur, Wayanad, and Kozhikode districts.
- Theyyam is also known as 'Bhuta Kola' in Karnataka's Tulunadu region. With ancient roots over a millennium old, Theyyam is integral to the cultural, socio-economic, and religious life of rural communities. In 2018-19, Kerala's government established the Theyyam-Kala Academy in Thalassery to preserve cultural heritage and renovate historic sites.
- Predominantly practiced by tribal communities, Theyyam is more than entertainment; it is a spiritual and communal expression. Key communities include: Malayar: Named after 'mala' (mountain), from Kasaragod to Vadamakara. Mavilanmar: From Kannur and Kasaragod hills, also known for basket weaving. Koppalar: In Kasaragod, known as 'Nalkedayar' (dancers) in Thulu, produce costumes from arecanut palm. Kalanadikal: A matrilineal society in Wayanad, preserving their tribal heritage.
- Theyyam artists undergo elaborate rituals, transforming into deities, spirits, or ancestral heroes. With intricate costumes, vivid makeup, and frenzied dances, they embody the divine, bridging earthly and celestial realms. It reflects rural society's beliefs, customs, and communal solidarity, offering insights into caste dynamics, gender roles, and human-nature relationships in Kerala.

The structural components of Theyyam performance encompass various elements integral to its rich cultural expression which collectively contribute to the immersive and enchanting experience of the ritual dance, showcasing the cultural richness and spiritual significance.

- **Thottam Paatu:** In the initial Vellattam or Thottam phase, the artist, in a simple red headdress with drummers, narrates the deity's myth, setting the stage for the elaborate performance.
- **Kaavu:** Sacred groves for Theyyam performances, preserving biodiversity and fostering communal and spiritual connections. These natural sanctuaries protect cultural heritage and sustain ecological balance, embodying harmony between rural communities and nature.
- **Symbolizing Harvest:** Theyyam performances align with festivals, agricultural milestones, and celestial events, typically during winter when farming is minimal. Rice grains are offered as blessings, symbolizing the Mother Goddess. Historically, animal sacrifice was practiced but is now rare.
- **Caste-based nature of Theyyam:** Specific castes, often from the lower strata, perform Theyyam. Each caste performs only their deity's Theyyam, preserving and passing down the tradition.
- **Natural Makeup, Attire, and Traditional Instruments:** Theyyam's striking makeup, made from natural materials like rice powder and turmeric, transforms performers into divine beings. Colourful costumes use coconut leaves and natural ingredients. Traditional instruments like chenda (drum) and elathalam (cymbals) enhance the performance.
- **Various Kinds of Theyyam:** There are around 400 forms of Theyyam, each depicting unique cultural, historical, and mythological narratives. Categories include:
  - Female deities like Bhagawati and Kali
  - Human figures and historical heroes
  - Indigenous and tribal gods, like snake deities
  - Animalistic forms, like tiger and monkey gods
  - Mappilla Theyyam, representing the Muslim community

These forms reflect Kerala's rich rural cultural landscape.

- Theyyam provides a window into the historical, political, and social aspects of rural life. Originating over a millennium ago, it captures the community's history through oral traditions, myths, and legends. Through rituals and performances, Theyyam preserves stories of migrations, conflicts, and societal changes, documenting the shift from nomadic to settled agricultural societies and the development of state systems. These narratives go beyond spirituality, offering insights into the region's history and culture.
- Theyyam critiques society by highlighting issues like caste discrimination and gender inequality through its performances, prompting reflection and dialogue. It transforms public participation into a communal experience, fostering social cohesion and solidarity in sacred groves and village courtyards.
- Theyyam serves as a form of resistance and assertion of cultural identity, challenging caste and patriarchy through performances that reclaim agency for marginalized communities. It acts as a site for political mobilization, allowing communities to express grievances and advocate for their rights. Through Theyyam, rural communities assert their self-determination and recognition, blending local traditions with broader cultural narratives.
- Theyyam provides insights into tribal wisdom, lifestyle, and ecology, illustrating the strong bond between indigenous communities and their environment through ritual performances.
- **Ecological Symbolism:** Many Theyyam performances depict nature-related deities and spirits, offering insights into sustainable land management, seasonal calendars, and ecological practices, promoting harmony with nature.
- **Sacred Groves and Biodiversity Conservation:** Theyyam rituals occur in sacred groves or kaavus, which are rich in biodiversity. Performing Theyyam in these areas helps reinforce spiritual ties to the land and supports local ecosystem conservation.
- **Harvest Festivities and Agrarian Wisdom:** Some Theyyam rituals are linked to harvest festivals, celebrating agriculture in tribal societies. Through songs and dances, performers honor the land and gods, seeking blessings for a good harvest. These rituals preserve agrarian wisdom and practices.
- **Environmental Conservation and Advocacy:** Recently, Theyyam has become a platform for environmental conservation, with themes on ecological preservation, wildlife protection, and climate change. Tribal communities use it to promote sustainable resource management.

Today, Theyyam is important beyond tradition, influencing culture, economy, and society locally, regionally, and internationally as a dynamic cultural phenomenon. Theyyam's lasting cultural significance showcases unique artistic traditions and folk practices to a broader audience. Originating in sacred groves, modern Theyyam is now performed in theaters and festivals, and featured in films. It has become a symbol of Kerala's cultural heritage, celebrated nationally in events like the Republic Day in 1960 and the Asian Games in 1982. Internationally, during the 1985 Year of India in Paris, Theyyam represented India's rich folk culture, promoting cultural diversity, and understanding worldwide. Theyyam boosts the local economy through tourism, supporting industries like hospitality and crafts. It also provides jobs for performers and artisans, preserving traditional skills. Scholars worldwide study Theyyam for its cultural and ecological insights, underscoring its importance in global heritage.

### **VITAL ROLE OF TRIBAL ART IN SAFEGUARDING CULTURE IDENTITY**

Tribal artwork is a testament to India's diverse culture, evolving alongside classical forms. Rooted in distinct communities, it reflects unique cultural essences. Tribal art, mainly visual, depicts daily life, traditions, festivals, and divine beings, showcasing each community's heritage.

This regional charm and mysticism are vital to Indian art. Culture includes beliefs, customs, traditions, nature sounds, arts, and religious behaviors of a community. It encompasses ways of life, integrity, traditions, and shared experiences, passing through generations via socialization. Culture shapes identities, influencing

perspectives and behaviors. Indigenous culture evolves with internal and external influences like migration and globalization. Thus, it is crucial to evaluate if indigenous folk art enriches national values and culture to determine preservation strategies.

