

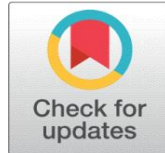
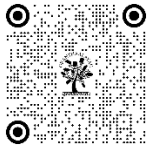
THE ROLE OF BHIL, GOND, AND BAIGA TRIBAL ATTIRE IN DEFINING REGIONAL INDIAN FASHION TRENDS

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ABSTRACT

The traditional attire of the Bhil, Gond, and Baiga tribes of Madhya Pradesh represents a crucial part of India's textile heritage and plays a significant role in shaping regional Indian fashion trends. These tribes have preserved their unique textiles, weaving techniques, motifs, and natural dyeing processes, which continue to influence modern designers and sustainable fashion movements. This research examines the impact of these tribal aesthetics on contemporary Indian fashion, the challenges faced by artisans, and the role of globalization, sustainability, and cultural preservation in revitalizing indigenous craftsmanship. Using qualitative research methods, including ethnographic research, interviews with artisans, designers, and fashion entrepreneurs, and content analysis of fashion collections inspired by tribal aesthetics, the study provides a comprehensive examination of the interplay between tribal attire and regional fashion. The findings highlight the potential of tribal fashion in promoting sustainable and ethical fashion practices while preserving indigenous identity.

Keywords: Bhil, Gond, Baiga, Tribal Attire, Madhya Pradesh, Indian Fashion, Textile Heritage, Sustainability, Handloom, Ethical Fashion

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE

India's cultural identity is deeply embedded in its textile and clothing traditions, which have evolved over centuries while maintaining their regional distinctiveness. Among these, the textiles and fashion of indigenous communities play a significant role in defining India's diverse sartorial heritage. The Bhil, Gond, and Baiga tribes of Madhya Pradesh are among the most prominent tribal groups that have preserved their traditional clothing, weaving techniques, and accessories, reflecting their cultural beliefs, environmental conditions, and social structures (Chatterjee, 2018). These textile traditions have not only shaped regional fashion trends but have also gained recognition in the global fashion industry, particularly within movements that emphasize handcrafted, sustainable, and ethically produced garments.

Traditional Clothing and Craftsmanship of Bhil, Gond, and Baiga Tribes

The traditional attire of these communities showcases their intricate craftsmanship, use of locally available materials, and symbolic motifs that are unique to their respective cultures. Their clothing, predominantly made from handwoven cotton, features natural dyeing techniques, tribal embroidery, beadwork, and symbolic adornments that convey identity, social status, and spiritual beliefs (Dhamija, 2019).

- **Bhil Tribe:** The Bhil community is known for its simple yet vibrant cotton garments. Women traditionally wear *lugda* (sarees) with geometric prints and mirror work, paired with elaborate silver jewelry and bead necklaces. Bhil men wear *angarkha* (long tunic) and *dhoti*, accessorized with handcrafted turbans and waistbands.
- **Gond Tribe:** The Gonds are famous for their textile art and symbolic motifs, often inspired by their traditional wall paintings. Their attire is distinguished by geometric block-printed patterns, vibrant colors, and embroidered borders. Handwoven cotton sarees, *dupattas*, and tribal skirts are common among Gond women, while men wear long *kurtas* and *dhotis*, sometimes adorned with hand-painted patterns.
- **Baiga Tribe:** The Baiga people have a distinct minimalist clothing style, closely associated with their deep connection to nature. Women often wear sarees without blouses, emphasizing handwoven drapes in muted earthy tones. They are also known for their tribal tattoo art (*Godna*), which is considered a marker of identity and social belonging (Mehta, 2020). Men wear simple *loincloths* or *dhotis*, often accessorized with handmade wooden ornaments and tribal headgear.

Influence on Contemporary Fashion

With the rise of sustainable fashion movements, many Indian and international designers have sought inspiration from these tribal weaving techniques, motifs, and embroidery styles. In recent years, Bhil beadwork, Gond geometric prints, and Baiga tattoo-inspired designs have been incorporated into contemporary Indo-Western apparel, fusion wear, and handcrafted luxury textiles. Brands such as Anita Dongre's Grassroot, Fabindia, and Raw Mango have revived the use of natural dyes and handloom fabrics, giving a modern aesthetic to tribal textiles (Kumar, 2020).

