June 2024

Kurukshetra

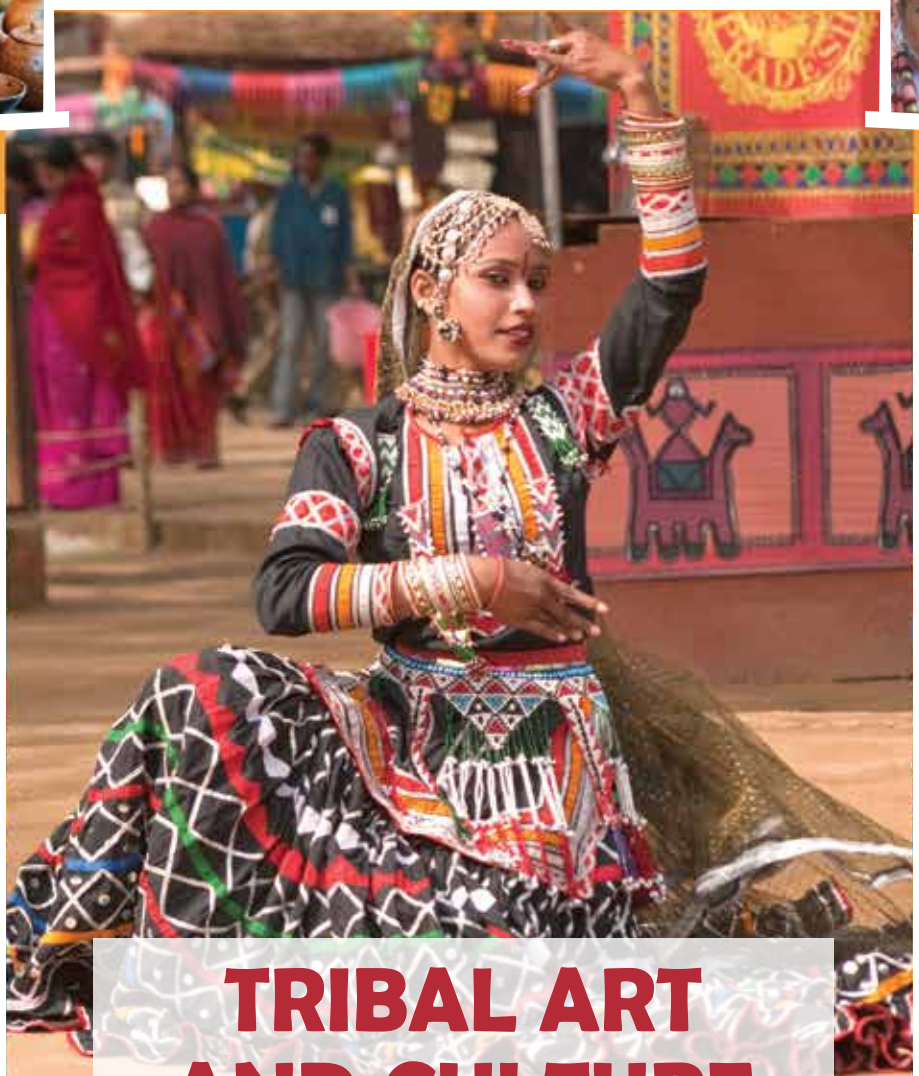
A JOURNAL ON RURAL DEVELOPMENT













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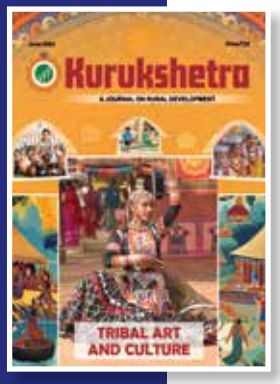
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Editorial

A tribe is a group of people who live and work together in a shared geographical area and has a common culture, dialect, and religion. Tribal life is characterized by comparative physical and cultural isolation, simplicity, small group size, low population density, and closeness to nature, both physically and conceptually.

The Tribal art generally reflects the creative energy found in rural areas that acts as an undercurrent to the craftsmanship of the tribal people. Tribal art is a wide range of art forms, such as wall paintings, tribal dances, tribal music, and so on. Tribes have rich and unique cultural traditions, including their own language, music, stories, and paintings.

Articles published in this issue cover most of the aspects related to Tribal art and culture in India. The article *'Innovative Science Projects to Preserve Tribal Culture'* embarks to explore the transformative power of innovative science projects in empowering and safeguarding the rich tapestry of tribal heritage in the country.

India is a land of cultural diversity also and by embracing the cultural diversity of the tribes in India we can foster mutual understanding among people or tribes of different backgrounds. The article *'Embracing Diversity: Cultural Heritage of Tribes in India'* stressed upon the need of recognising and valuing cultural diversity to create a more harmonious and equitable global community for their collective progress.

As we know that States in Northeast India have rich cultural tribal heritage and every tribe or community in Northeast has its own set of distinct festivals, most of which centre round sowing, harvesting and the New Year. The article *'Tribal folk dances of Northeast India'* focuses on their folk dances which are an inseparable part of the festivals of the region.

The article *'Tribal Culture: The potential for Global Representation'* explores the possibilities of taking the various tribal arts like painting, dance, weaving to the world stage with global partnership. Whereas the article *'Theyyam: The Tribal Cultural Dance'* delves into its origin, the social, economic, political and spiritual relevance of the traditional tribal dance of Kerala. The article *'Agriculture festivals: Integral part of Tribal culture'* describes about the astute connection between the Tribal culture and agriculture festivals celebrated in different regions of the country.

There are over 700 tribes that have been notified under Article 342 of the Indian constitution. All these spread across different states and union territories and to cover each and every tribe and the contours of their art and culture is a stupendous task which needs volumes of books but in this issue of Kurukshetra efforts have been made to touch upon some of the aspects of tribal life and their art and culture. Hope that it will give fairly good idea and information about tribal life in India. ❑



Innovative Science Projects to Preserve Tribal Culture

Across the diverse landscape of tribal communities, innovative science projects are being harnessed as powerful tools to preserve indigenous heritage. In an era marked by rapid globalisation and modernisation, these initiatives stand as beacons of resilience, offering hope for the survival and revitalisation of age-old customs and traditions.

*Dr. Nimish Kapoor

In the realms where tradition meets innovation, a profound renaissance is underway. In the heartlands of tribal communities, where ancient wisdom intertwines with modern aspirations, a new narrative is being written—one that celebrates the convergence of science and cultural preservation. This article embarks to explore the transformative power of innovative science projects in empowering and safeguarding the rich tapestry of tribal heritage.

One of India's most remarkable characteristics is its unity amid variety. The world's second-largest tribal population is found in India. According to data from the 2011 Census, 8.9% of India's population is classified as tribal. The tribal people throughout the country have rich traditions, cultures, and heritage with unique lifestyles and customs.

Across the diverse landscape of tribal communities, innovative science projects are being harnessed as powerful tools to preserve indigenous heritage. In an

* *Author is a science communication specialist. Email: nimish2047@gmail.com*

era marked by rapid globalisation and modernisation, these initiatives stand as beacons of resilience, offering hope for the survival and revitalisation of age-old customs and traditions.

From the misty hills of the Northeast to the sun-drenched plains of Central India, a wave of innovative science projects is sweeping through tribal villages, driven by a shared commitment to cultural conservation. These projects represent a convergence of traditional wisdom and cutting-edge research, embodying a holistic approach to preserving indigenous knowledge systems. As communities grapple with the challenges of environmental degradation, socio-economic marginalisation, and cultural erosion, these initiatives offer not only solutions but also a reaffirmation of the intrinsic value of tribal heritage.

The Department of Science & Technology, under the Ministry of Science & Technology, Govt. of India and Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, Govt. of India have recognised the importance of preserving the rich cultural heritage of tribal communities and has taken significant steps to support science projects aimed at this goal. Through various initiatives and schemes, the government is actively promoting research, documentation, and conservation efforts that integrate scientific knowledge with traditional wisdom.

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 aimed at documenting and preserving indigenous knowledge systems of tribal communities. These projects often involve collaborations between researchers, anthropologists, and tribal elders to record traditional practices, medicinal knowledge, oral histories, and cultural rituals. By digitising and archiving this information, DST helps ensure the continuity and accessibility of tribal culture for future generations.

For tribals' cultural heritage conservation, DST is involved in science projects aimed at conserving and restoring cultural heritage sites associated with tribal communities. This may involve the use of advanced scientific techniques such as remote sensing, geographic information systems (GIS), and 3D modeling to assess and monitor the condition of heritage sites, plan conservation interventions, and raise awareness about their significance.

DST promotes interdisciplinary research that integrates traditional ecological knowledge (TEK) with modern conservation science to protect biodiversity and cultural landscapes in tribal areas. These projects aim to understand the ecological wisdom embedded in tribal cultures and develop conservation strategies that respect indigenous practices and values. By fostering collaboration between scientists, tribal communities, and policymakers, DST contributes to the sustainable management of natural resources while safeguarding cultural heritage.

Through programmes such as the Science and Technology for Harnessing Innovations (SATHI) scheme and the Science for Equity, Empowerment, and Development (SEED), DST provides funding and support for science projects that promote grassroots innovation, entrepreneurship, and social inclusion among tribal populations to empower tribal communities and to address local challenges using scientific knowledge and technology.

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

The North East Centre for Technology Application & Reach (NECTAR) under DST is providing technology applications through various science projects and garnering support for sustainable harnessing of the tribals' cultural heritage. It has expanded honey production in Nagaland, produced eco-friendly yoga mats from water hyacinth, bamboo-based science project and also helped in promoting the bamboo sector through value addition and providing market linkages.



Ancient heritage art of Charei Taba Pottery or Coil Pottery in Imphal-East Manipur is being preserved with science projects

Bamboo holds medicinal and spiritual significance in the cultural beliefs of Northeast India. Traditional healers use bamboo extracts and preparations for their healing properties in indigenous medical practices. Moreover, bamboo is often associated with spirituality and revered as a sacred plant by certain communities, symbolising resilience, growth, and harmony with nature. In Assam, bamboo plays a vital role in Bihu celebrations, where bamboo-made instruments like dhols (drums) are used during the festivities. In Nagaland, bamboo is used to construct the traditional morungs (communal houses) where young men are initiated into adulthood.

For sustainable development of the traditional pottery culture, NECTAR has supported improvement and sustainability of the Traditional Terracotta and Pottery Business in Asharikandi, Dhubri, Assam. It has helped preserve the ancient heritage art of 'Charei Taba Pottery' (Coil Pottery) in Imphal-East Manipur and strengthened trade in cultural goods offering sustainable livelihoods. It has also provided employment opportunities and empowered women and tribal potters.

State Specific Technology Demo Centres (TDC) have been established to develop awareness among local people about the know-how of various technologies and their useful applications. A Bamboo-based TDC has been established in collaboration with the Bamboo & Cane Development Institute (BCDI), Agartala, Tripura, for promotion of the bamboo sector, its value addition and establishing market linkage. A Joint Centre called NECTAR-BCDI Incubation cum Innovation & Technology Demonstration Centre (IITDC) has also been set up in the BCDI campus, Agartala, for training and skill development of participants across the NE region and other parts of the country.

Flute Technology of Culm Cutting or Stem Setting Technique

In tribal cultures, the flute-making tradition is intertwined from centuries. NECTAR has developed a flute technology of culm cutting or stem setting technique which enables fast regeneration of bamboo. This method involves selecting specific sections of bamboo culms, carefully cutting them at precise nodes, and then replanting them in the earth to propagate new bamboo plants. Once these plants mature, they provide a sustainable source of bamboo for crafting flutes. This holistic approach not only ensures a steady supply of raw material but also fosters a profound connection between the craftsmen and the land, as they cultivate and care for the very plants that give life to their musical instruments. Through this project, tribal communities sustain their cultural heritage with economic benefits.



Flute technology of culm cutting or stem setting technique which enables fast regeneration of bamboo

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 also initiated many other bamboo products which are having huge industrial applications like bamboo processing 'waste' for high-grade charcoal and activated carbon. It can be used as deodorant, disinfectant, medicine, agricultural chemical and absorbent of pollution and excessive moisture. Centre has also supported various technologies for the production of mechanised bamboo blinds, acrylic



Gasifiers based on bamboo has been developed to produce clean and renewable electricity

products, fiber-based hygiene products, etc. Bamboo furniture is another industrial application where NECTAR has extended its support through science projects.

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 has been promoting use of bamboo and bamboo-based composite material on different types of construction which is another step to preserve tribal culture of bamboo-based housing. A science project was designed to develop and manufacture bamboo based sanitary and electrical products with an objective to replace plastic and metal with bamboo and explore multiple eco-friendly options. The start-up has got appreciation and incubation by Atal Incubation Centre. Under the project, various types of bathroom and washbasin taps, overhead and hand-held showers, kitchen taps and electric sockets and plugs made from bamboo were developed. The activity will create sustainable livelihood, employment opportunities, especially among the poor and disadvantaged groups, including women in North eastern region. There has been growing acceptability of bamboo composite material – in the first stage, one of the major uses has been in pre-fabricated structures, where 4.2 million sq. ft. of bamboo-based construction material has already been installed.



Bamboo-Based Sanitary and Electrical Products to Replace Plastic and Metal with Bamboo

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

Traditionally, the Indian tribal societies have been using bamboo to produce many things starting from handicraft to construction of houses, and bamboo-based water irrigation system and bamboo faucets, which are the part of tribal culture. Even now, many hilly villages transport their water from higher stream through bamboo pipes.

Science projects have been initiated related to bamboo faucets which does not require a large industrial set-up. It can easily be manufactured in a much smaller setup with the use of some specially designed machinery and well-trained artisans. A specially customised faucet cartridge is used to regulate the water flow and the respective connectivity. As bamboo is non-corrosive unlike metal, it can serve for a period much longer compared to metals. Bamboo faucets not only replaces



Specially Customised Bamboo Faucet is used to regulate the water flow and the respective connectivity

harmful plastic and expensive metal in the faucet manufacturing but also can engage traditional bamboo artisans and generate huge employment across the tribal areas in the country.

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 are fascinating structures found in various tribal cultures, especially in regions where bamboo is abundant. These towers serve as a traditional method of water preservation and storage, often ingeniously designed to capture and retain rainwater for community use during dry seasons or droughts.

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 in Meghalaya is often known worldwide as the world's wettest place with the highest rainfall annually, yet during the winter seasons, it suffers from acute water shortage and scarcity. As per Indian



Bamboo Water Tower, traditional method of water preservation and storage

Meteorological Department data for the period 2011 - 2020, the mean annual average rainfall in the region was about 11856 mm for about 157 mean rainy days. A project has been initiated on Bamboo Water Tower in Ramkrishna Mission School Campus, Cherrapunjee.

Bamboo Water Tower is designed to be owned and operated by the villagers and the local community. The project's goal is also to empower the local economy based on people training, construction, and manufacturing, monitoring, water management and maintenance, and applications to agriculture, etc. in order to meet the various water needs of the community.

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 analysed the linkages between the population and the water resources in the two villages. The water used in the villages is pumped or collected directly from the ponds without adequate treatment and therefore the quality of source water plays a critical role in determining the drinking water quality in the villages. After a thorough assessment of the water through testing, it was found that the water was contaminated with animal and human faecal and various impurities, which are of physical, biological, and chemical nature. The utilisation of such poor-quality water causes waterborne diseases and their spread in the villages. In both the villages of Kameng and Maklang, about 50% to 60% of the diseases occur due to poor drinking water quality as reported in community health studies. It has been further noticed that the drinking water quality and quantity in both the villages are very low because of poor treatment of deteriorated water and practice of old sanitation system in rural areas.