- Tribal creation is a vibrant repository of modern cultural heritage, embodying the beliefs, customs, and traditions of indigenous communities. It reflects their bond with nature and the mystical. In India, Gond and Santal paintings capture local sentiments, Muria dance in Bastar expresses spiritual life, and Pithora paintings by Rathwa, Bhilals, and Nayka tribes showcase rich tribal art.
- The Dhokra brass sculptures of Odisha tell ancient tales, while West Bengal's terracotta Bankura pottery expresses emotions simply. Bhimbetka cave paintings capture primitive human connections to nature, showing deep reverence. The landscape reflects how rivers, sea waves, and winds shaped it, forming caves where early humans painted. This art poignantly testifies to the ancestors' exquisite emotions.
- Tribal paintings from Odisha evolved from household decor to commercial art on silk, depicting daily life. Rajasthan's Indigo Dabu prints and Odisha's Bonda jewelry express ancestral legacies. Each creation, from the northeastern states to Gujarat's Kathiawar, reflects the diverse heritage of India's tribal communities.
- Indian tribal art, inspired by nature and folklore, depicts customs, religious symbols, daily life, and social issues. Passed-down values and rituals strengthen communities. Their nomadic lifestyle enriches their art, showcasing cultural identity, history, and beliefs. Each tribe has unique styles, from beadwork to colorful paintings and sculptures.
- Tribal folk art is diverse, with painting being the oldest form, its origins unknown. Wooden toys, furniture, metalwork, and colorful fabrics trace back to ancient times, when agriculture began and clothing emerged. While many art forms evolved later, painting remains a timeless relic. Its genesis is a mystery.
- Despite tireless efforts, it is only guessed that sketching began in humanity's dawn. Cave paintings are the purest form of tribal art, found where tribal communities still live, reflecting a timeless connection to their ancestral lands.
- India's tribal regions captivate with their cultural diversity, customs, and traditions. These communities embody solidarity and harmony, deeply connected to nature's resources—water, land, and forest. This bond shows their harmony with nature. Sadly, efforts to introduce "democratic modernity" in remote areas disrupt this balance, despite their struggles. Tribal folk art endures, but modernity threatens local traditions and mindsets.
- The tradition and cultural diversity of India's tribes are ancient and unparalleled, reflecting their unique artistry shaped by geography, history, and transformation. This precious art, vibrant and colorful, is created by talented indigenous artisans. Close to nature, their art has a regional touch, inspired by their beliefs. They often reinterpret ancient myths and spirituality in modern contexts.
- Nature is central to indigenous culture, influencing communities through rivers, forests, mountains, and landscapes. Ancient rock paintings, like those in Rajrappa cave and Kaimur hills, reflect the connection between people and their environment, showcasing emotions toward nature and wildlife. Nature has turned nomads and hunters into art lovers, uniting people socially.
- Tribal life and tradition or environment are two crucial prerequisites for the evolution and ecological development of art. The indigenous communities have been incredibly fortunate in both these aspects. The adherence to tradition is a cultural trait of tribal communities.
- Cultural identity in folk art is vital globally and debated in India. It's important to consider whether folk art values the individual or the community. Emphasizing society shows harmony and solidarity, whereas focusing on the individual reflects selfishness. This question highlights what culture means: are they culturally enriched or disconnected from tribal values? Ignorance here indicates cultural decline.
- Cultural values raise the question: are they connected to the common people or the elite? Without understanding this, we cannot preserve culture. Tribal communities do not debate this; each member integrates cultural norms into their daily life.

- Tribal artwork is deeply rooted in tradition and gaining popularity. Discussions, exhibitions, and critiques are exploring its unique features across cultural groups. Despite potential intellectual conflicts, indigenous cultural expressions are successfully establishing their identity and uniqueness.
- For example, Gond artwork from Maikal Hills and Warli paintings from Maharashtra are valued folk arts, widely embraced by the government and society. These arts receive recognition like Madhubani folk art, gaining international acclaim like Santal artwork.
- Indigenous folk art in India has deepened our understanding of cultural creations and values. The nation's acceptance of tribal communities' engagements has fostered a positive environment for tribal art. Global recognition of folk arts has increased curiosity about indigenous customs, traditions, and values. Cultural identity influences how people see themselves, and embracing positivity enhances national unity.
- Folk art among India's indigenous populations thrives, showcasing a deep-rooted charm and authenticity. It forms a unique part of India's identity, captivating people globally with its cultural vibrancy. This art, created by over 500 tribal communities, is deeply intertwined with their folklore and traditions, bringing joy to those in remote areas.
- Each artwork tells its own story, rooted in history and culture. Before market influence, handicrafts were unique, soul-driven creations, unaffected by commercial interests. In many Indian tribal communities, close living fosters the thriving of artwork and culture.
- In indigenous communities, skills are developed collectively, with members supporting each other in learning and preserving arts and crafts. This approach enhances individual abilities, preserves cultural heritage, and strengthens community bonds, fostering pride and identity.
- In artistic evolution, communal unity fosters cultural resilience, reflecting collective vision and shared understanding. In tribal India, art unites, not discriminates.
- Tribal art is for everyone, reflecting inclusivity and kinship. It serves as a non-verbal storytelling medium, depicting significant moments and cultural beliefs. Pattachitra art from Odisha, created by the Chitrakar tribe, uses detailed designs and bright colors to tell Hindu myths and aid in rituals.
- The increasing demand for indigenous art in a modern world raises questions about its interpretation, use of colors, relevance to current events, and ability to promote social harmony. Analyzing these aspects helps understand its cultural significance and the intentions behind its creation.
- Tribal art reflects community solidarity and commitment to harmony, developed collectively with shared understanding. It focuses on the community and respects its environment, rather than the individual.
- Excluding Jadopatia painting from Jharkhand and West Bengal, other tribal art forms prominently feature humans with nature and wildlife. Jadopatia uniquely expresses the Santal and Bhumij tribes' philosophy, narrating stories of tribal life, customs, festivals, and myths.
- In Gond art, forests and wildlife are central, depicting groups and natural elements rather than individuals. Warli painting focuses on rural life and maternal nature, using mud huts as canvases, reflecting the society's respect for nature and wildlife.
- In Jadopatia painting, the deceased in heaven reflects their past deeds, comforting the bereaved. Its limited spread is due to the unique tribal belief in the invisible presence of companions in nature. Interactions with non-tribals have influenced this art's content.
- Saura painting, from Odisha, mirrors Warli traditions, honoring nature. It depicts trees, animals, and tribal life, showcasing respect for the environment. This art also nurtures the craft and develops the artist's skills.
- Saura art decorates rocks, honoring spirits and protecting against ailments. It blends symbolic worship, rituals, and festivals, preserving cultural heritage across generations. Renowned for beauty and symbolism, these artworks store traditional wisdom and folk tales.
- Indigenous art, deeply natural and pure, uses tribal colors and natural produce, avoiding chemicals. It views art as a gift from nature, using plants to express emotions.