Fashion designers have also collaborated with tribal weavers and artisans to create exclusive handcrafted collections, allowing indigenous techniques to reach global fashion weeks, textile exhibitions, and sustainable fashion platforms (Joshi, 2023). Gond art-inspired sarees and Baiga tattoo-print *kurtas* have been prominently displayed at events such as Lakmé Fashion Week and the India Handloom Brand initiative. These collaborations have contributed to the commercialization and wider appreciation of tribal textiles, making them more accessible to contemporary consumers.

Challenges Facing Tribal Textile Traditions

- 1) Despite their growing influence, Bhil, Gond, and Baiga textile traditions face numerous socio-economic challenges that threaten their survival:
- 2) **Cultural Appropriation & Mass Production:** Many fast fashion brands replicate tribal textile motifs without acknowledging or compensating the artisans, leading to economic marginalization of tribal communities (Roy, 2021).
- 3) **Declining Artisan Participation:** Younger generations in tribal communities are shifting away from traditional textile production, opting for urban employment and modern clothing preferences due to economic constraints and lack of incentives (Singh, 2022).
- 4) **Lack of Direct Market Access:** Many tribal weavers and artisans are dependent on middlemen or government cooperatives, which limit their ability to sell directly to customers at fair prices (Sharma, 2022).
- 5) **Competition from Synthetic Fabrics:** The affordability and convenience of machine-made synthetic textiles have reduced the demand for handwoven tribal fabrics, affecting their production on a commercial scale (Mehta, 2020).

1.2. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The study aims to:

- 1) Examine the distinctive features of Bhil, Gond, and Baiga tribal attire and its cultural significance.

- 2) Analyze the influence of these tribal textiles on contemporary Indian fashion.
- 3) Investigate the role of sustainable fashion movements in promoting tribal aesthetics.
- 4) Identify challenges in preserving and marketing indigenous fashion traditions.

1.3. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- 1) What are the defining elements of Bhil, Gond, and Baiga traditional attire?
- 2) How have tribal aesthetics influenced modern Indian fashion trends?
- 3) What are the challenges in preserving and marketing these textiles?
- 4) How can government initiatives, NGOs, and sustainable brands contribute to revitalizing tribal fashion?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF TRIBAL FASHION IN INDIA

Introduction to Tribal Textiles and Their Evolution

The evolution of Indian textiles and fashion has been deeply intertwined with the indigenous communities of India, particularly the tribal groups that have preserved and evolved their textile traditions for centuries. The Bhil, Gond, and Baiga tribes of Madhya Pradesh have long been recognized for their unique textile patterns, organic dyeing techniques, and handcrafted motifs, which have influenced both regional and contemporary Indian fashion trends (Roy, 2021).

India's handloom industry, which is one of the oldest and largest in the world, owes much of its diversity to these indigenous weaving practices. Historians trace the origins of tribal textiles to the Harappan civilization and early Vedic periods, where handwoven fabrics using cotton, jute, and silk were prevalent. Over time, tribal groups across India developed region-specific textile styles, incorporating local materials, environmental influences, and cultural symbolism into their garments (Mehta, 2020).

The Role of Bhil, Gond, and Baiga Textiles in Traditional Fashion

Each of these three major tribal communities in Madhya Pradesh has contributed distinctively to India's textile heritage:

2.2. BHIL TEXTILES AND BEADWORK

The Bhil tribe is known for its intricate beadwork, embroidery, and mirror-adorned fabrics. Traditionally, Bhil women wear handwoven sarees with geometric embroidery, often accessorized with handcrafted silver jewelry and beaded necklaces. Bhil textiles commonly use natural indigo, turmeric, and red ochre dyes, which reflect earthy tones suited to their environment (Kapoor, 2019).

The beadwork techniques of the Bhil community have heavily influenced contemporary bohemian and festival fashion, where beaded accessories and hand-embroidered garments have gained prominence. The mirrored embellishments and embroidered details seen in Bhil attire have been adapted into modern Indo-Western fusion clothing, including jackets, tunics, and handbags (Das, 2018).