Under a project supported by NECTAR, a low-cost water treatment plant, based on roughing and bio sand filter was designed and constructed for both the villages. The aim of the project is to supply safe and wholesome water, distributed as widely as possible with the least initial cost and through a system that requires a minimum of maintenance on a sustainable basis. The Treatment plant was designed in such a way that the pond water available are treated using indigenous technique (combination of roughing filter and slow sand filter) with low cost and easily available 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.



Skill Development and Employment Generation with science projects



NECTAR has extended its support to bamboo furniture

Its activities have generated bamboo-based livelihood in bamboo growing areas. To ensure supply of sustained and cost-effective raw material, skill development training, induction and primary processing machineries is supported for manufacturing bamboo sticks at villages and community locations. Skill upgradation trainings are also provided in areas of mat weaving, use of natural dyes, processing of bamboo shoots, agarbatti stick rolling, and incensing.

While these efforts demonstrate the government's commitment to preserving tribal culture through science projects, there is still much work to be done. It is essential to ensure that these initiatives are participatory, community-driven, and respectful of tribal rights and autonomy. By fostering collaboration between government agencies, tribal communities, researchers, and civil society organisations, we can create a more inclusive and sustainable approach to cultural conservation that honours the legacy of India's indigenous peoples.

Efforts from the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change

The projects aimed at empowering tribal communities while promoting environmental conservation and sustainable development. Government plays a crucial role to integrate traditional ecological knowledge (TEK) with modern scientific practices. Through initiatives like the National Mission for Green India (GIM), Government supports afforestation programmes, biodiversity conservation, and sustainable resource management in tribal areas. These projects not only protect the environment but also safeguard the cultural landscapes and livelihoods of tribal communities.

Traditional Ecological Knowledge Documentation is a fantastic scheme to preserve the tribal culture with scientific inputs. Recognising the value of Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) held by tribal communities, projects under this scheme are aimed at documenting, preserving, and utilising indigenous knowledge systems. These projects involve collaboration between tribal elders, researchers, and local institutions to catalogue traditional practices related to biodiversity conservation, natural resource management, and climate resilience. By integrating TEK with modern scientific approaches, these initiatives promote holistic and context-specific solutions to environmental challenges.

Biodiversity Conservation and Sustainable Livelihoods programme supports projects that integrate biodiversity conservation with sustainable livelihood options for tribal communities. These projects involve the restoration and management of forest ecosystems, promotion of non-timber forest produce (NTFP) based enterprises, and eco-tourism initiatives. By providing alternative sources of income, these projects reduce dependency on forest resources while enhancing environmental conservation efforts.

Community-Based Forest Management programme is being implemented through projects like the Joint Forest Management (JFM), where participatory forest management practices involving local tribal communities are being encouraged. These projects empower tribal groups to play an active role in forest protection, afforestation, and regeneration activities. By fostering a sense of ownership and stewardship, JFM initiatives contribute to both ecological restoration and community development.



Community-Based Forest Management programme

Climate Change Adaptation and Mitigation science projects focused on climate change adaptation and mitigation strategies tailored to the needs of tribal communities. These projects may include the promotion of climate-resilient agriculture practices, renewable energy technologies, and community-based disaster risk reduction measures. By enhancing the adaptive capacity of tribal communities, these initiatives help minimise the adverse impacts of climate change on vulnerable populations.

Capacity-building programmes and awareness campaigns targeting tribal communities to enhance their understanding of environmental science issues and conservation practices. These initiatives provide training on sustainable land use practices, waste management techniques, biodiversity conservation, and other relevant topics. By empowering tribal youth and community leaders with scientific knowledge and skills, these projects foster environmental stewardship and promote local action for sustainable development.

Preserving tribal culture in India through science projects involves a multifaceted approach that combines traditional knowledge with modern tools like digital documentation, language preservation apps, cultural mapping, virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR), traditional knowledge repositories, community radio and podcasts, biocultural conservation, education & training and collaborative research. By combining the strengths of science, technology, and indigenous knowledge systems, it is possible to sustain and revitalise tribal cultures in India while respecting their autonomy and heritage.

Overall, various science projects have played a pivotal role to preserve tribal culture with harnessing the potential of tribal communities' traditional knowledge with scientific research and capacity building, thereby contributing to the socio-economic development and environmental conservation of Northeast India. Science projects for tribals in India aim to protect and preserve tribal culture with a symbiotic relationship between biodiversity conservation and community well-being. By leveraging scientific expertise, traditional wisdom, and participatory approaches, these initiatives contribute to the preservation of tribal culture while promoting ecological resilience and social equity. ❑

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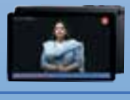
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Theyyam

The Tribal Cultural Dance

Practised predominantly by the tribal communities from the lower strata of the society, Theyyam transcends mere entertainment to serving as a conduit for spiritual expression and community cohesion. Some of them include the Malayar community, deriving their name from 'mala' meaning the mountain, they habit Kasaragod in north to Vadakara in south. Secondly, the Mavilanmar community of hill areas of Kannur and Kasaragod districts, who apart from the traditional dance engage in basket weaving. The Koppalar community in Kasaragod retains their Thulunad culture and are known as 'Nalkedayar' in the Thulu language meaning dance. Products made from the arecanut palm are used in the costumes and ornaments for Theyyam which the community produces.



*** Gowri S**

"Theyyam is North Kerala's most extraordinary worship of God. The term Theyyam in itself is derived from Daivam, meaning God, establishing this expression and exercise from the collective imagination of the particular region...In short, Theyyam, as it has been practiced since centuries, can be understood as the embodied form of the people's faith in God expressed through their imagination of beauty. It is the most beautiful Asiatic ritual art that harmoniously brings together the arts of face painting with needle precision combined with dance in forms of vigorous movements (Tandav) as well as enchanting grace (lasya) in a euphony of diverse instruments along with the ebbing and flowing of shimmering other-worldly ornaments fused with melodies and music that awakens the past."
– R C Karipath, Theyyaprapancham (The World of Theyyam)

** Author is a reserach scholar, Department of Political Science, University of Delhi.*

Theyyam, also known as Kaliyattam, Theyyamkettu, or Thirayadiyanthiram is a vibrant ritualistic art form indigenous to the northern part of Kerala, specifically the Kolathunadu area, which in present-day consists of Kasaragod, Kannur, Wayanad, and Kozhikode districts. The art form is also practised under the name 'Bhuta Kola' in the neighbouring region of Karnataka, historically occupying the Tulunadu region. Rooted in ancient traditions dating back over a millennium, Theyyam holds a prominent place in the cultural tapestry of these regions and is deeply intertwined with the socio-economic and religious fabric of rural communities. The Government of Kerala, in 2018-19, announced the establishment of the Theyyam – Kala – Academy at the Thalassery constituency, also known as the National Centre for Tangible and Intangible Cultural Heritage which seeks to preserve, reconstruct, renovate monuments, places, and objects of artistic and historic interest.

Practised predominantly by the tribal communities from the lower strata of the society, Theyyam transcends mere entertainment to serving as a conduit for spiritual expression and community cohesion. Some of them include the Malayar community, deriving their name from 'mala' meaning the mountain, they habit Kasaragod in north to Vadakara in south. Secondly, the Mavilanmar community of hill areas of Kannur and Kasaragod districts, who apart from the traditional dance engage in basket weaving. The Koppalar community in Kasaragod retains their Thulunad culture and are known as 'Nalkedayar' in the Thulu language meaning dance. Products made from the arecanut palm are used in the costumes and ornaments for Theyyam which the community produces. The Kalanadikal, a matrilineal tribal society are believed to have migrated and settled in the hills of Wayanad and strictly practice and maintain their tribal heritage.

The performers, known as Theyyam artists, undergo elaborate rituals and transformations, often assuming the guise of deities, spirits, or ancestral heroes. Through intricate costumes, vivid makeup, and frenzied dance movements, Theyyam artists embody the divine, bridging the gap between the earthly and the celestial realms. Moreover, Theyyam offers a profound insight into the ethos and values of rural society. It reflects the deeply ingrained beliefs, customs, and communal solidarity prevalent in these agrarian communities and by studying Theyyam, one can unravel the complexities of caste dynamics, gender roles, and the symbiotic relationship between humans and nature prevalent in rural 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 segment of the performance, commonly referred to as Vellattam or Thottam, the artist in a simple and modest red headdress accompanied by drummers, recites and narrates the myth of the deity of the shrine or Theyyam. This phase sets the stage, laying the groundwork for the elaborate transformation and immersive storytelling that follow in subsequent stages.
- **Kaavu**: It is the sacred grove or forest area where Theyyam performances traditionally take place. Embedded in tradition, these natural sanctuaries serve as vital repositories of biodiversity, preserving endemic flora and fauna, and culturally, they are sanctuaries which foster communal cohesion and spiritual connections to the land. Thus, kaavu not only safeguard cultural heritage but also sustain ecological balance, embodying the harmonious relationship between rural communities and their natural surroundings.
- **Symbolising Harvest**: The timings for Theyyam performances are generally scheduled during specific auspicious periods according to the traditional calendar, which often coincide with significant festivals, agricultural milestones, or celestial alignments. Moreover, Theyyam performances are commonly held during the winter months, aligning with the agricultural lull when villagers can actively participate without disrupting their farming activities. Theyyam is also one of the few customs wherein rice grains are offered as part of the blessings (dakshina), symbolising the blessings of Mother Goddess. Additionally, animal sacrifice, a subject of immense debate, although less common in contemporary Theyyam performances, was historically practiced as part of the ritual not only as appeasement to deities but

as an ancient tradition of distribution amongst the community.

- **Caste based nature of Theyyam**: Theyyam performances are often associated with specific castes, particularly those belonging to the lower strata of society. Each caste can only perform the specific Theyyam of their deity and thus play a significant role in preserving and transmitting the tradition from generation to generation.
- **Natural Makeup, Attire, and Traditional Instruments**: One of the most striking aspects of Theyyam is the elaborate makeup and the colourful attire worn by the performers. The makeup, often made from natural materials like rice powder and turmeric, transforms the artists into divine or ancestral beings. The attire includes colourful costumes adorned with intricate designs and ornaments, made from coconut leaves and other natural ingredients. Additionally, the traditional musical instruments such as chenda (drum) and elathalam (cymbals) accompany the performance, providing rhythm and enhancing the overall ambience.
- **Various Kinds of Theyyam:** There are around 400 diverse forms of Theyyam which encompass a myriad of deities and narratives, each representing a unique aspect of cultural, historical, and mythological significance. They can be broadly classified into, forms of female deities, predominantly Mother Goddesses like Bhagawati, Kali, Chamundi, and Bhadrakali, who embody both primordial aspects of nature and puranic tales. Additionally, there are deities elevated from human figures and history of the land, these include revered scholars and war heroes, thus developing a tradition of documenting history. Another category includes figures from indigenous and tribal cultures, like the snake gods and goddesses and those associated with curses and blessings. Furthermore, animalistic forms of Theyyam, such as tiger and monkey deities, celebrate the community's intricate links with nature. Lastly, there are Mappilla Theyyam, representing the Muslim community, embodying cultural interactions and engagement of the region and period. These diverse forms collectively reflect the rich tapestry of beliefs, histories, and societal



Natural Makeup, Attire, and Traditional Instruments Worn by Artists

dynamics prevalent in Kerala's rural cultural landscape.

Theyyam serves as a profound lens through which to view the historical, political, and social dimensions of rural life. With its origins stretching back a millennia, It embodies the collective memory of communities, offering invaluable insights into the region's past and present. Historically, at its core, Theyyam is a living archive, wherein there is a process of recording history through oral traditions, myths, and legends. Through intricate rituals and performances, Theyyam narratives recount tales of ancient migrations, conflicts, and societal transformations, preserving historical events that may otherwise have not survived the ravage of time. They recount the evolution of society from nomadic times to that of settled agriculture and the development of a state system. These narratives transcend spirituality to reflect and educate about the history and culture of the region.

Theyyam serves as a platform for truth-telling and critique of society. Many performances feature stories that challenge prevailing norms and power structures, shedding light on social injustices and inequalities, from caste based atrocities to gender discrimination. Therefore, Theyyam acts as a mirror to society, prompting reflection and dialogue on issues of caste, gender, and power dynamics. Here, public participation becomes integral to the essence of Theyyam, transforming it from a mere spectacle into a communal experience. Every community and tradition finds not just representation but also a space to have their voices heard. Hence, Theyyam serves as a space for social cohesion and solidarity. In the sacred groves and village courtyards where performances take place, communities come together fostering a sense of belonging and interconnectedness, strengthening the bonds that unite rural societies.



Theyyam Performance

Theyyam holds significance as a site of resistance and assertion of cultural identity. Through its narratives and performances, It challenges dominant narratives imposed by unjust systems of caste and patriarchy, reclaiming agency and autonomy for marginalized communities. Thus, Theyyam acts as sites of political mobilization, wherein communities come together to address common concerns and advocate for their rights and redressal. Whether through symbolic gestures or overt statements, performances often reflect the aspirations and grievances of rural communities, amplifying their voices and demands. By asserting their cultural heritage through Theyyam, rural communities assert their right to self-determination and recognition. Furthermore, Theyyam and its performance brings together the little and greater traditions of the region, whereby assimilation of cultures and communities can be witnessed. The coexistence of smaller wardens of the regions, like Kuttichatan along with Puranic gods, in addition to historical figures and war heroes highlight the complexities, diversities and engagement between the region and its cultures.

Theyyam serves as a captivating frame towards understanding the tribal wisdom, way of life and ecology, offering profound insights into the symbiotic relationship between indigenous communities and their natural surroundings. Embedded within the ritual performances, Theyyam embodies the deep-rooted ecological knowledge and spiritual connection that tribal societies have with the environment.

- **Ecological Symbolism:** Many Theyyam performances feature deities and spirits that are closely associated with elements of nature, such as forests, rivers, animals, and celestial bodies. These narratives contain insights into sustainable land management practices, seasonal calendars and ecological indicators used by indigenous people to navigate and utilise their natural resources in harmony with nature, thus promoting a sustainable perspective towards development and economy.
- **Sacred Groves and Biodiversity Conservation:** Theyyam rituals often take place in sacred groves or kaavus, which are revered as sacred sites by

indigenous communities. These groves serve as biodiversity hotspots, harbouring a rich diversity of plant and animal species. By performing Theyyam in these natural settings, tribal communities reinforce their spiritual connection to the land while also contributing to the conservation of local ecosystems.

- **Harvest Festivities and Agrarian Wisdom:** Some Theyyam rituals are associated with harvest festivals and agrarian celebrations, highlighting the importance of agriculture in tribal societies. Through songs, dances, and rituals, performers pay homage to the land, gods, and ancestral spirits, invoking blessings for a bountiful harvest and agricultural prosperity. These performances serve as repository of agrarian wisdom and practices that have sustained tribal communities for centuries.
- **Environmental Conservation and Advocacy:** In recent years, Theyyam has emerged as a platform for environmental conservation and advocacy, with some performances incorporating themes related to ecological preservation, wildlife protection, and climate change awareness. By using Theyyam as a medium for raising environmental consciousness, tribal communities seek to spread awareness and promote sustainable stewardship of natural resources.

The contemporary significance of Theyyam extends far beyond its traditional roots, encompassing a diverse range of cultural, economic, and social dimensions that resonate at regional, state, and even international levels. Its contemporary significance lies in the multifaceted contributions and position as a dynamic and enduring cultural phenomenon with relevance on both local and global scales.