- Tribal creators honor Earth, using art to preserve traditions and beliefs, guiding through life with wisdom. Indian tribal art captures the essence of tribal life, blending past and present, and is integral to India's identity.
- Indigenous folk art is deeply connected to nature. The natural pigments used in their vibrant paintings come from local mountains, soil, and crops. This art shows their respect for the environment and culture. For example, they use hematite to create red colors.
- Indigenous art uses natural materials: turmeric for yellow, lamp soot for black, Palash flowers for orange, brown stones for brown, bean leaves for green, and indigo for blue. This reflects their deep connection to nature, traditions, and beliefs, often depicting wildlife and people in their art.
- Tribes are self-reliant, often isolated, as shown in their art. Ancient and modern tribal works depict nature, animals, and humans, highlighting community and self-sufficiency rather than conflicts or interactions with other tribes.
- Tribes' self-sufficiency often leads to greater independence, relying less on external resources. This self-reliance is evident in food production, shelter building, social structure, and cultural practices, as shown in their art.
- Indigenous art expresses spiritual beliefs and cultural practices, showing scenes from mythology, rituals, and daily life. Found from central India to the western coast, this art uses symbols like animals and plants to connect with the natural and spiritual worlds.
- Animals in tribal art symbolize traits, while plants often represent growth or fertility. These paintings also focus on ancestor worship and nature spirits, reflecting the tribe's spiritual beliefs where ancestors guide and protect.
- Tribal art honor nature spirits like those of forests, rivers, and mountains, viewing them as sources of power and wisdom. It often depicts rituals to honor these spirits, involving music, dance, and costumes. These paintings reveal the deep spiritual and cultural traditions of indigenous communities, showing their respect for nature, ancestors, and the divine.
- These artworks reveal the deep spirituality and cultural traditions of indigenous communities, highlighting their bond with nature, ancestors, and the divine. Art is a vital way for tribes to preserve their traditions. The younger generation understands the market but chooses to create art that stays true to their traditions, ensuring its authenticity and appeal.
- Many tribes are losing their traditional ways as younger members move away from their roots. However, art helps preserve their knowledge and skills. For example, Gond Art from Madhya Pradesh features detailed patterns and bright colors, using natural materials like charcoal and plant sap. The Gond tribe has long used this art to express their beliefs and way of life, and they now face the challenge of passing these traditions to the next generation.
- Tribal art, especially paintings, protects the unique heritage of indigenous communities, showing their lifestyle and beliefs. Despite societal changes, tribal art reflects the captivating essence of India. Preserving tribal art is crucial for protecting our nation's cultural legacy.

### **TRIBAL CULTURE: THE POTENTIAL FOR GLOBAL REPRESENTATION**

- India's tribal art showcases diverse cultural expressions through painting, weaving, pottery, metalwork, woodwork, music, and dance. It reflects India's ancient cultural heritage and fosters global cultural dialogue.
- Tribal art in India connects ancestral legacies with nature, spirituality, and community. Preserved through isolation from urban influences, it remains authentic but less exposed. Notable examples include Warli paintings from Maharashtra and Tripura's intricate bamboo work, reflecting the tribes' deep bond with nature and the cosmos.

- Warli art features monochromatic motifs and geometric patterns depicting social gatherings, harvests, and tribal cosmology, using circles, triangles, and squares to symbolize nature. Tripura's bamboo craft highlights sustainable resource use, creating baskets, furniture, and decorative items, reflecting the tribe's ecological values.
- These artistic traditions are passed down through generations, taught by elders, and celebrated in community festivals and rituals, preserving tribal identity, and offering insight into India's indigenous cultures.

### Symbolism and Connection to Nature and Life

- Tribal art in India, rooted in ancient folklore and myths, depicts creation, existence, and harmony with nature. Bhil tribe art uses dots and dashes, symbolizing prosperity, and agrarian life.
- Gond paintings from Madhya Pradesh use vibrant colors and intricate patterns to depict tales of gods, humans, and animals. Natural pigments reflect their sustainable practices and harmony with nature. Tribal art symbols educate and preserve culture, fostering identity and continuity. Each artwork holds community knowledge and traditions, passing values and teachings to younger generations, ensuring ancestral wisdom thrives in the modern era.
- Music and dance are central to tribal celebrations and rituals, essential for cultural expression. The Santhal tribe's rhythmic drumming and folk dances narrate stories of harvest, hunting, and festivals, uniting the community and preserving cultural bonds.
- The Bhil tribe's dynamic dances with elaborate costumes and vigorous movements symbolize historical and mythological events. These dances, performed at specific times, entertain, and reinforce tribal lore.
- The Naga tribes' folk songs and dances, vital to festivals like the Hornbill Festival, pass down stories and traditions. Their music, using locally made instruments, reflects their resourcefulness and land connection.
- Preserving these musical traditions is important for the tribes' cultural identity. They resist modern influences and strengthen community pride and unity. These traditions help younger members connect with their heritage, ensuring they remain relevant over time.

### Philosophical Underpinnings and Global Relevance

- The philosophical roots of tribal art in India are eco-friendly, focusing on sustainability and minimal environmental impact. These practices show respect for nature, using local materials and natural pigments, reflecting the close connection between tribal communities and their environment.
- These practices are highly relevant globally, especially as the world faces environmental challenges and seeks sustainable living. India's tribal art and daily routines provide valuable lessons in eco-friendly living, using organic materials, conserving local wildlife in sacred groves, and sustainable harvesting, offering a model for global environmental strategies.
- The tribal philosophies of coexistence and respect for all life are crucial today amid ecological imbalance and resource depletion. Indian tribal communities offer a sustainable living model that the world can adopt.
- These philosophies are practical in daily life, offering a model for global ecological balance and cultural richness. Integrating these principles can promote sustainable practices worldwide, making tribal art essential in the sustainability conversation.