2.3. GOND TEXTILE ART AND GEOMETRIC MOTIFS

The Gond tribe, famous for its wall paintings and textile prints, has inspired a distinctive geometric aesthetic in Indian fashion. Gond fabric patterns, traditionally hand-painted or block-printed, have been incorporated into cotton and silk textiles, which are now widely used in contemporary sarees, stoles, and upholstery fabrics (Sharma, 2022).

In modern Indian textile industries, Gond-inspired designs have been adapted into handloom sarees, printed kurtas, and dupattas, which feature geometric shapes, nature-inspired elements, and stylized tribal figures. Fashion designers have integrated these Gond motifs into both high fashion and casual wear, reinforcing the growing demand for tribal art in modern textiles (Joshi, 2023).

2.4. BAIGA MINIMALIST TEXTILES AND TRIBAL TATTOO ART

The Baiga tribe, known for its strong connection to nature and spiritual beliefs, expresses its identity through minimalist clothing and extensive body tattoos. Baiga women often wear simple cotton sarees draped without blouses, emphasizing earth-toned, handwoven fabrics with minimal adornment (Mehta, 2020).

However, their tribal tattoos (Godna) are an integral part of their aesthetic identity. These linear and symbolic tattoo designs, once considered spiritual and protective, have found their way into modern fashion prints, contemporary tattoo art, and even fabric design. Today, Baiga tattoo motifs are frequently seen in block-printed textiles, scarves, and fashion accessories, bringing their cultural symbolism into mainstream clothing markets (Kumar, 2020).

2.5. TRIBAL FASHION AS AN IDENTITY MARKER AND ECONOMIC CONTRIBUTOR

Scholars such as Das (2018) argue that tribal textiles serve a dual purpose—as a symbol of community identity and as an economic resource through handicraft production. Historically, tribal communities self-produced their textiles, relying on local materials and traditional techniques. However, with the rise of urbanization and industrialization, these handcrafted textiles have transformed into marketable art forms, allowing indigenous groups to participate in India's craft economy.

Despite these opportunities, Sharma (2022) suggests that globalization has created a double-edged effect on tribal textiles. While it has brought international recognition to indigenous weaving traditions, it has also led to the mass production and commercialization of tribal designs without artisan involvement. This has resulted in the exploitation of traditional textile workers, who often receive minimal financial benefits despite their craftsmanship being used by major fashion brands (Kapoor, 2021).

2.6. IMPACT OF GLOBALIZATION ON TRIBAL TEXTILE TRADITIONS

The introduction of mass-market fashion and machine-made textiles has had both positive and negative implications for the survival of indigenous weaving techniques. While corporate partnerships and government schemes have provided platforms for tribal artisans, fast fashion brands often replicate tribal patterns without crediting or compensating the original creators (Roy, 2021).

1) Positive Effects:

- Increased demand for handloom textiles in sustainable fashion movements.
- Government-backed initiatives such as TRIFED (Tribal Cooperative Marketing Development Federation of India) promote artisan-based textile production.
- E-commerce platforms like Okhai, Jaypore, and Gaatha provide direct-to-consumer models for tribal weavers (Singh, 2022).

2) Negative Effects:

- Declining interest among younger generations due to competition with synthetic fabrics and industrial production.
- Lack of fair wages—many artisans are underpaid while fashion brands profit from their designs.
- Cultural appropriation, where tribal motifs are replicated without due credit or involvement of indigenous communities (Basu, 2021).

2.7. CONTEMPORARY FASHION TRENDS AND THE REVIVAL OF TRIBAL TEXTILES

In response to the challenges posed by globalization, many fashion designers, NGOs, and artisan cooperatives have begun revitalizing tribal textiles through collaborations. The "slow fashion" movement, which promotes ethical and handmade clothing, has emphasized the importance of preserving indigenous textile traditions. Major fashion brands, including Fabindia, Grassroot by Anita Dongre, and Raw Mango, have worked with tribal artisans to integrate traditional weaving techniques into modern clothing, ensuring both authenticity and financial empowerment for artisans (Mehta, 2020).

Additionally, fashion schools and government programs have started initiatives to educate young designers about tribal textiles, promoting a deeper understanding of indigenous weaving techniques and ethical sourcing (Kapoor, 2019).