The enduring cultural significance of Theyyam represents the unique artistic traditions, folklores and practices to a wider audience. While Theyyam has its root in sacred groves and traditional village settings, contemporary performances have transitioned to more formal stages and venues, including theatres, auditoriums, and cultural festivals and has even found representation in various film industries. On a national scale, It became a proud emblem of Kerala's cultural heritage, representing the state's deep-rooted folk traditions. Its presence in significant events like the Republic Day celebrations in 1960 and the opening act of the ninth Asian Games in 1982 underscores its importance on the national stage. On the international stage, during the Year of India festival in Paris in 1985, Theyyam transcendeds its regional identity and became a symbol of India's rich folk culture. And by participating in such events, It contributed to the promotion and recognition of India's cultural diversity on the world stage, fostering greater appreciation and understanding of its traditional art and rural life.

Theyyam contributes significantly to the local economy through tourism, generating revenue for communities hosting performances. The influx of tourists attending Theyyam events stimulates economic activity in rural areas, benefiting hospitality, transportation, handicrafts, and other related industries. Furthermore, ritual art provides livelihood opportunities for a significant population of the region, including performers, musicians, costume makers, and artisans. By sustaining traditional occupations and skills, Theyyam contributes to the economic well-being of local communities and helps preserve cultural heritage. Finally, Theyyam has also garnered attention from scholars, researchers, and cultural enthusiasts worldwide, spurring interdisciplinary studies and research into its history, symbolism, and socio-cultural significance. Such academic inquiry contributes to a deeper understanding of It's role in shaping the cultural landscape and its associated tribal and ecological wisdom with its broader implications for global cultural heritage. Therefore, this ancient ritualistic dance form has an enduring significance as repository of knowledge on rural life, culture, history, ecology, and economy. ❑

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Vital Role of Tribal Art in Safeguarding Cultural Identity



It is significant that the tradition and cultural diversity of tribal India are the most ancient and unparalleled in the world, with its own relevance and rationality, since Indian tribes express their unique artistry in beautiful ways, so factors like geographia, socio-historic transition, transformation and transcreation shape the style of their artistic approach. This art is a precious gem in our rich civilisation, brought to life with vibrant colours by talented indigenous artisans all over the country.

* **Amarendra Kishore**

The tribal artwork, woven intricately into the fabric of artistic expression, stands as a testament to the diverse cultural tapestry of the nation. Over time, it has undergone a gradual evolution, journeying alongside classical forms. These artistic traditions are deeply rooted within distinct social communities, each imbued with its own unique cultural essence. These expressions primarily manifest as visual art forms, such as paintings, depicting the intricacies of daily life, traditions, and cultural heritage specific to their respective communities. The art of tribal communities often incorporate elements like local festivals, divine beings, and flights of fancy into their portrayal.

This infusion lends them a regional charm and a touch of mysticism, which are indispensable to Indian artistic tradition. Since the word 'culture' refers to the beliefs, customs, traditions, various sounds of nature along with birds and animals each including arts, and religious behaviours of a specific group of people. It includes the ways of life that includes integrity, traditions, and shared experiences of a community. Culture spreads from one generation to another within a community through socialisation and interaction. It shapes the identity of individuals and communities, influencing their perspectives, beliefs, and behaviour. Importantly, culture which is a pure genetics of orientation, expression, creation of life and livelihood. So, indigenous culture is dynamic and can evolve over time in response to internal and external influences such as migration, technological advancements, and globalisation. Therefore, it is important to consider whether the folk art of indigenous communities

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contributes to enriching the values of the country and its culture? Only then can the direction to preserve culture be determined.

Tribal creation, undoubtedly, serves as a vibrant repository of modern cultural heritage. So, the indigenous creation represents the beliefs, customs, and traditions of many more indigenous communities. It weaves together the rich tapestry of religious beliefs, rituals, and tales from indigenous communities, reflecting their deep bond with nature and the mystical realms beyond. In the special context of India, the colourful paintings among Gond of Madhya Pradesh and Santal of Jharkhand embody the essence of local sentiments; the Muria dance in Bastar of Chhattisgarh reflects the spirituality of life, resonating with thoughts and feelings. Pithora paintings among the tribes of Rathwa, Bhilals, and Nayka of Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh are another fine examples of Indian tribal art. The Dhokra brass sculptures of Odisha drive up into ancient tales, while terracotta Bankura pottery of West Bengal is indeed the simplest medium for expressing emotions. The Bhimbetka cave paintings eloquently capture the essence of primitive human connection to nature, expressing a profound reverence for the bounties of the natural world with an unparalleled depth and breadth of emotion. Upon arrival here, one can palpably sense how rivers once flowed amidst the mountains, or how years ago, the relentless waves of the sea carved these very rocks. Shapes in the soil took form under the caress of the winds. Within them, caves were formed, where primordial humans indulged in the art of painting. This artwork stands as a poignant testament to the exquisite emotions of those illustrious ancestors.

Originating from Odisha, tribal paintings were once a simple household adornment, but have now changed into a commercial art form, adorning raw silk fabric with scenes from daily life. Similarly, Indigo Dabu fabric prints of Rajasthan offer a variety of expressions, and indigenous Bonda jewellery of Odisha carries the soulful essence of an ancestral legacy. Every creation has its own interpretation, whether it hails from the north-eastern states or the Kathiawar in Gujarat treasured by various and versatile communities of tribal India.

Indian tribal art is influenced by both colourful nature and the vivid creatures mentioned in their folktales and songs. It is mostly about customs, religious symbols, everyday life, and social issues. The traditions, values, and rituals passed down through generations help keep their communities strong and stable. By sticking together and sharing their experiences, they are able to face challenges and stay true to themselves. Additionally, the nomadic lifestyle finds expression in these art forms, further enriching their narrative. Tribal art shows what a tribe's culture is all about. It tells the story of their past, what they believe in, and how they live. In India, tribal art comes in many different styles because each tribe has its own way of doing things. Some tribal communities are famous for making beautiful beadwork, while others are known for their colourful paintings or sculptures.

Tribal folk art has diverse dimensions, with numerous forms and expressions, but their oldest art form is painting, which has no known history. Be it the allure of finely crafted wooden toys or furniture, the intricate designs of metalwork, or the delicate weaving of colourful fabrics, the genesis and evolution of these arts trace back to epochs long past, when humanity transitioned into the age of metal. Agriculture had taken root, and humanity had begun veiling their forms in garments. Thus, while myriad forms of art blossomed in subsequent eras, the art of painting stands as a relic of antiquity, its primordial essence beyond question or dispute. The genesis of their painting remains shrouded in mystery, with its unknown inception. Despite tireless endeavours, it has only been guessed that the art of sketching emerged during humanity's primordial dawn. Thus, cave painting emerges as the pristine essence of tribal artistry, for the ancient cave paintings unearthed to date grace the very landscapes where tribal communities continue to dwell, echoing the timeless connection between their art and their ancestral homelands.

The cultural diversity, customs, and social traditions of India's tribal regions captivate the entire nation. It is a unique world where community, solidarity, and harmony reign supreme, awaiting further exploration. The adornment is indeed a distinctive feature of tribal society, directly connected to nature and its various resources, i.e Jal, Zameen and Jangal (water, land and forest). This perpetual connection epitomises the complete harmony between men and nature. It is truly a matter of great sorrow to witness robust efforts being made to introduce 'democratic modernity' in the

name of development, even in the remote mountains and forests, where human settlements struggle hard with the absence of necessities. Most parts of the hilly regions are facing numerous challenges, but the vibrant presence of tribal folk-art work still surviving strongly. We must not forget that the biggest obstacle to folk tradition is so called 'modernity', which does not bother about the mindset and tradition of local folk.

It is significant that the tradition and cultural diversity of tribal India are the most ancient and unparalleled in the world, with its own relevance and rationality, since Indian tribes express their unique artistry in beautiful ways, so factors like geographia, socio-historic transition, transformation and transcreation shape the style of their artistic approach. This art is a precious gem in our rich civilisation, brought to life with vibrant colours by talented indigenous artisans all over the country. Being close to nature, indigenous people infuse their art with a regional touch. Their belief systems inspire them to interpret things in their own native ways, reflecting in their artwork. Often, ancient myths and spirituality of God and Goddess are reimagined in modern contexts. Nature is the soul, the life force, and the culture of the indigenous world. That's the reason it plays a vital role in the lives of communities that treasure their surroundings—the melodic rivers flow, the exuberant biodiversity of forests, the sky-scraping mountains that touch the azure blue sky, and the verdant landscapes all inspire their art and culture. This is evidenced by the ancient rock paintings of Rajrappa cave in Hazaribagh of Jharkhand and different cave shelters in Kaimur hills of Bihar, which inspired primitive human beings to showcase their emotions and sentiments towards forest and wildlife. The beauty of nature has transformed the lives of nomads and hunters into art lovers. Ultimately, this has brought people together, successfully fostering social unity within them.

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.

In the context of folk art, the question of cultural identity is crucial to the entire world. In the Indian context, there is still deep debate and discussion on this issue, but it is important to consider what is significant in the society that practices folk art, the individual or the entire community. The importance of the individual lies in selfishness, while acknowledging the importance of society is evidence of harmony and solidarity. Indeed, it is important to ask whether we are individuals or members of a larger community. This question reflects what culture means in a society. Are they culturally loaded or culturally outraged by tribal ethos? Indeed, this ignorance is a clear indication of cultural bankruptcy. The presence of cultural values raises the question for us: who is connected to whatever cultural wealth there is—the common people or the elite class? Without understanding this, we cannot preserve any culture or align ourselves with cultural values. However, tribal communities do not require such questions. They do not debate on such issues. The main cause is that every individual in these communal groups lives their life by incorporating cultural norms into their habits.

The creativity of indigenous communes, especially tribal artwork, is rooted in centuries of tradition. Their art holds its own vast significance as a tradition, which is not just about its survival but also about its increasing popularity over time. Actually, discussions, exhibitions, and critiques of their artistic imaginations are happening among various cultural groups in the country, and reviews of the unique features of their art have begun. Although there is concern about intellectual conflicts arising from dialogues, indigenous cultural dominance, self-assertion, or cultural appropriation seem to establish their identity successfully apart from the realm of various cultural expressions and above all exploration. For example, the renowned Gond artwork of Maikal Hills of Madhya Pradesh or Warli painting in the Sahyadri Range of Maharashtra are controversy-free folk art that is a priceless treasure- trove of diversity and inclusivity, which the government and society have wholeheartedly embraced. The government has given this art as much recognition as the highly acclaimed Madhubani folk art. Consequently, this art and its associated artists are gaining widespread recognition. Just as Santal artwork once received international acclaim, recognition has been established.

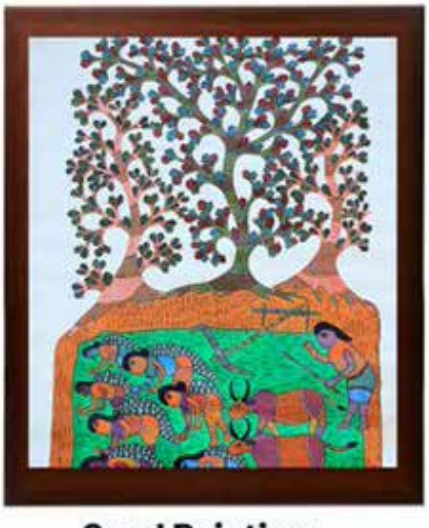
Now the situation is such that indigenous folk art in India has presented issues through painting and other forms of artwork, which have strengthened our understanding of creations. It has also encouraged us to reconsider our cultural values and prejudices. It

is heartening that the nation has accepted the entire spectrum of sentiments and harmonious, virtuous engagements of tribal communities, creating a favourable atmosphere within tribal art. The nation's ethos reflects the sentiment of individuality and attachment that people feel towards a particular culture or group. Due to the increasing global recognition of folk arts, there is a growing curiosity to learn about indigenous customs, traditions, beliefs, values, language, and other aspects which define the unique ways of life of any group. It is important to note that cultural identity determines how individuals perceive themselves and their place in the world, and in this experience, the assimilation of positivity strengthens national unity.

The essence of this declaration is that amidst the indigenous populations of this very country, folk art flourishes, exuding its intrinsic charm. Its fundamental nature, born centuries ago, still resonates to a considerable extent in its original form today, constituting an incomparable facet of India's identity. The culture of the indigenous species, their diversity, and vibrancy, imbued with unadulterated authenticity, captivate the innermost recesses of the global psyche. These natural wonders bring immense joy, pleasure, ecstasy, and grandeur to the people who inhabit the remote corners of this country. Indeed, the diverse arts of more than 500 tribal communities (some of them were not familiar with art of sketches) are intricately woven with their folklore, stories, idioms, and expressions. Each artwork assumes its own tale, rooted in history, tradition, and unique cultural perspectives. Before the influence of the market, handicrafts were born from a fusion of emotions and soul, creating invaluable and unique masterpieces. These creations, stemming from deep within the mind and soul, remained untouched by commercial interests. In the bygone era, handicrafts served as a representation of society, bolstering its strong identity before the supreme power of the state. In many Indian tribal communities, people live and grow together, sharing everything they have. This closeness helps their artwork and culture thrive.

In the indigenous communities, skills are often developed and nurtured at the community level. Members support each other in learning and mastering various crafts, arts, and traditional practices. Through collective effort and sharing of knowledge, individuals within the community refine their skills, pass down techniques to future generations, and collectively contribute to the preservation and evolution of their cultural heritage. This community-based approach not only enhances individual abilities but also strengthens the bonds within the community, fostering a sense of pride and identity in their shared traditions and craft skills. In the realm of artistic evolution, the spirit of communal unity bestows upon society a profound positivity, serving as the bedrock of cultural resilience. Delving into the fabric of tribal communities reveals not merely individual sentiments, but a collective vision





Gond Painting

Visual ingenuity is not uncommon for the Pardhans of the Gond tribe of Madhya Pradesh.

They smear mud paste on the floors, doors and walls of their homes and then paint motifs on them with a brush fashioned out of bamboo, using colours made from mud of different hues found in their environment.

Painted freehand, these two-dimensional paintings reflect the artist's perception of life whereas the absent 'depth' factor, emphasizes simplicity.

Gond Artwork of Maikal Hills, Madhya Pradesh



Pattachitra Art, Odisha

through which every challenge is met with shared understanding. It is this unity, this cohesive force, that not only fortifies the fabric of society but also forms the very cornerstone of its unity. In tribal India, art doesn't discriminate.

It is not just for a chosen few; it's for everyone in society. Indigenous communities have made sure their creations are for everyone. Their spirit of inclusivity and human kinship, no doubt, sets a great example for all of us. For tribes, art is like talking without words. It is how they share their stories and teach others about their culture. Tribal art often shows important moments in their past representation, like battles or religious celebrations. It also tells us about their beliefs and how they live. One prominent example of this is Pattachitra art from Odisha. This art was made by the Chitrakar tribe of the Kalinga dynasty, existed in the eastern coastal region, and is known for its detailed designs and bright colours. They use it to tell stories from Hindu myths, and sometimes these pictures help during religious rituals.