### Intellectual Property: Safeguarding Tribal Art

- Protecting IP rights of tribal art is essential to recognize and reward tribal communities for their cultural contributions, preventing exploitation of their art when exposed to larger markets.
- Using geographical indication (GI) tags for tribal arts like Warli paintings helps protect these cultural expressions. GI tags confirm the origin, prevent misuse, and support the economic welfare of the original creators.
- Enforcing IP rights is vital for preserving the authenticity of tribal art. It prevents cultural dilution or misrepresentation in national and global markets, protecting the diversity of indigenous cultures. Efforts to enhance IP protections for tribal art must include educating tribal artists about their rights and the

importance of protecting their cultural heritage. This empowers them to manage their cultural assets effectively.

- Protecting the intellectual property of tribal art acknowledges these unique cultural expressions and ensures fair compensation for the communities, supporting both their economic stability and cultural traditions.

### **Ethical Tourism: A Path to Cultural Sustainability**

- Ethical tourism respects and sustainably engages with the cultural and natural environments of tribal communities, promoting sensitive interactions that honour their traditions and ecology.
- Ethical tourism includes cultural immersion activities like workshops and village tours, respecting the tribe's customs. This educates tourists and provides direct economic benefits to the tribal communities, promoting sustainable cultural exchange.
- For ethical tourism to succeed, tribal communities must fully participate and consent. They should control how their culture is shared and get a fair share of tourism profits. This supports their cultural and economic sustainability.
- Preserving tribal art shows sustainable living, but faces challenges. Romanticizing tribal lifestyles can ignore the complexities they face from modern influences and globalisation. Commercialisation risks cultural dilution, potentially diminishing its authenticity and meaning. Tribal artists' economic stability can be uncertain. Lack of steady demand or support makes it hard for many to sustain their traditional crafts, especially in areas with little tourism.
- Living museums actively preserve and showcase tribal culture, art, and traditions through interactive experiences. Unlike traditional museums, they allow visitors to directly engage with the daily life and cultural practices of tribal communities, providing a unique educational opportunity.
- In India, Dakshinachitra in Tamil Nadu and the Tribal Museum in Madhya Pradesh are examples of living museums. Dakshinachitra displays South Indian tribal culture with traditional homes, artifacts, and crafts, helping preserve these elements and educate visitors.
- Similarly, the Tribal Museum in Madhya Pradesh showcases the lives of the Gond and Bhil tribes through artifacts and interactive sessions with tribal artisans. The museum educates the public about central India's tribal culture, preserves traditions, provides jobs, and ensures that knowledge is passed down to future generations.

### **Way Forward**

- Tribal art in India shows the country's cultural diversity and historical legacy. It reflects the deep connections between India's tribal communities and their environment, beliefs, and social structures. Preserving these art forms is important for maintaining cultural diversity and teaching sustainable and ethical living practices to the global community.
- As global culture becomes more alike, tribal art shows us the value of preserving unique traditions. Governments, cultural groups, and communities need to work together to protect these art forms. This involves improving laws on intellectual property, providing support to local artisans, and increasing awareness through education and media.
- Global partnerships can help preserve tribal cultures. International programs, exhibitions, and collaborations can introduce tribal art to a wider audience, ensuring financial sustainability and global appreciation.
- Let us commit to preserving tribal art by promoting ethical tourism, supporting living museums, and respecting intellectual property rights. By working together, we can ensure this cultural heritage continues to inspire and sustain future generations.
- By integrating these strategies, we not only celebrate but actively participate in the preservation and enrichment of India's tribal art, ensuring it remains a lively and cherished part of our collective global heritage.

## **AGRICULTURE FESTIVALS: INTEGRAL PART OF TRIBAL CULTURE**

- India has over 730 scheduled tribes, each with unique cultures, languages, and lifestyles. Living mainly in forests and hills, these "Adivasis" sustain themselves through hunting, farming, fishing, or gathering. They practice sustainable farming and hold natural elements in high esteem.
- Festivals to appease deities and revere nature are integral, and agricultural activities depend on nature and weather for best results. Adverse weather was a major challenge for ancient agrarian societies. To protect their crops, they began worshipping fields and deities with songs, dances, and offerings. This led to diverse rituals and traditions to honor nature. Agricultural festivals in various tribal regions stem from these beliefs and practices.
- Agricultural festivals are celebrated twice a year: at the start of cultivation and during the harvest. These community events include deity worship, traditional food, music, and dances. Tourists are welcomed to experience India's diverse tribal culture during these festivals. From Jammu and Kashmir to Kerala, Gujarat to Manipur, and in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Daman and Diu, and Lakshadweep, these festivals are celebrated across the country.

### **Tribes, Traditions and Trends**

- Madhya Pradesh, home to over 45 tribes, showcases rich cultural diversity. The Bhil tribe is the largest, followed by Gond, Kol, Korcu, Sahariya, and Baiga.
- Some festivals are celebrated collectively, while others are unique to specific tribes. Bhagoria Haat, celebrated by the Bhils and Bhilalas in March, marks the end of harvest. Held in Jhabua, Dhar, Alirajpur, and Khargone, it features dance, music, colorful attire, and a bazaar for tribal silver jewelry.
- The festival is known for the unique 'Swayamvar' custom, where young couples choose life partners, elope, and are later acknowledged as married after tribal rituals.
- Karma or Karam is a festival celebrated by tribes in Madhya Pradesh, Jharkhand, Odisha, Chhattisgarh, West Bengal, Bihar, and Assam. It honors Karam God for good harvest and health.
- Major tribes like Munda, Ho, Oraon, and Baiga celebrate it on the 11th day of the full moon in the Hindu month of Bhadon (August-September). The festival has deep farming roots. Young girls plant nine types of seeds and care for them for 7-9 days, then offer seedlings to the deity.
- Villagers collect Karam tree branches from forests for worship, carried by singing and dancing girls. Unmarried girls fast for good harvests and husbands. The festival emphasizes worshipping, saving, and planting trees.
- Hareli is a popular tribal festival in Chhattisgarh, celebrated mainly by the Gond tribe in July-August (Shravan). Dedicated to harvests, trees, and greenery, it honors the Goddess Kutki Dai for a good monsoon and crops.
- Farmers place Bhelwa tree branches in fields and Neem branches at home entrances for protection and health. The festival includes the ritual 'Pat Jatra,' worshipping Sal tree wood collected from the forest through traditional rituals.
- The wood is collected from Machkot or Bilori Forest in Bastar and rituals are held at Danteswari temple in Jagdalpur. After the puja, the wood is used to make tools for constructing a chariot pulled during Navratri. Pat Jatra honors the importance of wood and forests for tribals.
- In Uttarakhand, the Harela festival, like Hareli, marks the start of the sowing season in July. 'Harela' means 'day of green,' symbolizing its agricultural significance. Farmers sow seeds in leaf or bamboo bowls 10 days before the festival.
- On Harela, seedlings are offered to Lord Shiva and Goddess Parvati for blessings. After worship, farmers sow seeds. Recently, people also plant saplings to increase regional greenery.
- Harela is a festival for environmental conservation and human-nature bonding. In Kumaon, it is very popular. In Garhwal, it is called Mol-Sankranti or Rai-Sagan. In Himachal Pradesh's Kangra, Shimla, and Sirmour, it is known as Hariyali or Rhiyali, and as Dakhrail in Jubbal and Kinnaur.