This matter is extremely important as to why the demand for indigenous art is increasing amidst all kinds of modernity across the globe. Does its interpretation extremely important? Are the selection and use of colours something special? Is its subject highly sensitive or utilitarian? Does it have any connection with current events? Does it appeal to strengthen social harmony? Can all aspects of culture be seen through indigenous folk art? By analysing these questions, indigenous art can be understood very easily. Since the basic motive of the analysis of tribal art is to understand the intentions behind its manifestations, the question arises whether the adornment of the home and personal happiness give way to an artist's creation? However, it is well known that community feelings, understanding of solidarity, and commitment to harmony are the fundamental essence of tribal life. The development of art collectively occurs with understanding and consensus. Therefore, their art is deeply connected to the sentiments of its society in every way. It is noteworthy that the subject of tribal art is not centered on the individual. It speaks of the community and always pays attention to its environment, respecting them.

Keeping away from the Jadopatia painting of Jharkhand and some regions in West Bengal, all other forms of art, which are connected to tribal society, prominently feature humans amidst the jungle and wild animals. At this juncture, mention of Jadopatia is necessary because it is the only tribal art that fully expresses the historic philosophy of the Santal and Bhumij tribes. It doesn't confine itself to nature but also tells captivating stories about tribal life, customs, and festivals, along with the origin of life, life after death, and its myths. In Gond art, the richness and density of the forests come to the forefront. The portrayal is not centered on individuals but on humans in the group, otherwise focusing on trees, mountains, and especially the lives of animals in the jungle where the artist immerses himself. The Warli painting focuses on the concept of maternal nature, placing its elements at its centre. This art expresses rural life entirely, depicting humans in groups. The particular society is adept at art and deeply respects nature and wildlife in their lives. The Warli artists use their mud huts as the backdrop for their paintings, much like ancient people used cave walls as their canvas.

However, in Jadopatia painting, the focus is on depicting the deceased person in heaven, showing the outcome of their past deeds. Upon seeing this art, the family of the deceased feels satisfied. By doing so,



Jadopatia Painting, Jharkhand

the artist plays a special role in alleviating the grief of mourners. The reason for the limited expansion of Jadopatia's popularity lies in something unique. Tribal society and its worldview do not conceive of life after death like any other folk. They believe that after death, their companions become invisible and reside with them - in the trees and mountains. The concept of heaven is a different notion from tribal culture, but the mingling of tribal and non-tribal people in the periphery of Santal Pargana has brought about some changes in the content of this art.

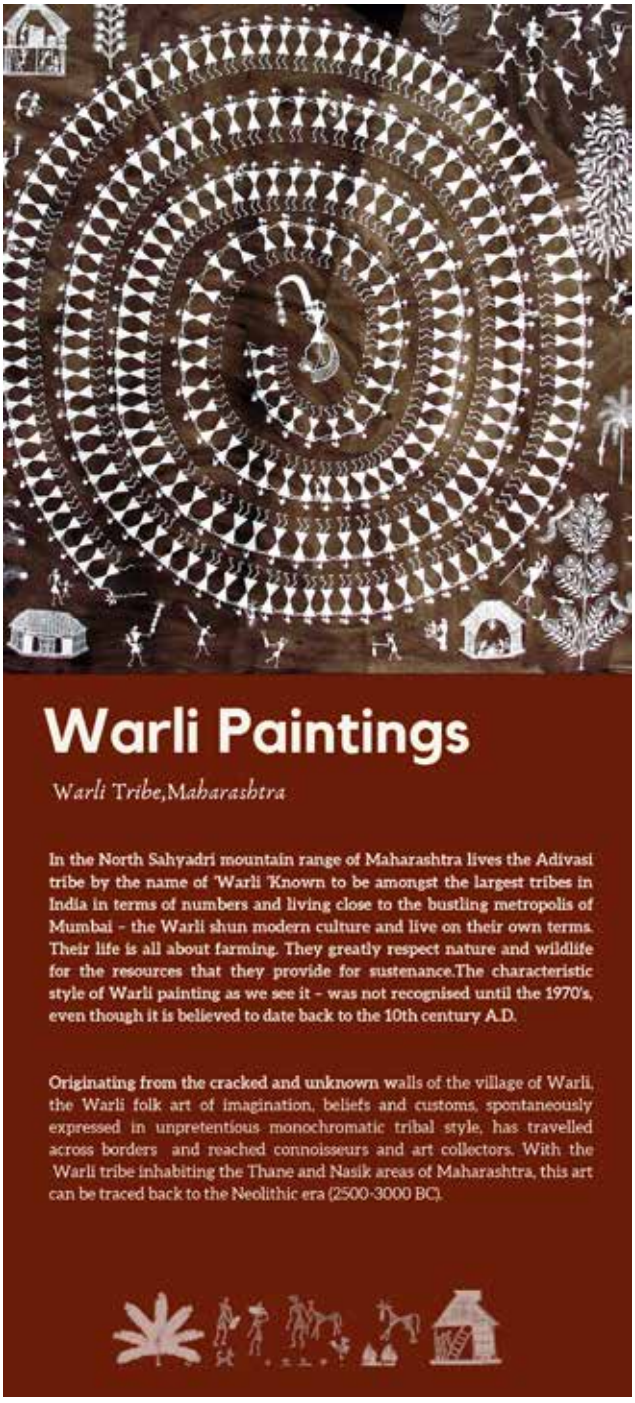
This is an undeniable truth. Saura painting, a magnificent folk-art originating from the heartlands of Odisha, resonates with echoes of Warli tradition. It stands as a testament and a source of enlightenment, showcasing the profound reverence these indigenous cultures hold for the natural world. Within the intricate strokes of these artworks, one can witness a profound homage paid to the sacredness of trees, the dignity of animals, and the resilience of tribal life. Central to the essence of Saura art lies an unwavering reverence for the arboreal. Amidst the verdant canvas, one finds not just depictions of jungle fauna and humble abodes, but also subtle portrayals of everyday existence – women with their humble utensils, children with their innocent smile, and men tending to their cherished livestock. This art form, however, transcends mere aesthetic pursuit; it serves a dual purpose – nurturing the craft while honing the artist's skill.

The Saura art, with its masterful strokes, adorns the rugged faces of rocks and crevices, paying homage to departed souls and safeguarding against unseen maladies. Symbolic worship intertwines seamlessly with sacred rituals and traditional festivities, weaving a tapestry of cultural heritage that spans generations. Celebrated for their unparalleled beauty, captivating allure, and profound symbolism, these artworks serve as vessels of traditional wisdom, repositories of ancestral knowledge, and custodians of timeless folk tales.

The art of indigenous society is rooted undefined in nature; hence, it is as pure as it is profound. In their embellishment with tribal hues, they incorporate the produce of nature into their creations without using chemicals. They consider art as a gift of invisible natural power. Hence, for the expression of emotions through art, they rely on various elements of flora.

Tribal creators honour Earth and her gifts, using their creativity to weave tales of respect and reverence. Their paintings and sculptures are like windows into the past, preserving the traditions and beliefs of their ancestors for future generations to admire. Through their art, tribes find strength and purpose, guiding them through life's journey with wisdom and pride. In the end, Indian tribal art is not just about pretty pictures—it's about preserving culture and passing on traditions from one generation to the next. Traditional tribal art in India tries to capture the special vibe of tribal life that never fades. It's not just something from the past; but is alive today. It's become a big part of what makes India unique and special.

Within the domain of indigenous folk art, myriad elements pulsate with the essence of nature. The hues of painting remain untouched by any adulteration; they resonate purely with nature. The indigenous people procure their pigments from their mountains, soil, and organic harvests, crafting them into vibrant hues. Such creations are not detrimental but rather wholly devoted to nature, embodying a reverence for the environment. To maintain reverence for nature is to honour their culture, the very foundation upon which their lives brim with joy. For instance, they utilise ochre stones, specifically hematite, to concoct the vibrant red hues.



Turmeric or Yellow Ochre stone is employed for yellow tones. Lamp Soot, derived from carbon black, lends its darkness for black shades. Above all, patience is required for obtaining orange hues from Palash flowers (Butea monosperma), while brown tones emanate from brown stones. The acquisition of green hues relies upon the leaves of the bean leaves, and true blue is sourced from the depths of indigo itself. In this manner, the indigenous people share a profound connection with nature, rooted in their customs, traditions, and beliefs, which revolve around the forests and creatures that inhabit them. Hence, the subjects of indigenous art often encompass the wilderness and its denizens, with humans also being an integral part of this narrative.

Through imagery, a tribe can be understood as a self-reliant community, distinguished by its inherent capability to sustain by itself. Typically, a tribe operates as a relatively closed society, its interaction with external groups or influences is limited. In ancient cave paintings and contemporary tribal art, nature, animals, and humans are depicted not as representations of a specific group or detailing encounters or conflicts with other clans. Instead, they embody the essence of self-sufficiency, often portrayed through individuals forming close-knit communities rather than hierarchies or engagement with other tribes. Essentially, a tribe's openness is often correlated with its self-sufficiency, which emerges as a result of individuals merging into a familial unit rather than an amalgamation of different entities. In other words, the more self-reliant a tribe becomes, the less dependent it is on external resources or aid, thus potentially leading to greater isolation or independence. This self-sufficiency can manifest across various aspects of tribal life, including food production, shelter construction, social organisation, and cultural practices. Obviously, to some extent, all these attributes can be observed within their visual narratives.

The indigenous art often serves as a poignant expression of the unique spiritual beliefs and cultural practices of native communities. These artistic creations frequently depict scenes from tribal mythology, rituals, ceremonies, and daily life, providing profound insights into their spiritual worldview. Spanning from central India to the western coastal regions of Maharashtra, Gujarat, and notably Karnataka, tribal art embraces symbolism that deeply resonates with their spiritual and cultural heritage. Animals, plants, and natural elements often take centre stage, symbolizing connections to both the natural world and the spiritual realms. For example, specific animals may represent particular qualities or traits, while plants may symbolize growth, regeneration, or fertility. Furthermore, tribal paintings often highlight the worship of ancestors, nature spirits, or deities, central to the tribe's spiritual beliefs. Ancestor worship is prevalent in indigenous cultures, where ancestors are revered as protectors and guides who continue to influence the lives of the living.

Nature spirits, associated with forests, rivers, or mountains, are also honoured as sources of supreme power and wisdom in tribal artwork. Moreover, tribal art frequently depicts rituals and ceremonies conducted to honour these spiritual entities or to seek their blessings and protection. These rituals often involve music, dance, and elaborate costumes, showcasing the vibrancy and diversity of tribal cultures. Overall, tribal paintings offer a glimpse into the rich understanding of spiritual beliefs and cultural traditions that shape indigenous communities, highlighting their deep reverence for nature, ancestors, and the divine. These artworks provide a window into the profound spirituality and cultural heritage of indigenous communities, celebrating their deep connection to nature, ancestors, and the divine. Art has turned into a key tool for tribes to keep their traditions alive. The new generation of the tribal community, when it senses the heartbeat of the market, is also aware of how to sell their artwork in the State and national market. Despite having a mindset for selling, it continues to create art according to its own terms, aligned with its traditions, ensuring that its art continues to sell without compromising the soul of its creativity due to market influence.

Now, many tribes are at risk of losing their way of life, especially as younger people drift away from their roots. On the other side of the coin, art has become a way for these tribes to make sure their knowledge and skills don't disappear. Take the example of Gond Art from Madhya Pradesh, for instance. It is made by the Gond tribe and is known for its detailed patterns and bright colours. They use natural stuff like charcoal and plant sap to make it. The Gond tribe has been doing this art for ages to show their beliefs and how they live. Now, it's a big challange for them that how they pass their traditions down to the next generation.

Tribal art, particularly their paintings, acts as a guardian of the unique heritage and customs of indigenous communities. It serves as a mirror reflecting on their lifestyle and imparting knowledge about their beliefs and principles. Despite the ongoing changes in society, tribal art remains a testimony to the distinct and captivating essence of India. Ensuring the preservation of tribal art is akin to safeguarding the rich tradition of our nation's cultural legacy. ❑



KE-2670/2024



Tribal Culture

The Potential for Global Representation

India's tribal art, rich in diverse artistic expressions such as painting, weaving, and dance, serves as a vital link to the nation's ancient cultural traditions and offers significant potential for global cultural dialogue. These art forms, deeply rooted in nature and community life, reflect sustainable practices and philosophical beliefs that emphasise ecological balance and coexistence. The preservation of tribal art not only safeguards these unique cultural expressions but also promotes a sustainable model of living globally. By integrating ethical tourism, protecting intellectual property, and fostering global partnerships, we can ensure the continued vibrancy and relevance of India's tribal art on the world stage.

*** Hemanth Menon**

India's tribal art reflects the nation's rich tapestry of cultural diversity, wherein each tribal community contributes its unique artistic expressions and traditions. This art encompasses various mediums such as painting, weaving, pottery, metalwork, woodwork, music and dance, providing a panoramic lens into India's ancient cultural past and its significant potential for global cultural dialogue.

Tribal art in India serves as an umbilical cord to ancestral legacies, deeply entrenched in the essence of nature, spiritual beliefs, and community living. These

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forms of art are predominantly preserved through their relative isolation from urban influences, safeguarding their authenticity while simultaneously limiting wider exposure. Among the most distinguished of these art forms are the Warli paintings from Maharashtra and the intricate bamboo work by the tribes of Tripura. These are not merely aesthetic pursuits but are deeply embedded in the lifestyle and ethos of the tribes, encapsulating their profound interaction with nature and the cosmos.

Warli's art is particularly notable for its use of monochromatic motifs and rhythmic geometric patterns that narrate tales of social gatherings, harvests, and tribal cosmology. This style employs a circle, triangle, and square, symbolising different elements of nature, and reflecting the tribe's deep connection with their environment. In contrast, bamboo craft from Tripura showcases the sustainable use of local resources, where bamboo is not just a material but a lifeline. The artisans create a variety of goods from this versatile material, including baskets, furniture, and decorative items, each piece echoing the ecological ethos of the tribal communities.



Tribal Warli Painting

These artistic traditions are passed down from generations, taught by the elders to younger members of the tribe, ensuring the survival of their cultural heritage. Through community festivals and rituals, these art forms are celebrated and remain integral to the tribal identity, offering a window into the soul of India's indigenous cultures.

Symbolism and Connection to Nature and Life

Tribal art in India is rich with replete artworks, derived from ancient folklore and tribal myths, each telling its own story of creation, existence, and living in harmony with nature. Central to many tribal artworks are motifs that symbolise natural elements, spiritual guides, and tribal lore. The Bhil tribe of Central India, for instance, employs a distinctive style involving dots and dashes to narrate stories, where each dot represents a grain of millet, signifying prosperity and connection to their agrarian way of life.

Similarly, the Gond paintings from Madhya Pradesh are vibrant and intricate, often illustrating tales of gods, men, and animals intertwined with elements of nature. These paintings use bright colours and patterns to depict scenes from folklore, highlighting the tribe's reverence for nature's bounty. The use of natural pigments made from charcoal, cow dung, leaves, and coloured soil not only underlines their sustainable artistic practices but also their philosophy of living in sync with the environment.



Gond Painting

The symbology in tribal art extends beyond mere impressiveness; serving as a medium for education and cultural continuity. It fosters a sense of identity and continuity in tribal communities, with each artwork serving as a repository of community knowledge and traditions. These symbols help communicate the values and teachings of the tribes to the younger generations, ensuring that their ancestral wisdom and practices do not fade into oblivion but thrive in the modern era.

Music and dance constitute the heartbeat of tribal celebrations and rituals, deeply intertwined with other forms of art and essential for the cultural expression of India's tribal communities. The Santhal tribe of Jharkhand, for instance, is renowned for its rhythmic drumming and folk dances that narrate stories of harvest, hunting, and festivals. These performances are not just artistic displays but also vital elements of the social fabric, bringing the community together to celebrate and maintain their cultural bonds.

The Bhil tribe expresses their cultural identity through dynamic dance forms that involve elaborate costumes and vigorous movements, symbolising key historical and mythological events. These dances are often performed during specific times of the year and have a dual function of entertainment and ritualistic importance, reinforcing the tribal lore and heritage. The Naga tribes of the Northeast take pride in their folk songs and traditional dances, which are an integral part of their festivals such as the Hornbill Festival. These songs and dances are imbued with historical significance and are means of passing down stories and traditions through generations. The music typically features instruments made from locally sourced materials, embodying the tribe's resourcefulness and connection to their land.



Hornbill Festival

The preservation of these musical traditions is crucial for maintaining the cultural identity of the tribes. They offer a form of resistance against the encroaching modern influences and serve as a rallying point for community pride and cohesion. Additionally, these cultural expressions provide an avenue for the younger members of the tribe to connect with their heritage, ensuring that these age-old traditions continue to resonate and adapt through the ages.

Philosophical Underpinnings and Global Relevance

The philosophical foundations of tribal art in India are deeply ecological, emphasising sustainability and minimal environmental impact. These practices reflect a profound respect for nature, often employing locally sourced materials and natural pigments in their artistic endeavours. This ethos of sustainability is not just a cultural preference but a necessity, given the close-knit relationship between tribal communities and their natural surroundings.

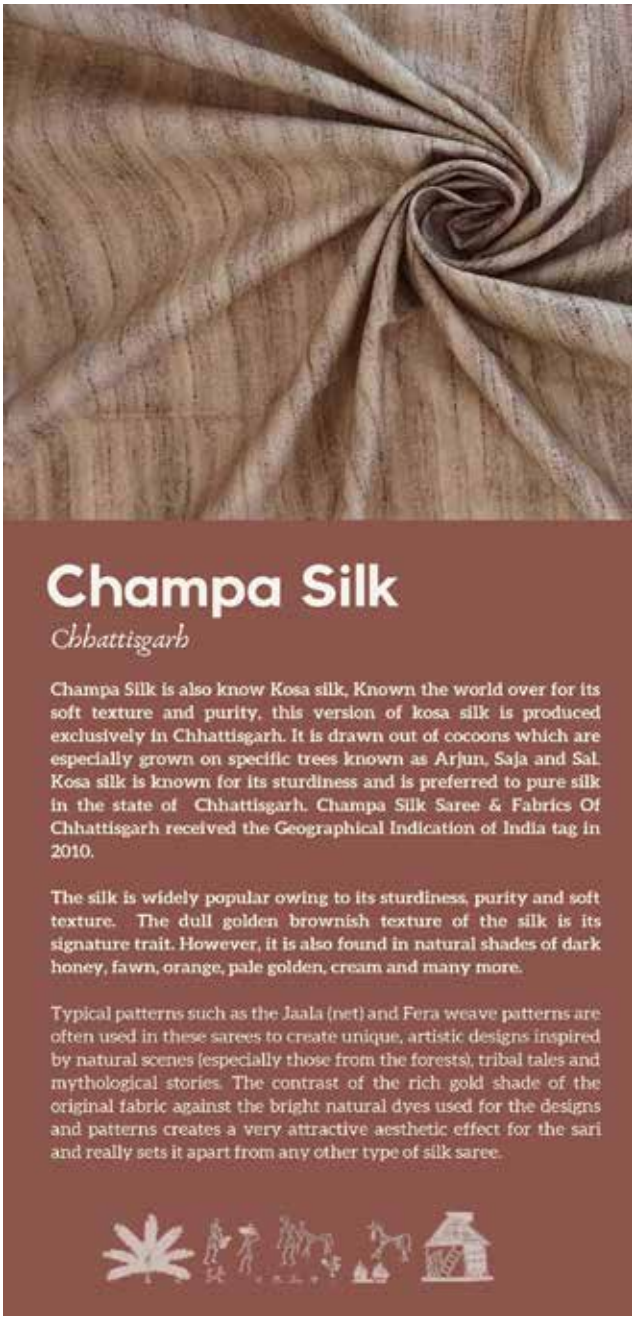
The global relevance of these practices cannot be understated, especially in a world grappling with environmental issues and the pursuit of sustainable living. The art forms and daily practices of India's tribal communities offer valuable lessons in eco-friendly living, showcasing how traditional knowledge and techniques can lead to a more sustainable relationship with the environment. For instance, the use of organic materials in craft, the conservation of local flora and fauna through sacred groves, and the sustainable harvesting practices all highlight an integrated approach to living that can inspire global environmental strategies.

Moreover, the tribal philosophies of coexistence and respect for all life forms are profoundly relevant in today's context, where ecological imbalance and resource depletion are pressing concerns. The tribal communities of India, through their art and lifestyle, champion a balance between human needs and environmental stewardship, providing a blueprint for sustainable living that the rest of the world can learn from.

These philosophical underpinnings are not just theoretical but are embedded in the practical applications of daily life within these communities. They offer a model for the global community on how to maintain ecological balance and cultural richness. As such, understanding and integrating these principles can lead to more sustainable practices worldwide, making tribal art not only a cultural treasure but a pivotal element in the global dialogue on sustainability.

Intellectual Property: Safeguarding Tribal Art

Protecting the intellectual property (IP) rights of tribal art is critical for ensuring that tribal communities are recognised and rewarded for their cultural contributions. This is particularly important as tribal art forms are deeply embedded within the cultural



(GI) tag, Tribal Arts

identities of the communities and are often susceptible to exploitation when exposed to broader markets. Establishing and enforcing IP rights is essential to prevent unauthorised use and appropriation of tribal designs, motifs, and techniques.

The introduction of geographical indication (GI) tags for tribal arts, such as Warli paintings, has proven to be an effective measure in safeguarding these cultural expressions. GI tags help authenticate the origin of these artworks, preventing misrepresentation and exploitation while promoting economic benefits for the original creators. Such initiatives not only protect the artistic expressions but also provide a legal framework that supports the economic welfare of the tribal communities.

Moreover, the enforcement of IP rights plays a crucial role in maintaining the authenticity of tribal art. It ensures that the cultural expressions are not diluted or misrepresented as they find a place in national and global markets. This is especially important in a world where cultural homogenisation poses a threat to the diversity and richness of indigenous cultures.

Initiatives to strengthen the IP framework for tribal art need to be accompanied by increased awareness and education among tribal artists about their rights and the importance of protecting their cultural heritage. This can empower them to navigate the complex landscape of cultural commerce, ensuring that they retain control over their artistic outputs and reap the full benefits of their cultural legacy.

By safeguarding the intellectual property of tribal art, we not only protect these unique cultural expressions but also ensure that the communities behind them are acknowledged and compensated adequately. This not only contributes to the economic stability of the tribes but also to the cultural integrity and continuity of their artistic traditions.

Ethical Tourism: A Path to Cultural Sustainability

Ethical tourism offers a respectful and sustainable approach to engaging with and preserving the cultural and natural environments of tribal communities. This form of tourism encourages interactions that are sensitive to the cultural traditions and ecological realities of tribal communities.

A model of ethical tourism involves tourists participating in cultural immersion experiences, such as workshops and village tours, conducted in ways that respect the tribe's lifestyle and customs. These experiences not only educate tourists about the rich cultural tapestry of the tribes but also create economic opportunities that benefit the tribal communities directly. It can also act as a counterbalance to the forces of globalisation and cultural dilution, offering a sustainable model of cultural exchange that benefits both the visitors and the host communities.

For ethical tourism to be truly effective, it must be implemented with the full participation and consent

of the tribal communities. This includes ensuring that the communities have control over how their cultures are presented and shared with outsiders, and that they receive a fair share of the economic benefits derived from tourism. Such initiatives not only enhance the tourist experience but also contribute to the cultural and economic sustainability of the tribal communities, making them active participants and beneficiaries of the tourism industry.

While the preservation of tribal art offers insights into sustainable and ethical living, it is crucial to recognise the challenges involved in these efforts. The romanticisation of tribal lifestyles often overlooks the complexities tribes face due to modern influences and globalisation. There is also a risk of cultural dilution as tribal art becomes commercialised, potentially stripping away its authenticity and reducing it to mere aesthetic value without its cultural significance.

Furthermore, the economic stability of tribal artists can be precarious. Without consistent demand or support, many artists may find it difficult to continue their traditional crafts, especially in regions where tourism is sporadic or minimal.

Living museums serve as dynamic platforms for the preservation and demonstration of tribal culture, art, and traditions. Unlike traditional museums, which often present static displays, living museums offer interactive experiences that allow visitors to engage directly with cultural practices and daily life activities of tribal communities. These museums provide a unique opportunity for cultural education and appreciation, bridging the gap between the past and the present.

In India, examples like Dakshinachitra in Tamil Nadu and the Tribal Museum in Madhya Pradesh illustrate the successful implementation of living museums. Dakshinachitra has created dedicated spaces for showcasing the cultural heritage of South Indian tribal communities, including traditional homes, artifacts, and crafts. This setup not only provides visitors with a rich context for understanding tribal cultures but also supports the preservation of architectural styles and artisanal skills that are at risk of disappearing.

Similarly, the Tribal Museum in Madhya Pradesh offers insights into the lives of the Gond and Bhil tribes, among others. By displaying a variety of artifacts and hosting interactive sessions with tribal artisans, the museum plays a crucial role in educating the public about the rich cultural tapestry of central India's tribal communities. These museums do more than preserve artifacts; they keep traditions alive, provide employment opportunities, and ensure that knowledge is passed down to future generations.

Way Forward

Tribal art in India is not just a reflection of the country's cultural diversity but also a vibrant testament to its rich historical legacy. As we delve deeper into understanding these art forms, we uncover layers of meaning that reveal the profound connection between India's tribal communities and their environment, their spiritual beliefs, and their social structures. The



Tribal Museum

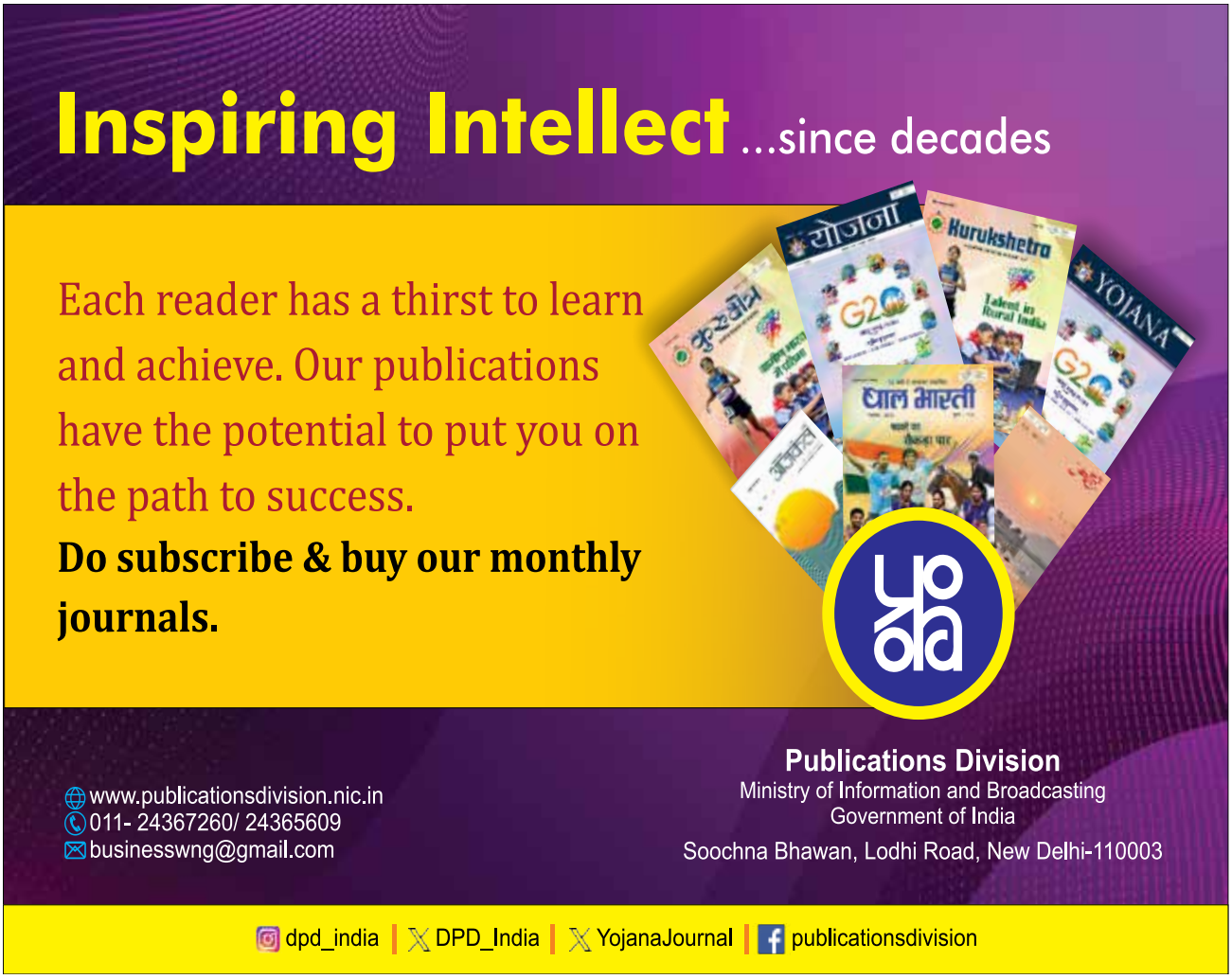
preservation of these art forms is crucial not only for maintaining cultural diversity but also for educating and enriching the global community about sustainable and ethical living practices.

In a world rapidly moving towards cultural homogenisation, the distinctiveness of tribal art challenges us to rethink our approaches to cultural preservation and appreciation. It urges us to adopt more inclusive policies that support the safeguarding of these unique traditions. Governments, cultural organisations, and communities must collaborate to create frameworks that protect and promote tribal art forms. This includes strengthening intellectual property laws, supporting local artisans through subsidies and grants, and enhancing public awareness through education and media.

Moreover, fostering global partnerships can amplify efforts to preserve these cultures. International cultural exchange programs, exhibitions, and collaborations can bring tribal art to a broader audience, ensuring that these practices are not only sustained financially but are also appreciated as essential elements of the global cultural mosaic.

As we move forward, let us commit to being custodians of this incredible cultural heritage. By promoting ethical tourism, supporting living museums, and respecting intellectual property rights, we can help ensure that the vibrant tapestry of tribal art continues to inspire and inform future generations. Through collective effort and shared responsibility, tribal art can transcend being merely a subject of admiration to become a cornerstone of cultural sustainability and global heritage conservation.

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

As a part of their culture heritage, all tribes celebrate various festivals to appease deities and revere mother nature for blessings. Various agricultural activities, like sowing, caring of crops, harvesting etc., are nature or weather dependent for their best results. Hence, any adversity in weather conditions posed a big challenge to ancient agrarian societies for their survival and sustenance. To keep their crops safe from any calamity, they started worshipping the agricultural fields and related deities with songs, dances, and various offerings.