## Farming, Festivities and Fanfare

- In Seethampapeta Mandal (Srikakulam, Andhra Pradesh), tribes celebrate festivals tied to the seasons and crops. The major tribes, Savara and Jatapu, mainly farm and gather forest produce. During festivals, they worship traditional deities with agricultural and forest products.
- In January, they observe Makar Sankranti as 'Redgram Week Festival' with their own rituals. Redgram from the new harvest is offered to God and then cooked. In February, they celebrate Shiva Ratri, known locally as Poola Pandaga, collecting flowers from the forest to worship the Goddess.
- Flowers are used both personally and commercially. In March, they celebrate crop seeds and tamarind festivals.
- In April, they honor Mother Earth, forests, and water during Perantal celebrations, praying for their welfare.
- In May, they hold a Seeds Festival before sowing, worshipping agricultural tools and collecting seeds for offering. Seeds are later distributed to farmers as divine permission to start planting. In June, two festivals celebrate the new mango crop.
- In July's Mokkalu festival, tribals remove weeds to prevent crop diseases and boost productivity. During August, they celebrate Plough Week by cleaning and decorating the plough with turmeric and bangles, then worship it before use.
- September's festival focuses on using forest flowers to control mosquitoes. For Durga Puja, they decorate tools, weapons, utensils, and furniture with turmeric.
- October features the Nandamma Goddess festival celebrating the harvest. In November, tribals display their physical skills through games. The Kanda festival starts in December and ends with January's Redgram Week. Tribals celebrate festivals centered on essential crops that support their livelihoods.
- North-East India, rich in culture with many tribes, centers its festivals around agriculture. In Assam, the Mising tribe celebrates two main agricultural festivals: Ali-Aye-Ligang, marking the start of cultivation, and Porag, a post-harvest festival. Ali-Aye-Ligang occurs on the first Wednesday of Phalgun, where rice and curries are prepared without oil.
- It is believed that using oil before harvest can harm crops. Sowing in fields is accompanied by tribal songs and dances depicting farming and hunting. A special drum is played before sowing to ensure seeds grow well; skipping this ritual is thought to hinder germination.
- Porag, also known as Nora Siga Bihu, is a joyful post-harvest festival celebrated over 5 days in Aghan and Phalgun. Villagers, especially young people, participate in music, dance, and food. Married women from other villages are also invited, promoting unity and cultural exchange.
- Agriculture is the main livelihood for the Naga community, which includes 17 tribes in Nagaland. They celebrate festivals for activities like sowing seeds, cleaning fields, and harvesting. The Aelong festival, held from April 1-6, follows the sowing of new seeds, seeking divine blessings for a good harvest. Celebrated mainly by the Konyak tribe, the festival features tribal dance, music, and fertility rituals.
- In the Ao tribe, after sowing seeds and cleaning fields, they celebrate the Moatsii Mong, or Moatsu, festival with great enthusiasm for three days in early May. The village priest conducts a traditional puja, and a bamboo pole is decorated in front of the village. People light a fire, called Sangpangtu, and gather around it in their finest traditional clothes, seeing it as the happiest time of the year.
- Women serve traditional food and drinks, followed by songs, dances, and storytelling. The celebrations end with a tug of war. During the festival, tribals thank the forests and ancestors. The Dimasa tribe celebrates the Bushu Dima festival after the January harvest, offering their paddy to their god, Brai Sibrai Madai. This 3-day festival includes drumming, dancing, feasting, and sports. Now, guests and tourists join on the final day.
- In Arunachal Pradesh, the Apatani tribe celebrates the Myoko festival from March 20 to April 19, starting preparations in October. It reinforces their belief in ensuring fertility through rituals. The Idu Mishmi tribe holds the Reh festival from February 1 to 3, invoking deities to bless their family and crops.

- Mopin, an agricultural festival of the Galo tribe in Central Arunachal Pradesh, is celebrated on April 5, with rice flour applied to faces, symbolizing rice as a staple. The Nyish tribe celebrates the Nyokum festival on February 26, worshipping the goddess of prosperity for a good harvest.
- Losar, a popular Sikkim festival, starts after harvest, celebrating farmers' efforts and praying for a good harvest in the new year. Sakewa, mainly celebrated by the Kirat Khamba Rai community, honors Mother Earth for blessings. Losong or Noomsong marks the end of the harvest season and Sikkimese New Year.
- Tribals, valuing nature, worship five elements in their festivals, performing rituals to conserve them, vital for agriculture. They also honor their handmade agricultural and hunting tools. These festivals demonstrate unity, with participation from all villages, homes, and family members. As tourism grows in tribal areas, these festivals are gaining popularity, aiding the spread and preservation of tribal culture.

### **A NEW BEGINNING: BIHAN MELA**

The Kondh tribe of Odisha celebrates the Bihan Mela, a seed festival, since 2019 to honor indigenous crops and traditional farming. After the Green Revolution, many local crops were abandoned. A non-profit promoting forest rights and agroecological farming started Bihan Mela to support these traditional varieties and mixed cropping. The festival, held in December, resembles a traditional market where seeds are exchanged. Farmers from over 40 villages of Dasapalle block participate in the fair where tribal music and dance are also showcased with enthusiasm.

Tribal women play the central role in the event, as they collect seeds of indigenous varieties and store them in earthen pots. On the festival day, women decorate seed pots with red and white motifs and carry them to mela in a bamboo basket. Men accompany them playing drums and other musical instruments. Seeds are traditionally exchanged among tribal farmers.