*** Dr. Jagdeep Saxena**

India is home to over 730 scheduled tribes, each with a distinct culture, custom, language, and lifestyle. These special communities primarily inhabit forests and hilly regions across the country, hence often called 'Adivasis'. Depending on where they live, tribal communities have different ways of getting food, like hunting, farming, fishing, or gathering from forest. As an age-old tradition, they maintain a profound relationship with their land, practising sustainable farming methods and holding natural elements like sun, rivers, soil, mountains, etc. in high esteem. As a part of their culture heritage, all tribes celebrate various festivals to appease deities and revere mother nature for blessings. Various agricultural activities, like sowing, caring of crops, harvesting etc.,

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are nature/weather dependent for their best results. Hence, any adversity in weather conditions posed a big challenge to ancient agrarian societies for their survival and sustenance. To keep their crops safe from any calamity, they started worshipping the agricultural fields and related deities with songs, dances, and various offerings. In due course, diverse rituals and traditions originated in various tribal societies for the gratification of mother nature. The agricultural festivals celebrated by tribes in various geographical regions are derived from these popular beliefs and rituals.

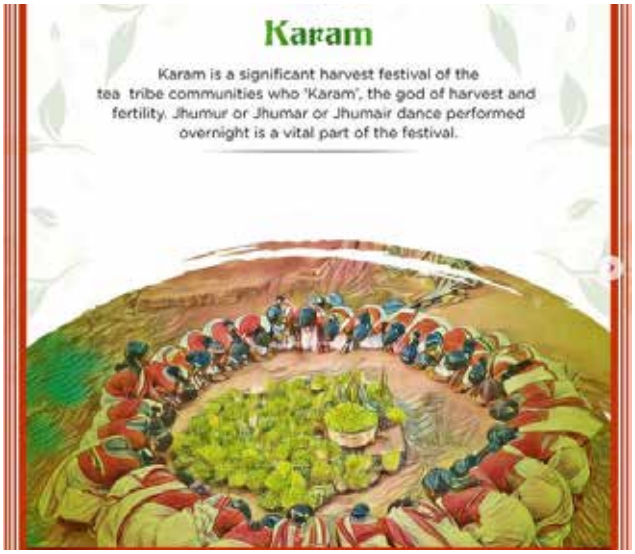
Most of the agricultural festivals are celebrated twice a year, one at the beginning of cultivation and the other at the time of harvest. Generally, these are community celebrations wherein deities are worshipped along with traditional food, music, dances, and much more. Nowadays, tourists are also warmly welcomed into these celebrations where they experience rich and varied tribal culture of India. Beginning from Jammu and Kashmir in the north to Kerala in the south, to Gujarat in the west, and Manipur in the east, tribal agricultural festivals are celebrated in each corner of the states. Such festivals are also part of tribal culture in Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Daman and Diu and Lakshadweep.

Tribes, Traditions and Trends

Madhya Pradesh, the heart of India, is home to over 45 tribes that enhance its cultural diversity and vibrancy. Bhil is the most populous tribe in the state followed by Gond, Kol, Korku, Sahariya, and Baiga. Some of the agricultural festivals are celebrated collectively by some tribes, whereas some events have individual identity of a tribe. Bhagoria Haat or Bhagoria tribal festival is celebrated by Bhils and Bhilalas tribes during the month of March every year. Basically, the festival celebrates completion of harvests in fields. This is one of the oldest festivals of this region greatly enjoyed in Jhabua, Dhar, Alirajpur, and Khargone areas. In addition to dance, music, and colourful attires, Bhagoria is famous for its unique haat (bazaar) where you can get exquisite tribal silver jewellery. A large number of young boys and girls flock the event in their best attires to participate in the unique custom of 'Swayamvar' for choosing life partners of their own choice. Couples elope after choosing their partners and on return are acknowledged as husband and wife after performing the set rituals of the tribe. Prospective brides and grooms smear 'Gulal' on faces of each other to express consent for marriage.



Bhagoria Tribal Festival



Karam Festival

Karma or Karam is a festival largely celebrated among tribes of Madhya Pradesh, Jharkhand, Odisha, Chhattisgarh, West Bengal, Bihar, and Assam. It is dedicated to the worship of Karam-Lord/God to seek his blessings for good harvest and health. Munda, Ho, Oraon, Bagal, Baiga, Kharia, Kudmi, Lohra, and Korwa are major tribes which celebrate it on the 'Ekadashi' (11th day) of 'Purnima' (Full Moon) in the Hindu month of 'Bhadon' (August-September). Rituals of Karma festival have deep roots and connection with farming. Young girls sow seeds of nine types of crops in a basket and take care of it for 7-9 days. Later, these seedlings are offered to the deity. Prior to festival, villagers go to nearby forest in procession to collect branches of Karam tree, which are transplanted at community places for worship. Generally, young girls carry tree branches while singing and dancing throughout the way. Unmarried girls remain on fast on the worship day believing it will ensure good harvest throughout the year, and will be blessed with good husbands as well. The Karma festival delivers a message that trees which sustain the environment must be worshipped, saved and planted more and more.

Hareli is a very popular tribal festival of Chhatisgarh dedicated to crop harvests, trees and greenery in general. It is celebrated mainly by Gond tribe with great pomp and show on the new moon day in the month 'Shravan' (July-August). The Goddess 'Kutki Dai' is worshipped during this festival to seek blessings for good monsoon and bumper crops. Farmers place branches of Bhelwa tree on their respective fields and pray for protection of crops. They also hang branches of Neem tree on the entrance of their homes due to its medicinal properties and power toward off diseases and insects. Hareli festival is also marked by the ritual 'Pat Jatra' that embraces worship of Sal tree wood. Locally known as 'Thurlu Kotla' or 'Tika Pata', the Sal wood is collected from the forest and puja is performed through various traditional rituals. The wood is generally collected from the Machkot or Bilori Forest of the Bastar region and rituals take place in front of Danteswari temple in Jagdalpur town. After the puja, the sal wood is used for making the tools such as hammer etc., and later, these tools are used for making chariot which is pulled by the tribals during the nine days of Navratri. Pat Jatra is a way to honour the significance of wood and forests in the lives of tribal people. In Uttarakhand, Harela festival is celebrated on the pattern of Hareli to mark the beginning of sowing season. The word Harela translates to 'day of green' or 'day of greenery' in the local language, which signifies its importance as an agricultural festival celebrated in the month of Shravan (July). Local farmers treat it as an auspicious day to begin the sowing cycle in their fields. As a ritual, the head of family sows five to seven types of seeds (maize, sesame, black gram, mustard, etc.) in bowls made of leaves or bamboo sticks 10 days before the festival. On the day of Harela, the seedlings are offered to Lord Shiva and Goddess Parvati to seek their blessing for the ensuing farming season. After worship, farmers begin sowing seeds in their fields. Of late, people have taken up this opportunity for mass-scale planting of sampling to enhance greenery in the region. Traditionally, Harela is also a festival dedicated to environmental conservation and celebration of bonding of humans with nature. Besides its great popularity in Kumaon region, Harela is observed as Mol-Sankranti or Rai-Sagran in some areas of Garhwal region, Uttarakhand. Harela is popular as Hariyali or Rhiyali in the Himachal Pradesh regions of Kangra, Shimla and Sirmour, and as Dakhrail in Jubbal and Kinnaur.

Farming, Festivities and Fanfare

A study at Seethammapeta Mandal (Srikakulam, Andhra Pradesh) tribal areas indicates tribals celebrate most of the festivals with respect to the crop grown at particular season and throughout the year. Savara and Jatapu are the two major tribes of the region engaged mainly in farming and collection of produce from forests

A New Beginning : Bihan Mela

Tribals, supported by external group, have recently included new festivals/ melas etc. in their calendar of traditional festivities, especially in the field of agriculture. One such event is Bihan Mela which is being celebrated by Kondh tribe of Odisha since 2019. Literally meaning seed festival, it is a celebration of the indigenous crops and varieties grown in the region, especially in Nayagarh district. Post-green revolution, farmers of Kondh tribe abandoned many traditional crops which were naturally resistant to diseases and pests. They were well suited to region's climate as well, and thus had scope to face climate change scenario. Taking note of this situation, a non-profit organsation working with the tribe on forest rights and agroecological farming initiated Bihan Mela with the objective to promote traditional varieties and conventional farming practices such as mixed cropping. Seed festival is organised in the month of December, and is almost like a traditional haat (market) where farmers used to exchange seeds. 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 facilitate the exchange and increase availability of indigenous seeds, the organisation set up a seed bank in Raisar village in 2019 itself. The bank, with active participation of farmers, collects and preserves indigenous seeds from across Kondh villages and lends those out to farmers for cultivation. Initially, bank had only 12 varieties of paddy, but now it has grown into a large store of 62 varieties of paddy, four varieties of millets, five varieties of pulses, and eight types of vegetables. The farmers have to return double the quantity of seeds or two different seed varieties within the first year of cultivation. The bank is open to farmers of Kondh tribe and has benefitted over 750 families. Motivated by the success, more seed banks are in offing.

for livelihood. In most of the festivals, tribals worship their traditional deities in association with agricultural and forest mining produce. In January, tribals celebrate Makar Sankranthi as traditional 'Redgram Week Festival' with a set of their own rituals and customs. Newly harvested crop of redgram is first offered to God with prayers, and then cooked for family. Tribals celebrate Shiva Ratri in the month of February as festival of flowers, locally called Poola Pandaga. During the festival, tribals collect flowers of all kinds from forest for worshipping the Goddess. Then onwards, flowers are used for personal and commercial purposes. Crop seeds and tamarind festivals are celebrated in the month of March. They also worship mother earth, forest and water in April in form of Perantal celebrations. Prayers and rituals are performed for the welfare of these natural elements which are integral to their existence. Tribals celebrate Seeds festival in the May prior to sowing and cultivation. Agri-utensils and tools are worshipped and seeds are collected from each family for offering to the deity. Later, seeds are distributed to farmers as a token of permission from the God to begin sowing and cultivation. Two festivals are celebrated in the month of June mainly to rejoice on the new crop of mango. During Mokkalu festival in July, tribals pluck out the unwanted plants from their fields to prevent crop diseases and increase productivity. In August, tribals celebrate Plough Week prior to ploughing in their fields. Plough is neatly cleaned with turmeric powder, decorated with bangles, etc. and worshipped before taking out in their fields. The festival held in the month of September aims to get rid of mosquitoes by using flowers of the forest. Tribals celebrate Durga Puja by decorating all the tools, weapons, utensils, furniture, etc. with turmeric powder. Generally held in October, it is followed by Nandamma Goddess festival which celebrates bringing of harvested crops from fields. November is the month during which tribals exhibit their physical skills by playing various games. Kanda festival begins in the month of December and culminates in the January as Redgram Week. Tribals of this region celebrate festivals for the most consumed crop or produce that is directly helpful and gainful to their livelihood.

North-East India is one of the most culturally rich regions of the country owing to large number of tribes which inhabit its forests and hills. Agriculture is the mainstay of tribal economy, hence, most of their festivals, customs and rituals revolve around various farming operations, from sowing to post-harvest procedures. In Assam, Mising is the major tribe which celebrates two major agricultural festivals namely Ali-Aye-Ligang and Porag. Former marks the beginning of cultivation, while latter is a post-harvest festival. Ali-Aye-Ligang is celebrated on the first Wednesday of the month of Phalgun. It is customary to prepare rice and various curries on the occasion, but oil is not used in any of the recipe. According to a popular belief, the crops get dried or diminished before they are reaped if oil is used. Sowing is done in the fields with tribal songs and dances, which depict various farming and hunting operations. Before sowing operations, tribal play a special type of drum in fields as a mandatory ritual. If this drum is not played, tribal believe, seeds will not germinate and grow properly. Porag is celebrated with rejoice and joy as a post-harvest festival in the months of Aghan and Phalgun. Generally, villagers celebrate it after a gap of 3-4 years as per their convenience. Also known as Nora Siga Bihu, it is a 5-day long festival in which mostly young boys and girls participate by indulging in tribal music, dance and food. The women who are married to other villagers are also invited for the feast along with their husbands. This festival strengthens unity and ensures cultural exchanges among different villages.

Agriculture is the main source of sustenance and livelihood for Naga community which consists of 17 tribes dwelling in various parts of Nagaland. They celebrate various agricultural activities as festivals such as the sowing of seeds, cleaning of fields after sowing, and completion of harvest. Aelong festival is celebrated after sowing of new seeds in the fields to seek divine blessings for bumper harvest. Celebrations continue for five days (1-6 April) every year mainly by Konyak tribe. They indulge in tribal dance and music and worship the cult of fertility. As a central ritual, people decorate a bamboo pole in front of village and the village priest performs customary puja. After sowing seeds and cleaning the fields, people of Ao tribe celebrate Moatsii Mong festival with great pomp and show. Locally known as Moatsu, the 3-day long festival is celebrated annually in the first week of May. Tribal people regard it as the happiest time of year due to festivities around it. As part of the custom, they light a fire, called Sangpangtu, and sit around it in their best traditional attires. Women



Bihu Festival



Losar Festival

serve traditional food and drinks, which is followed by song, dance, and story-telling sessions. The celebrations conclude with a game of tug of war between men and women. During the festival, tribals pray and express their gratitude to forests for their bounty and ancestors for their blessings. Dimansa tribe of Nagaland celebrate Bushu Dima festival on the completion of January harvest. People of the tribe offer their yield of paddy field to their supreme god, called Brai Sibrai Madai. It is a 3-day long festival in which drumming, dancing and feasting are integral. Sports and games are also part of it. Nowadays, guests and tourists are also welcomed to participate on the last day of festival.

In Arunachal Pradesh, Myoko is one of the most important festivals of the Apatani tribe. The Festival is celebrated from 20th March to 19th April every year, but the actual preparations start from October. This festival reinforces their age-old belief that by performing the rituals they can ensure fertility, both in the fields and its people. Idu Mishmi tribe celebrates Reh festival every year from 1st to 3rd February to seek prosperity of family and crops. Various deities are invoked during festival for seeking their blessings. Mopin is an agricultural festival celebrated by the Galo tribe of the Central Arunachal Pradesh. Celebrated on 5th April every year, rice flour is applied to fellow revelers' faces as rice is the main staple food of this tribe. Nyish tribe of the region celebrates Nyokum festival every year on the 26th February. The festival is closely linked with sowing, as during the festival, the goddess of prosperity is worshipped with offerings for a bountiful harvest.

Losar is one of the most popular festivals of Sikkim celebrated by local communities. Festival begins when farmers complete harvesting and come together to celebrate their hard work and patience. However, Losar is basically praying for a good harvest in the current new year. Sakewa is another famous festival of Sikkim celebrated by mostly Kirat Khamba Rai community. This festival is celebrated as a homage to Mother Earth for the blessings in many forms. Losoong or Noomsong festival celebrates the end of reaping season of crops. It also marks Sikkimese new year.

Tribals believe much in nature, and hence, in most of the festivals worship five natural elements. As health of these elements are critical for agriculture, tribals show their commitment for the conservation through many rituals and customs performed during festivals. Along with deities, tribals also worship their agricultural and hunting tools which they make themselves by using local natural resources. Such festivals also exhibit a very high degree of unity as participation is found from every small village, every house and every person in the family. With increasing emphasis on tourism and influx of tourists in tribal region, these festivals are gaining popularity among general public. It's a good sign for progress and expansion of tribal culture. ❑

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Tribal Folk Dances of Northeast India

Home to over two hundred tribes and ethnic communities, India's North-eastern Region is often referred to as a region of festivals, music and dance. Every tribe or community has its own set of distinct festivals, most of which centre round sowing, harvesting and the New Year. Folk dances are an inseparable part of these festivals which not only display the culture of the tribes, but also reflect their colourful fabrics, musical instruments, and above all, their intrinsic love for Nature.

* **Dr. Samudra Gupta Kashyap**

Home to over two hundred tribes and ethnic communities, the northeast region of India is often referred to as a region of festivals, music and dance. Every tribe or community has its own set of distinct festivals, most of which centres around sowing, harvesting and New Year. Here is a glimpse of a few folk dances from different states of the region.

Arunachal Pradesh

Over 25 tribes and 100 sub tribes of Arunachal Pradesh are broadly divided into two categories – Buddhists and non-Buddhists or followers of various indigenous faiths. For the Nishyie people who follow an indigenous faith, the most important folk dance is Rikham Pada. A medley of dances and songs performed during every community festival, the dancers wear elaborate cane headgears, and an antique waist-belt

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made of beaten bell metal (which is a family heirloom handed down through generations). The songs are in ballad form, sung in honour of gods and ancestors, as also some love stories.



For the Adi tribe, Ponung is the most important folk dance. Part of the Solung festival to seek a bumper crop, this dance is exclusively performed by women with one male person called Miri guiding them. While the Miri shakes a Yoksa (sword) to make a rattling sound, the women gather around him in a beautifully arranged pattern repeating the same lines in a chorus initiated by him and move around in unison following the rhythm of the song, making delicate movement of the hands. The women wear a Gale (traditional skirt), a Galup (traditional top or blouse), cover their heads with a piece of conical shaped cloth and wear various traditional ornaments. In contrast, Delong is an all-male Adi folk dance performed during the Etor festival. This dance depicts making or mending of fences around village farms to protect them from animals.

Among the Apatani people, Daminda, a folk dance, is performed to mark the beginning and end of Dree festival. Performed by women, it depicts various aspects of traditional agriculture, and is marked by wonderful footwork and hand gestures of the dancers.

The Monpa people, who profess Mahayana Buddhism, have twenty-two different types of folk dances called Cham, some of which are performed during Torgya, a three-day monastic festival. Among them, Pha Cham is performed by a single person in a monk's dress wearing a *pha* (boar) mask. It is performed to pacify the gods and spirits so that perfect conditions could be created for observing the Torgya festival and usher in good health and prosperity. Shanag cham, on the other hand, is performed by twelve dancers who represent Tantric priests, wearing *phodka (*a richly embroidered gown flowing to the ankles) and *pang kheb* (a colourful embroidered apron), apart from a black, broad-brimmed hat called Shanag. Gon-Nyin Cham is performed by eleven dancers each holding a ritual bell in one hand and *damaru* in the other and represent *dakinis* who are protectors of the Buddhist faith. This dance is generally performed during the construction of a monastery or installation of a holy statue, in order to ward off demons who create obstacles to the advancement of the Buddhist doctrine.

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 performed by young Bodo women dressed in traditional attire like *dokhona* (body wrapper) and *phali* (scarf) to the rhythm of the *kham* (drum), *serja* (a string instrument) and *siphung* (flute) played by young men. It is generally performed in Spring to pray for the community's prosperity and well-being. The dancers look like butterflies when they hold up their *phali* sideways and flutter to the beat of the music. Another spring time Bodo folk dance called Bardwisikhla is performed to welcome the wind goddess.



Bagrumba Dance, Assam

Among the Mising people, Gumrag Soman is the most popular folk dance, which is part of Ali-a-ye Ligang (the Springtime seed-sowing festival). Young men dressed in traditional *mibu galug* (sleeveless jacket),



Khasi Damsels Taking Part in Nongkrem Dance, Meghalaya

gonro ugon (loin cloth) and *dumer* (turban), and women dressed in *ege* (lower garment flowing to the ankles) and *ribi* (upper body wrapper) dance to the rhythm of amorous Oinitom songs to the accompainment of drums, cymbals and flutes. In the Karbi tribal community, Ritnong Chingdi, Lingpum Sokchon and Hacha Hekan are folk dances associated with agriculture, while Nimso Kerung and Banjar Kekan are associated death rituals. The Karbis believe that it was a divine personality called Rangsina Sarpo who had first taught them to dance and sing.

Meghalaya

In Meghalaya, the Khasis perform Nongkrem dance during the Nongkrem festival. Dedicated to the indigenous deity called U Lei Shyllong, the dance is performed by young women clad in their best colourful traditional jewelry who move gracefully in synchronised patterns to the rhythmic beats of drums and flutes.

Wangala or the Hundred Drums dance is part of the Wangala Festival of the Garos held to mark the end of a period of toil, and pray for a good harvest. While the men beat the drums, other men and women dance in two parallel queues, moving forward in rhythmic accord to the music of traditional drums, gongs and flutes, punctuated by the sonorous music of a primitive flute made of buffalo horn.

Mizoram

The Mizo folk dances too are expressions of their joyful carefree spirit. Almost all Mizo folk dances like Cheraw, Khuallam, Chhieh Lam, Chai, Rallu Lam, Solakia, Sarlamkai and Par Lam are closely related to the agricultural cycle. Cheraw, often also called Bamboo dance, is the oldest Mizo dance believed to have existed even in the 1st century AD. While eight young men hold four pairs of bamboo poles, two crossing the other two, and tap the bamboos open and close in rhythmic beats, young women dancers step alternately in and out from between and across them. It is amazing to see the dancers step in and out to the beats of the bamboos with ease and grace. Watching closely, one will find that the stepping the dancers are sometimes in imitation of movement of birds, sometimes of swaying of trees.

Khuallam – meaning "Dance of the Guest" – is a Mizo folk dance which is part of Khuangchawi, a ceremony comprising of community feasting, dance and music. Invited guests are required to enter the Khuangchawi arena by performing a dance which is called Khuallam. It is generally performed by men who have to wear a particular traditional dress called *Puandum* with red and green stripes and keep pace to the rhythm of a set of gongs which are known as *Darbu*.

Chheih Lam is a dance which embodies the spirit of joy and exhilaration. A group of people sit in a circle and sing a song called Chheih hla which is sung to the beats of a drum or a bamboo tube or just clapping of hands. Only one or two persons take part in the dance, and perform it with various movements of the limbs and body. As the dance reaches its climax, all the people around also join the dance.

Children of Nature as they are, young Mizo men and women on the other hand celebrate the beauty of mountains and rivers through the Par Lam dance. While the girls are dressed in colourful attire with flowers tucked in their hair sing the glory of Nature, a couple of boys play a gong and a string musical instrument. The



Chheih Lam

dance is slow yet very attractive, and mainly comprises of movement of their hands as if resembling the wave of a flowing river.

Manipur

Manipur has a number of tribal communities. For the Mao tribe, Asharai Odo is a colourful folk dance known for its vocal rhythms and mellifluous movements. The Tangkhul people on the other hand consider Luivat Pheizak as their most important folk dance. Depicting different stages of cultivation and the simple tribal lifestyle, this dance is performed during all traditional festivals like Luira Phanit (seed sowing festival), Manei Phanit (festival of tools and equipments), and Chumphu (harvest festival). While both men and women wear traditional attire, some men also hold spears and swords as they dance to the rhythm of *Phung* (drum), *Tala* (trumpet), *Paren* (bamboo pipe) and *Sipa* (flute).

Among the Kabui tribals, Shim Lam or Fly Dance and Kit Lam are two most popular folk dances. Shim Lam is performed during the Gang-Ngai festival and depicts the story of Tajuibon, a flying insect with shiny wings, which moves around from one flower to another drinking nectar. Kit Lam dance, on the other hand, is a harvest festival in which the rhythmic dance imitates the movement of the crickets.

Nagaland

Home to seventeen major and several minor tribes, Nagaland is a land of folk dances. While it is not possible to describe the folk dances of every tribe, here are a few interesting ones.

The most popular folk dance of the Angami tribe is Sovi Kehu. It is a community dance which takes place at an open space in the centre of the village. An elder takes the lead with an "ohh-hoo ohh-hoo" sound, and others follow him in a circular motion. Once a big circle is formed, the leader raises his right hand and makes a small leap jump which all others follow in a rhythmic order. The leader continues with his leap steps, and in every leap the circle becomes smaller and smaller. At one point, the leader takes a complete u-turn and, without breaking the line the circle intertwines back bigger and bigger until it becomes a single big circle again. Once the big circle is complete, the leader signals to end the leap jump, and the dance ends with a big ululation by the whole group in unison.

Yimdongsu Tsungsang is a famous folk dance of the Ao tribe. It is a celebration of heritage and spirituality, and the dancers traverse the village streets in intricate movements, wearing several traditional items like the *Langtem* (loin-cloth adorned with sea shells), *Hokomangzutsu* (sash decorated



Hega Festival, Nagaland



Hornbill Festival, Nagaland

with dyed animal hair, worn diagonally across the chest from right shoulder to waist), *Wamulung* (similar sash worn diagonally from left shoulder to waist), and *Ozumi* (tail feather of the Hornbill bird) etc, with a *dao* (machete) hanging from the waist. With every step, every sway, and every beat of the drum, the village comes alive, reverberating with the pulse of unity and cultural pride.

Among the Chakesang people, Oh Hio is a popular folk dance performed by the men folk during festivals and celebrations. The dancers imitate actions of different birds and animals, like rooster fights, and flapping of wings by the ducks.

Tripura

In Tripura, the Reang tribals perform the Hozagiri dance during Hozagiri festival or Lakshmi puja. While a group of men sign the lyric and play the *Kham* (drum) and *Sumui* (flute), four to six women perform the dance during which they depict the entire cycle of *jhum* (slash-and-burn) cultivation. The Jamatia and Kalai tribes on the other hand perform Garia dance during Garia or Shiva puja, in which young men and women go from house to house, place a symbol of Lord Garia in the middle of the courtyard, and sing and dance in an anti-clockwise circle around it. ❑

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Embracing Diversity Cultural Heritage of Tribes in India



India's tribal communities are custodians of a rich artistic legacy, manifesting in a kaleidoscope of vibrant arts and crafts that captivate the imagination. From the rhythmic strokes of Warli paintings depicting tribal life in Maharashtra to the intricate designs of Gond art narrating mythical tales in Madhya Pradesh, the artistic prowess of these communities is awe-inspiring. Pattachitra scrolls from Odisha unfurl mythological narratives with intricate detail, while tribal jewelry crafted from silver, beads, and shells adorns wearers with symbolic elegance. Bamboo craft from Northeast India weaves tales of sustainability and utility, while Dhokra metal casting from Chhattisgarh immortalizes tribal motifs in timeless metal sculptures.

*** Suman Kumar**

Cultural diversity is essential for fostering a vibrant and inclusive society. It enriches our understanding of the world, promotes tolerance, and encourages respect for different perspectives and ways of life. Embracing cultural diversity promotes creativity and innovation, as diverse viewpoints often lead to novel ideas and solutions to complex problems. Furthermore, it preserves the unique identities and traditions of various communities, contributing to the richness of human heritage. In an increasingly interconnected world, cultural diversity serves as a bridge for building meaningful connections and fostering mutual understanding among people from diverse backgrounds. By recognising and valuing cultural diversity, we can create a more harmonious and equitable global community where all individuals are empowered to express themselves and contribute to collective progress.

UNESCO, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation, has a comprehensive understanding of cultural diversity as a fundamental

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aspect of human societies. According to UNESCO, cultural diversity encompasses not only the tangible aspects of culture such as languages, arts, and traditions but also the intangible aspects such as beliefs, values, and social practices. UNESCO recognises cultural diversity as a source of enrichment for individuals and communities, fostering dialogue, creativity, and mutual respect. Moreover, UNESCO emphasises the importance of safeguarding and promoting cultural diversity as a means to ensure human rights, dignity, and sustainable development. By acknowledging the intrinsic value of cultural diversity and promoting intercultural dialogue, UNESCO aims to build peaceful and inclusive societies where all cultures are respected and celebrated. UNESCO grants The International Fund for Cultural Diversity to support communities to build thriving culture and creative industry.

India is home to a diverse array of tribal communities, with over 700 distinct tribal groups recognised by the government. India's tribal population stood at approximately 104 million people, accounting for around 8% of the country's total population. These tribes, vary significantly in terms of language, culture, customs, and traditions. It is estimated that there are over 400 tribal languages spoken in India. These languages belong to various language families, including Dravidian, Indo-Aryan, Austro-Asiatic, and Tibeto-Burman, reflecting the diverse origins and historical migrations of India's tribal populations.

Tribal communities in India despite facing challenges such as marginalisation, economic disparities, and loss of traditional lands, tribal cultures continue to thrive, preserving their unique customs, languages, and art forms. The cultural scenario of India is greatly enriched by the vibrant traditions of its tribal communities, which encompass a wide array of music, dance, art, and rituals deeply rooted in nature and indigenous beliefs. Efforts are being made by both governmental and non-governmental organisations to recognise and promote tribal cultures through initiatives such as cultural festivals, documentation of traditional knowledge, and community-based development projects. However, there remains a need for greater recognition and inclusion of tribal voices in the broader cultural discourse of India, ensuring that their invaluable contributions are acknowledged and celebrated across the nation.



Folk Dance by Mizo Tribes

Among the major tribes of India are the Gonds, found predominantly in central India, known for their vibrant art forms such as painting and music. The Santhals, primarily inhabiting the eastern states, have a rich tradition of music, dance, and oral literature. In the northeastern region, tribes like the Nagas, Mizos, and Khasis maintain their distinct languages, customs, and traditional governance systems. The Bhils and the Gujjars, residing mainly in western and northern India, have a strong connection to agriculture and pastoralism, reflected in their lifestyle and folklore. Additionally, the Adivasis of Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh, including tribes like the Oraon, Munda, and Ho, have a deep-rooted cultural identity tied to their ancestral lands and forest resources.

Indian tribal communities speak a multitude of languages and dialects, reflecting the country's rich linguistic diversity. Some of the major languages and dialects spoken by Indian tribes include Santali, spoken by the Santhal tribe primarily in Jharkhand, West Bengal, Odisha, and Bihar; Gondi, spoken by the Gond tribe in central India, particularly in states like Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Maharashtra, Telangana, and Andhra Pradesh; Khasi, spoken by the Khasi tribe in Meghalaya; Mizo, spoken by the Mizo tribe in Mizoram; Bhili, spoken by the Bhil tribe mainly in Rajasthan, Gujarat, and Madhya Pradesh; and Oraon, spoken by the Oraon tribe in Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Bihar, and West Bengal. These languages and dialects, along with many others, contribute to the rich cultural tapestry of India's tribal communities, each with its own unique linguistic heritage and cultural identity.

Indian tribal folklore is a treasure trove of myths, legends, and oral traditions passed down through generations within indigenous communities across the

country. Among the major tribal folklore of India are the rich oral epics of tribes like the Gonds, Santhals, and Khasis, which narrate tales of creation, heroism, and supernatural beings. These epics often serve as a repository of cultural values and beliefs, offering insights into tribal cosmology and the relationship between humans and nature. Additionally, Indian tribal folklore is replete with enchanting folk songs, ballads, and storytelling traditions that celebrate the triumphs and struggles of tribal life, as well as offering moral lessons and entertainment. These folklore traditions play a vital role in preserving the cultural heritage of Indian tribes, fostering a sense of identity and belonging within their communities, and serving as a bridge to connect the past with the present. Popular tribal singers, musicians, and bands are popular among tribal communities.