To boost indigenous seed availability, the organization set up a seed bank in Raisar village in 2019. It collects and preserves seeds from Kondh villages, lending them to farmers. The bank initially had 12 paddy varieties; now, it holds 62 paddy, four millet, five pulse, and eight vegetable varieties. Farmers must return double the seeds or two different varieties within a year. The bank benefits over 750 families and is open to Kondh tribe members. Inspired by success, more seed banks are planned.

### **TRIBAL FOLK DANCES OF NORTHEAST INDIA**

Northeast India, home to over 200 tribes, is known for its festivals, music, and dance. Each tribe has unique festivals, mainly focused on sowing, harvesting, and New Year. Here are some folk dances from different states in the region.

#### **Arunachal Pradesh**

- Arunachal Pradesh's 25 tribes and 100 sub-tribes are divided into Buddhists and non-Buddhists. The Nishyie people, who follow an indigenous faith, celebrate Rikham Pada, their key folk dance. Performed at community festivals, dancers wear cane headgears and antique waist-belts. The ballad-like songs honor gods, ancestors, and love stories.
- For the Adi tribe, Ponung is the main folk dance, performed by women during the Solung festival for a good harvest, guided by a male Miri. The Miri shakes a sword to make a rattling sound, while women, dressed in traditional attire, dance in a pattern, repeating lines in a chorus. In contrast, Delong is an all-male dance during the Etor festival, depicting the making or mending of farm fences.
- For the Apatani people, women perform Daminda during the start and end of the Dree festival. This dance, showcasing traditional agriculture, features intricate footwork and hand gestures.
- The Monpa people, who follow Mahayana Buddhism, have 22 folk dances called Cham. During the Torgya festival, they perform Pha Cham, a solo dance by a monk in a boar mask to pacify gods and spirits for good health and prosperity. Shanag Cham involves 12 dancers dressed as Tantric priests in embroidered gowns, aprons, and black hats.

- Gon-Nyin Cham is performed by 11 dancers holding a ritual bell and damaru, representing dakinis, protectors of the Buddhist faith. This dance wards off demons during monastery construction or statue installation.

### Assam

- Meeting point of cultures, Assam has as many as 23 Scheduled Tribes, of which twelve are called Plains Tribes, and eleven Hills Tribes, each having its own respective folk dances.
- Bagrumba is a spring dance by young Bodo women in traditional attire, accompanied by men playing drums, strings, and flutes. It prays for community prosperity, with dancers resembling butterflies. Another spring dance, Bardwisikhla, welcomes the wind goddess.
- Among the Mising people, Gumrag Soman is a popular spring seed-sowing dance during Ali-a-ye Ligang. Young men in traditional attire and women in ege and ribi dance to Oinitom songs with drums, cymbals, and flutes.
- In the Karbi community, Ritnong Chingdi, Lingpum Sokchon, and Hacha Hekan are agricultural dances, while Nimso Kerung and Banjar Kekan are for death rituals. They believe Rangsina Sarpo, a divine figure, taught them to dance and sing.

### Meghalaya

- In Meghalaya, the Khasi people celebrate the Nongkrem festival by performing the Nongkrem dance. This dance honors their local god, U Lei Shyllong. Young women wear beautiful, colorful traditional jewellery and dance gracefully in unison to the rhythm of drums and flutes.
- Wangala, also known as the Hundred Drums dance, is a part of the Wangala Festival celebrated by the Garos to celebrate the end of hard work and to pray for a good harvest. During this festival, men drum while other men and women dance in two lines, moving together to the beat of traditional drums, gongs, and flutes, with the deep sound of a flute made from a buffalo horn adding to the music.

### Mizoram

- Mizo folk dances show their happy and carefree nature. Many Mizo dances, like Cheraw, Khuallam, Chhieh Lam, Chai, Rallu Lam, Solakia, Sarlamkai, and Par Lam, are tied to the farming cycle. Cheraw, also known as Bamboo dance, is the oldest Mizo dance, thought to have been performed since the 1st century AD.
- In this dance, eight men hold four pairs of bamboo poles that cross each other. They tap the bamboos open and closed to a rhythm, while young women dance in and out from between the poles. The dancers' steps often mimic the movements of birds or the sway of trees, making the dance graceful and fluid.
- Khuallam, which means "Dance of the Guest," is a Mizo folk dance that is part of Khuangchawi, a ceremony that includes eating, dancing, and music. Guests are expected to enter the Khuangchawi area by performing the Khuallam dance.
- Usually, men perform this dance wearing a traditional outfit called Puandum, which has red and green stripes. They dance to the rhythm set by a set of gongs called Darbu.
- Chhieh Lam is a dance that shows happiness and excitement. A group of people sit in a circle and sing a song called Chhieh hla, which is accompanied by drum beats, bamboo tubes, or hand clapping. Usually, one or two people dance, using different movements with their arms and body. As the dance gets more exciting, everyone in the circle joins in.
- Young Mizo men and women, in tune with nature, celebrate the beauty of mountains and rivers with the Par Lam dance. The girls wear colorful clothes with flowers in their hair as they sing about the beauty of nature. A couple of boys play a gong and a string instrument. The dance is slow but very captivating, mainly using hand movements that mimic the waves of a flowing river.

### Manipur

- Manipur is home to several tribal groups. The Mao tribe's Asharai Odo is a vibrant folk dance known for its rhythmic singing and graceful movements. The Tangkhul people consider Luivat Pheizak their main folk dance, showcasing stages of farming and the simple tribal life. This dance is performed during

festivals like Lura Phanit (seed sowing festival), Manei Phanit (tools festival), and Chumphu (harvest festival).

- Both men and women wear traditional clothes, and some men dance with spears and swords, accompanied by the Phung (drum), Tala (trumpet), Paren (bamboo pipe), and Sipa (flute).
- Among the Kabui tribe, Shim Lam or Fly Dance and Kit Lam are two popular folk dances. Shim Lam is done during the Gang-Ngai festival and tells the story of Tajuibon, a flying insect with shiny wings that moves from flower-to-flower drinking nectar. Kit Lam is a harvest festival dance where the rhythmic movements imitate the movements of crickets.