India's tribal folklore is a kaleidoscope of rich narratives, each intricately woven with cultural symbols and ancestral wisdom. Among these cherished tales are legends like "The Legend of Thakur Jiu" from the Santhal tribe, depicting the heroic deeds of their revered figure. The Bhil tribe venerates "The Story of Pithoro," a deity synonymous with protection and fertility. In Gond folklore, the epic of "Sing Bonga" reigns supreme, embodying the spiritual essence of nature and creation. Meanwhile, the Munda tribe shares the saga of "Langhan Baba," a mythical figure of extraordinary abilities. Across the Khasi hills, the myth of "U Thlen" serves as a cautionary tale of greed and consequence. In Mizo folklore, "The Legend of Pu Lallula" entertains with its clever trickster antics. The Naga community reveres "The Saga of Pu Jabi," a testament to courage and resilience. Santal tradition honours "The Story of Marang Buru," their divine creator and protector. Oraon folklore speaks of "The Myth of Bera," a wise spirit guiding their path. Lastly, the Ho tribe celebrates "The Legend of Thakkar Bapa," a beacon of strength and wisdom. These tales, intertwined with tribal identities, illuminate the cultural richness and spiritual depth of India's indigenous heritage.

Tribal communities in India have made significant contributions to the country's music industry. Instruments like drums, flutes, stringed instruments, and indigenous percussion are commonly used in tribal music. The influence of tribal music can be seen in Bollywood films, where composers often incorporate tribal rhythms and melodies into film scores and songs, adding a rustic and authentic flavour to the music. Teejan Bai from Chattisgarh, Tetseo Sisters and Rewben Mashangva from Nagaland, Mukund Lal Nayak, Nand Lal Nayak from Jharkhand, Panchuna Rabha from Assam, Tseshu Lhamo (Ladakh), Sonam Tshering Lepcha, Naren Gurung and Hilda Mit Lepcha from Sikkim are some examples of popular artists from different tribes who captivate the audience who are unknown to their language.

In Indian cinema, several memorable musical compositions, dancing items and jungles scenes have drawn inspiration from tribal life, adding depth and authenticity to the cinematic experience. Composers like A.R. Rahman, Vishal Bhardwaj, and Sanjay Leela Bhansali have masterfully blended tribal rhythms, melodies, and instrumentation into their songs, creating a fusion of traditional and contemporary sounds. Songs like "Jiya Jale" from Dil Se and "Dil Gira Dafatan" from Delhi-6 feature haunting melodies infused with tribal beats, while "Rangabati" from Kaun Kitne Paani Mein and "Genda Phool" from Delhi-6 incorporate folk elements from Odisha and West Bengal, respectively. Even in children's movies like The Jungle Book, Vishal Bhardwaj's "Jungle Jungle Baat Chali Hai" captures the essence of the jungle with its tribal-inspired music. These compositions not only enrich the cinematic narrative but also pay homage to the cultural heritage and diversity of India's tribal communities, ensuring their voices resonate across the silver screen. It is also true that films have mostly presented tribal culture as colourful variety, not as powerful thematic content.

Tribals have a significant presence in Indian theatre. Several contemporary theatre groups and playwrights have incorporated themes related to tribal life, culture, and struggles into their productions, shedding light on issues such as land rights, displacement, and identity politics faced by tribal communities. These productions provide a platform for tribal voices to be heard and for audiences to gain insight into their lived experiences. The presence of tribals in Indian theatre is a testament to their resilience, creativity, and cultural vitality, enriching the theatrical landscape with their diverse narratives and performance traditions. In Indian dramas, tribals are often portrayed as integral characters, reflecting the socio-political complexities and cultural diversity of the country. Plays like "Sonajhuri" by Bijon Bhattacharya delve into the struggles of tribal communities against exploitation and oppression, shedding light on issues



Aadi Mahotsav

of land rights and displacement. Similarly, plays like Nagamandala (Girish Karnad), Jasma Oden (Shanta Gandhi), Chanda Bedni (Alakhnandan), Gayatri Pashu (Bhanu Bharti), Bheema Bhil, Agni Tiriya (Ravindra Bharati), Dharti Abhaa (Hrishikesh Sulabh), Hirma Ki Amar Kahani (Habib Tanvir) explore the socio-economic vulnerability of tribals and the clash between tradition and modernity. In films like Satyajit Ray's "Hirak Rajar Deshe," tribals are depicted as marginalised groups manipulated by those in power, showcasing the complexities of power dynamics in society. Through these dramas, tribals emerge as central figures, their stories serving as a lens through which to examine broader themes of identity, injustice, and resistance within Indian society. Habib Tanvir, Ratan Thiyam, H. Kanhailal, Madhusudan Debbarma, Jitrai Hansda, Sukumar Tudu, Shukracharya Rabha, Pabitra Rabha, Munna Lohar are explorers of tribal content in dramatic arts.

A myriad of traditional dramas that have originated from these indigenous communities. From the Santal tribe comes "Pirama," a tale of bravery and leadership, while the Gonds present "Karmabai," depicting struggles against injustice. The Bodos perform "Laokhowa" during their New Year festival, celebrating themes of love and nature, while the Koya tribe's "Hudhud" narrates the adventures of a mythical bird. Pandavani, a storytelling form of the Gonds, retells episodes from the Mahabharata, and Yakshagana from the Tulu-speaking regions combines dance, music, and dialogue to depict Hindu mythology. Ho drama "Jaduranga" explores love and the supernatural, while Santal drama "Gandha Madana" delves into themes of love and betrayal. Bhil tribe's "Bhawariya" emphasises bravery and social justice, and Oraon tribe's "Hachchiya" celebrates love and community life. These dramas not only entertain but also preserve and showcase the vibrant cultural heritage of India's tribal communities.

India's cultural landscape is dotted with vibrant celebrations and festivals that pay homage to the rich and diverse identities of its tribal communities. The National Tribal Festival (Aadi Mahotsav) and Tribal Festival of India (Tribal Odyssey) serve as showcases for the myriad traditions, arts, and cuisines of indigenous tribes from across the country. In Chhattisgarh, the Bastar Dussehra Festival celebrates tribal rituals and customs, while Nagaland's Hornbill Festival fosters inter-tribal cultural exchange and solidarity. Meghalaya's Wangala Festival and Mizoram's Mim Kut Festival honour tribal heritage with harvest rituals, music, and dance. Arunachal Pradesh's Ziro Festival of Music and West Bengal's Poush Mela highlight the artistic talents of tribal communities, while Jharkhand's Karam Festival and Mizoram's Cheraw Dance Festival offer glimpses into tribal spirituality and cultural practices. These celebrations not only preserve tribal traditions but also promote understanding, appreciation, and respect for the diverse cultural mosaic that is India's tribal heritage.

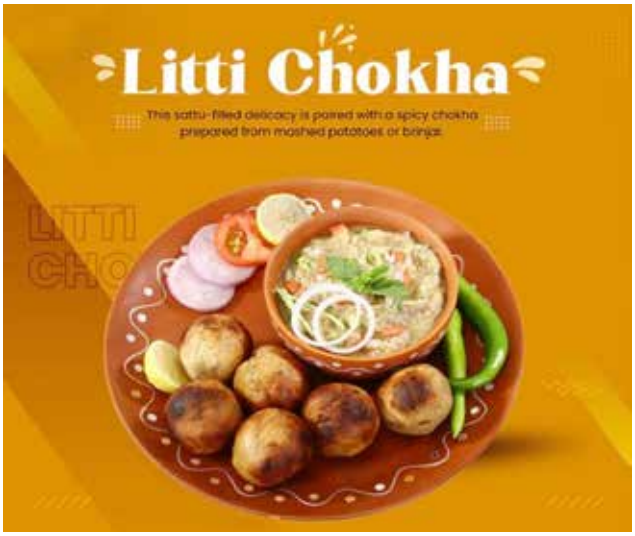
From the intricate tie-and-dye patterns of Pochampally Ikat to the vibrant floral motifs of Phulkari embroidery, each textile carries the stories and symbols of its tribal creators. Ornate silver jewelry, crafted by skilled artisans across the country, adorns tribal men and women with intricate necklaces, earrings, bracelets, and anklets, each piece telling tales of



Phulkari Embroidery

tradition and heritage. Meanwhile, Dokra jewelry, with its rustic charm and ancient technique, captures the essence of tribal craftsmanship, while terracotta jewelry showcases the earthy beauty of clay adorned with tribal motifs. Traditional costumes like the lugade saree of Maharashtra's Gond tribe and the ghagra choli of Rajasthan's tribal women are testaments to the vibrant colors and intricate designs that define tribal attire. Handwoven shawls from Himachal Pradesh to Manipur bear witness to the skillful artistry of tribal weavers, with each thread woven with cultural pride. Body decorations, from elaborate tattoos worn by Naga warriors to the delicate henna designs adorning the hands of Gujarati tribal brides, serve as expressions of identity, spirituality, and beauty. And as accessories like tribal bags, hats, footwear, and belts showcase the ingenuity and resourcefulness of tribal craftsmanship, they also reflect the deep-rooted connection between tribes and their natural surroundings. These Indian textiles, ornaments, costumes, and body decorations not only celebrate the rich cultural heritage of India's tribal communities but also serve as living reminders of their resilience, creativity, and enduring legacy.

India's tribal cuisines offer a tantalising glimpse into the rich culinary heritage of the country's indigenous communities. Bamboo shoot curry from the Northeast, flavoured with indigenous spices, tantalises the taste buds with its unique aroma. Naga cuisine showcases pork cooked with axone, a fermented soybean paste, adding depth and complexity to the dish. Meanwhile, Sao Aloo from the Santhal tribe offers a comforting blend of potatoes, mustard oil, and local spices. In Mizoram, bamboo steamed fish highlights the creative use of natural resources, while red ant chutney from the Gond tribe provides a tangy and spicy accompaniment to meals. Bhil cuisine introduces Mahua flower curry, celebrating the bounty of nature with its floral essence. Litti Chokha, a staple of Adivasi communities, brings together roasted wheat dough balls with spiced gram flour, served with flavourful accompaniments. Sisunak saag from the Garhwali tribes showcases foraged greens cooked with mustard oil and spices, while rice beer, brewed by various tribal communities, adds a festive touch to celebrations. These dishes not only tantalise the taste buds but also serve as a testament to the culinary ingenuity, cultural richness, and connection to nature that define India's tribal cuisines.



India's tribal communities cherish their cultural identity through vibrant designs of traditional clothing. Phanek and Innaphi grace Manipuri women with elegance, while Pherans cocoon Kashmiris in warmth and beauty. The Lugade wraps Gond women in Maharashtra in a riot of colours, and the Sari drapes Bhil women in Rajasthan with grace. Gagra Cholis bedeck Garhwali women in Uttarakhand with mirror work, while Tribal Shawls envelop Naga men and women in warmth and tradition. Santal men stride confidently in Dhotis, while Munda men opt for the simplicity of Loincloths. Lungis adorn the waists of tribal men across India, and Gamuchas add a touch of tradition to Oraon attire. The Angami Naga Shawl exudes elegance, and Mekhela Chadors from Assam speak of timeless grace. Panches add flair to Tulu men's attire, while Lambani Skirts dazzle with their colours. Pattu Pavadai graces Irula girls with charm, and Santhal men don Jhunghas with pride. Himachali Caps from the Gaddi tribe add a dash of whimsy, and Banjara women flaunt their Kanjaris with flair. Khasi men sport Kupiahs with panache. These traditional garments not only adorn the bodies of India's tribal communities but also weave together a tapestry of culture, tradition, and identity that is both timeless and resplendent.

Contemporary fashion embraces the vibrant and eclectic styles of tribal clothing, seamlessly blending traditional aesthetics with modern trends. From Tribal Print Dresses adorned with intricate patterns to Tribal Print Tops featuring bold designs, fashionist as have embraced the allure of tribal-inspired fashion. Tribal Embroidered Jackets add a touch of artisanal craftsmanship to outerwear, while Tribal Print Skirts and Tribal Print Pants make a statement with their eye-

catching prints. Accessories like statement necklaces, earrings, and handbags featuring tribal motifs complement outfits with an exotic flair. Tribal Print Scarves and Tribal Print Swimwear offer versatile options for adding tribal-inspired touches to any ensemble. Meanwhile, Tribal Print Kimonos provide stylish layering options, and Tribal Print Footwear completes the look with trendy shoes adorned with ethnic patterns. By incorporating elements of tribal fashion into contemporary styles, fashion enthusiasts celebrate the cultural richness and diversity of indigenous tribes while making a bold fashion statement.

India's tribal communities are custodians of a rich artistic legacy, manifesting in a kaleidoscope of vibrant arts and crafts that captivate the imagination. From the rhythmic strokes of Warli paintings depicting tribal life in Maharashtra to the intricate designs of Gond art narrating mythical tales in Madhya Pradesh, the artistic prowess of these communities is awe-inspiring. Pattachitra scrolls from Odisha unfurl mythological narratives with intricate detail, while tribal jewelry crafted from silver, beads, and shells adorns wearers with symbolic elegance. Bamboo craft from Northeast India weaves tales of sustainability and utility, while Dhokra metal casting from Chhattisgarh immortalises tribal motifs in timeless metal sculptures. Each artifact, whether it's the delicate threads of tribal textiles or the earthy allure of tribal pottery, reflects not just artistic mastery but also a deep-rooted connection to cultural heritage and tradition. Through tribal arts and crafts, India's indigenous communities celebrate their identity, preserve their stories, and share their creativity with the world.



Dhokra Metal Casting

The spiritual world of India's tribal communities is a tapestry woven with ancient beliefs, mystical rituals, and a profound connection to nature. For these indigenous groups, spirituality permeates every aspect of life, shaping their worldview and guiding their interactions with the natural and supernatural realms. From the worship of ancestral spirits and tribal deities to reverence for sacred landscapes and natural elements, tribals perceive the divine in the rhythms of the earth and the cycles of life. Rituals and ceremonies, infused with music, dance, and storytelling, serve as conduits for communion with the spiritual realm, seeking blessings, protection, and harmony with the cosmos. Sacred groves, hills, rivers, and forests are sanctuaries where tribals commune with spirits and seek solace in times of need. Through their spiritual practices, tribals cultivate a deep sense of interconnectedness with the world around them, fostering respect for all living beings and honoring the wisdom of their ancestors. In the spiritual world of India's tribals, the sacred and the secular intertwine, offering a glimpse into a profound and timeless understanding of existence.

The imposition of market-driven values onto tribal cultures poses a profound threat to their unique identities and traditions. The pervasive influence of Bollywood's creative culture, fueled by consumerism and commercialisation, undermines the authenticity and richness of tribal heritage. As tribal communities strive to adapt to these dominant narratives, they risk losing their own cultural expressions and wisdom. This homogenisation erodes the diverse tapestry of humanity, replacing it with a standardised and often superficial representation. Moreover, the commodification of tribal art forms for mass consumption exploits their cultural significance, perpetuating a cycle of exploitation and marginalisation. It is imperative to recognise and safeguard the intrinsic value of tribal cultures, preserving their integrity amidst the pressures of market-driven globalisation.

A National Tribal Cultural Policy in India is imperative to honour, preserve, and promote the rich and diverse cultural heritage of the country's tribal communities. These communities possess unique languages, traditions, arts, and customs that contribute to the cultural mosaic of India. Such a policy is crucial for ensuring the preservation and documentation of tribal culture, promoting cultural diversity through festivals and exhibitions, empowering tribal communities through support for artists and artisans, integrating tribal culture into educational curricula, developing cultural infrastructure, supporting research and documentation initiatives, revitalising endangered tribal languages, safeguarding traditional knowledge, facilitating community participation in cultural initiatives, and fostering collaboration and partnership between stakeholders. 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. ❑

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