### Nagaland

- Nagaland has seventeen main tribes and many smaller ones, and it is known for its folk dances. While it is hard to cover all the dances from every tribe, here are a few interesting ones.
- The Angami tribe's most popular folk dance is Sovi Kehu. It is performed in an open area in the village. An elder leads with "ohh-hoo ohh-hoo" sounds, and everyone follows in a circle. The leader raises his right hand and jumps, and everyone else jumps in sync. Each jump makes the circle smaller, until the leader turns and the circle grows larger again. Once the circle is big, the leader signals to stop, and everyone finishes with a loud cheer.
- Yimdongsu Tsungsang is a popular dance of the Ao tribe. It celebrates heritage and spirituality, with dancers moving through village streets wearing traditional items like the Langtem, Hokomangzutsu, Wamulung, Ozumi, and carrying a dao. Every step, sway, and drumbeat bring the village to life, showing unity and cultural pride.
- Among the Chakesang people, Oh Hio is a popular dance done by men at festivals. Dancers mimic actions of birds and animals, such as rooster fights and ducks flapping their wings.

### Tripura

- In Tripura, Reang tribals perform the Hozagiri dance during the Hozagiri festival or Lakshmi puja. A group of men sing and play the Kham (drum) and Sumui (flute), while four to six women dances, showing the jhum (slash-and-burn) cultivation cycle. Meanwhile, the Jamatia and Kalai tribes do the Garia dance during Garia or Shiva puja. Young men and women visit homes, place a symbol of Lord Garia in the courtyard, and sing and dance in a counterclockwise circle around it.

## **EMBRACING DIVERSITY: CULTURE HERITAGE OF TRIBES IN INDIA**

- Cultural diversity is crucial for a vibrant, inclusive society. It enhances our understanding, promotes tolerance, and fosters respect for different perspectives. Embracing it sparks creativity and innovation, preserving unique traditions and enriching human heritage.
- In our connected world, it builds connections and mutual understanding. Valuing cultural diversity creates a harmonious, fair global community where everyone can express themselves and contribute to progress.
- UNESCO sees cultural diversity as essential to human societies. It includes both tangible aspects like languages and arts, and intangible aspects like beliefs and values. UNESCO believes cultural diversity enriches individuals and communities, fostering dialogue, creativity, and mutual respect.
- UNESCO stresses safeguarding cultural diversity to ensure human rights, dignity, and sustainable development. By valuing cultural diversity and promoting dialogue, UNESCO aims to create peaceful, inclusive societies where all cultures are respected.
- UNESCO's International Fund for Cultural Diversity supports communities in developing thriving cultural and creative industries.
- India has over 700 recognized tribal groups, with about 104 million people, making up 8% of the population. These tribes vary widely in language, culture, and traditions. Over 400 tribal languages are spoken, belonging to language families like Dravidian, Indo-Aryan, Austro-Asiatic, and Tibeto-Burman, showing diverse origins and migrations.

- Despite challenges like marginalization and economic disparities, India's tribal cultures thrive, preserving unique customs, languages, and art. Tribal traditions enrich India's cultural landscape with music, dance, art, and nature-based rituals.
- Governmental and non-governmental efforts promote tribal cultures through festivals, documentation, and development projects. However, greater recognition and inclusion of tribal voices are needed to celebrate their contributions nationwide.

### Major Tribes of India

**Gonds:** Central India; known for painting and music.

**Santhals:** Eastern India; rich in music, dance, oral literature.

**Northeastern Tribes:** Nagas, Mizos, Khasis; unique languages, customs, governance.

**Bhils and Gujjars:** Western and northern India; agricultural and pastoral lifestyle.

**Adivasis:** Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh; Oraon, Munda, Ho tribes; cultural identity linked to ancestral lands and forests.

### Languages of Indian Tribes

**Santali:** Santal tribe (Jharkhand, West Bengal, Odisha, Bihar)

**Gondi:** Gond tribe (Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Maharashtra, Telangana, Andhra Pradesh)

**Khasi:** Khasi tribe (Meghalaya)

**Mizo:** Mizo tribe (Mizoram)

**Bhili:** Bhil tribe (Rajasthan, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh)

**Oraon:** Oraon tribe (Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Bihar, West Bengal)

These languages reflect the linguistic diversity and cultural richness of India's tribal communities.

### Indian Tribal Folklore

- Indian tribal folklore includes myths, legends, and oral traditions passed through generations. Major tribes like the Gonds, Santhals, and Khasis have rich oral epics about creation, heroism, and supernatural beings, reflecting their cultural values and beliefs. Folklore also features folk songs, ballads, and storytelling, celebrating tribal life and offering moral lessons. These traditions preserve cultural heritage, foster identity, and connect past and present. Popular tribal singers and bands are celebrated in their communities.

### Indian Tribal Folklore Narratives

- Santhal: "The Legend of Thakur Jiu" - heroic deeds Bhil: "The Story of Pithoro" - protection and fertility Gond: "Sing Bonga" - nature and creation Munda: "Langhan Baba" - mythical abilities Khasi: "U Thlen" - greed and consequence Mizo: "The Legend of Pu Lallula" - trickster antics Naga: "The Saga of Pu Jabi" - courage and resilience Santhal: "The Story of Marang Buru" - divine protector Oraon: "The Myth of Bera" - wise spirit Ho: "The Legend of Thakkar Bapa" - strength and wisdom These stories reflect the cultural richness and spiritual depth of India's tribes.
- Tribal communities in India contribute significantly to the music industry, using instruments like drums and flutes. Their influence appears in Bollywood, where tribal rhythms and melodies enhance the music.
- Teejan Bai, the Tetseo Sisters, and Rewben Mashangva from Nagaland; Mukund Lal Nayak and Nand Lal Nayak from Jharkhand; Panchuna Rabha from Assam; Tsesu Lhamo from Ladakh; and Sonam Tshering Lepcha, Naren Gurung, and Hilda Mit Lepcha from Sikkim are popular tribal artists who engage audiences unfamiliar with their languages.
- In Indian cinema, tribal life has inspired music, dance, and jungle scenes, enhancing the authenticity of films. Composers like A.R. Rahman and Vishal Bhardwaj blend tribal rhythms with modern sounds in songs like "Jiya Jale" from Dil Se and "Rangabati" from Kaun Kitne Paani Mein. Even children's films like The Jungle Book feature tribal-inspired music. These elements celebrate India's tribal culture and diversity, though often as colorful variety rather than central themes.

- Tribal communities play an important role in Indian theatre. Contemporary theatre groups and playwrights often explore themes of tribal life, culture, and challenges, such as land rights and displacement, in their work. These productions give a platform for tribal voices and offer audiences insight into their experiences. The presence of tribals in Indian theatre highlights their resilience, creativity, and cultural richness, adding depth to the theatre with their unique stories and traditions. In dramas, tribals are portrayed as important characters, reflecting the complex socio-political and cultural landscape of the country. For example, the play "Sonajhuri" by Bijon Bhattacharya addresses the struggles of tribal communities against exploitation and oppression, focusing on issues like land rights and displacement.
- Plays like Nagamandala and films like Satyajit Ray's HIRAK RAJAR DESHE explore tribal issues such as socio-economic vulnerability and the clash between tradition and modernity. These works highlight the marginalization and power struggles of tribal communities, portraying them as central to themes of identity, justice, and resistance. Notable playwrights like Habib Tanvir and Ratan Thiyam have significantly contributed to representing tribal content in dramatic arts.
- Indigenous communities in India have a rich tradition of dramas. The Santal's "Pirama" tells of bravery, while the Gonds' "Karmabai" depicts fighting injustice. The Bodos celebrate love and nature in "Laokhowa." "Hudhud" from the Koya tribe recounts a mythical bird's adventures. The Gonds' "Pandavani" retells Mahabharata stories, and Yakshagana combines dance and music to portray Hindu myths. "Jaduranga" from the Ho tribe explores love and the supernatural, and "Gandha Madana" from the Santals discusses love and betrayal. "Bhawariya" from the Bhils focuses on bravery and justice, and "Hachchiya" from the Oraons celebrates love and community. These dramas entertain and preserve the vibrant culture of India's tribal communities.
- India's festivals like Aadi Mahotsav and Tribal Odyssey showcase tribal traditions. Events like Bastar Dussehra and Hornbill Festival celebrate tribal culture and unity. Festivals such as Wangala and Mim Kut honor heritage through music and dance. Ziro Music Festival and Poush Mela highlight tribal arts. Karam Festival and Cheraw Dance reveal tribal spirituality. These festivals preserve and promote India's rich tribal culture.
- Tribal textiles like Pochampally Ikat and Phulkari embroidery tell stories through patterns. Skilled artisans create silver jewelry and Dokra pieces that reflect tradition. Clay jewelry showcases earthy tribal designs. Traditional attire like Maharashtra's lugade saree and Rajasthan's ghagra choli highlights vibrant tribal fashion. Handwoven shawls from various regions exhibit the pride and skill of tribal weavers.
- Body decorations like tattoos and henna express identity and beauty. Tribal accessories like bags and hats show resourcefulness and link to nature. Indian textiles and ornaments celebrate tribal heritage, highlighting their resilience and creativity.
- India's tribal foods give a taste of indigenous culinary traditions. Northeast's bamboo shoot curry is aromatic with native spices. Naga pork with axone offers rich flavors. Sao Aloo from Santhal tribe blends potatoes and local spices. Mizoram's bamboo steamed fish uses natural ingredients creatively. Gond tribe's red ant chutney adds tangy spice. Bhil cuisine's Mahua flower curry celebrates nature's bounty.
- Litti Chokha features roasted wheat balls with spiced gram flour. Sisunak saag is made from foraged greens and mustard oil. Tribal rice beer adds festivity. These dishes highlight the culinary creativity and cultural richness of India's tribal cuisines.
- India's tribal clothing reflects cultural identity. Manipuri Phanek and Innaphi are elegant; Kashmiri Pherans are warm. Maharashtra's Gond women wear colorful Lugade; Rajasthan's Bhil women don graceful Sari. Uttarakhand's Garhwali women wear mirror-work Gagra Cholis. Naga men and women wear Tribal Shawls. Santal men wear Dhotis, Munda men wear Loincloths. Lungis are common among tribal men, and Oraon attire includes Gamuchas.

- The Angami Naga Shawl is elegant, and Assam's Mekhela Chadors are graceful. Tulu men's Panches add style, and Lambani Skirts are colorful. Irula girls wear charming Pattu Pavadai, and Santhal men proudly don Jhunghas. Gaddi's Himachali Caps are whimsical, and Banjara women show off Kanjaris. Khasi men wear Kupiahs with style. These traditional garments showcase India's tribal culture and identity.
- Contemporary fashion blends tribal styles with modern trends. Tribal Print Dresses and Tops feature bold designs. Tribal Embroidered Jackets showcase artisanal craft. Tribal Print Skirts and Pants stand out with unique patterns. Accessories like necklaces and handbags add a tribal touch. Tribal Print Scarves and Swimwear offer versatile options. Tribal Print Kimonos provide stylish layering. Tribal Print Footwear completes the look. This fusion celebrates tribal culture in modern fashion.
- India's tribal communities showcase rich arts and crafts. Warli paintings from Maharashtra and Gond art from Madhya Pradesh depict tribal life and myths. Odisha's Pattachitra scrolls tell mythological stories. Tribal jewelry uses silver, beads, and shells. Northeast India's bamboo crafts focus on sustainability. Dhokra metal casting from Chhattisgarh creates tribal motifs in metal. Tribal textiles and pottery reflect artistic skill and cultural heritage. These arts celebrate identity and preserve stories.
- India's tribal communities have a spiritual world rooted in ancient beliefs and nature. Their spirituality influences all aspects of life, connecting them with the natural and supernatural. They worship ancestral spirits and deities, and respect sacred lands and elements. Rituals, ceremonies, music, dance, and storytelling facilitate their connection to the spiritual realm, seeking blessings and harmony.
- Sacred groves, hills, rivers, and forests are where tribals connect with spirits and find solace. Their spiritual practices foster a deep connection with the world, respect for all life, and reverence for ancestors. In India's tribal spirituality, the sacred and secular blend, revealing a deep understanding of life.
- Market-driven values threaten tribal cultures, eroding their unique identities and traditions. Bollywood's influence undermines tribal heritage, risking the loss of cultural expressions. This homogenization replaces diverse cultures with a standard, often shallow representation. Commodifying tribal art exploits its cultural significance, perpetuating marginalization. It is crucial to protect and value tribal cultures in the face of global market pressures.
- A National Tribal Cultural Policy in India is essential to honor and preserve the diverse heritage of tribal communities. It should document tribal culture, promote cultural diversity, empower communities, integrate culture into education, support cultural infrastructure, research, and endangered languages, protect traditional knowledge, encourage community involvement, and foster partnerships.
- By recognising the importance of tribal culture and implementing supportive policies, India can celebrate its cultural diversity while ensuring the preservation and prosperity of its tribal communities for generations to come.