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1. RESEARCH DESIGN

This research follows a qualitative approach to understand the role of Bhil, Gond, and Baiga tribal attire in shaping regional Indian fashion. The methodology is structured into three key components:

- 1) **Ethnographic Field Research:** On-site visits to tribal communities in Madhya Pradesh to document traditional attire, textile weaving techniques, and accessories.
- 2) **Interviews:** Semi-structured interviews with tribal artisans, textile industry experts, fashion designers, and sustainable fashion advocates.
- 3) **Content Analysis:** Review of existing fashion collections incorporating tribal aesthetics, including those by Sabyasachi, Ritu Kumar, and Anita Dongre.

3.2. DATA COLLECTION

The study relies on primary and secondary data sources:

- **Primary Data:** Interviews with 5 tribal artisans, 3 fashion designers, and 1 sustainability experts.
- **Secondary Data:** Academic literature, government reports, case studies, and content analysis of fashion weeks and textile exhibitions.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the key findings of the study in alignment with the research questions. The results focus on how Bhil, Gond, and Baiga tribal attire has influenced contemporary Indian fashion, the challenges in preserving these textile traditions, and potential solutions for ensuring their sustainability.

4.1. INFLUENCE OF BHIL, GOND, AND BAIGA TRIBAL FASHION ON MODERN TRENDS

4.1.1. INCORPORATION OF TRIBAL TEXTILE MOTIFS IN CONTEMPORARY INDIAN FASHION

The geometric motifs of Gond textiles, traditionally used in wall paintings and fabric printing, have been adapted into modern Indian fashion. Designers such as Sabyasachi Mukherjee and Ritu Kumar have utilized Gond art-inspired motifs in their handloom collections, featuring bold patterns that reflect tribal aesthetics (Kapoor, 2021). These motifs are now commonly seen in sarees, kurtas, dupattas, and fusion wear.

Similarly, Baiga tattoo art, historically applied on skin as a symbol of cultural identity, has influenced contemporary fashion accessories and textile prints. Fashion houses are experimenting with these symbolic tribal designs in block-printed scarves, handbags, and fabric embellishments, bringing tribal aesthetics into the global fashion industry (Joshi, 2023).

The Bhil tribe's beadwork and mirror embroidery, once limited to tribal jewelry and festive attire, are now commonly found in bohemian and festival fashion, particularly in fusion Indo-Western wear. Several fashion designers, such as Anita Dongre, have collaborated with Bhil artisans to incorporate their traditional beadwork into sustainable fashion collections (Singh, 2022).

4.1.2. ADOPTION IN SUSTAINABLE AND ETHICAL FASHION MOVEMENTS

The demand for organic and eco-friendly textiles has led to a renewed appreciation for handwoven tribal fabrics. Several brands now promote handcrafted tribal weaves, encouraging the use of natural fibers, vegetable dyes, and hand-

spun cotton fabrics. The rise of slow fashion movements has positioned tribal textiles as an alternative to mass-produced synthetic fabrics.

Brands such as Grassroot by Anita Dongre and Fabindia have launched collections inspired by tribal craftsmanship, ensuring that artisans receive fair wages while maintaining the authenticity of traditional textiles (Mehta, 2020). However, there remains a gap between demand and actual financial benefits for artisans, which is further discussed in Section 4.2.

4.2. ECONOMIC AND ETHICAL CHALLENGES IN THE REVIVAL OF TRIBAL TEXTILES

Despite the growing recognition of tribal fashion in mainstream markets, many challenges persist in safeguarding the integrity and economic sustainability of these traditions.

4.2.1. MASS PRODUCTION VS. AUTHENTICITY

A key issue is the mass replication of tribal motifs by commercial brands without the direct involvement of tribal artisans. Many major fashion retailers have been accused of cultural appropriation, using tribal textile designs without acknowledging or compensating the original creators (Basu, 2021). This raises concerns over the erosion of authenticity in tribal textiles.

Furthermore, machine-made imitations of tribal textiles often flood the market at lower prices, undercutting the traditional artisans who rely on handwoven techniques. As a result, authentic tribal weaves struggle to compete in commercial markets, leading to declining interest among younger generations (Roy, 2021).

4.2.2. ECONOMIC EXPLOITATION OF TRIBAL WEAVERS

Tribal weavers face exploitative labor conditions, as many artisans are paid only a fraction of the selling price of their textiles. Despite the success of high-fashion designers in incorporating tribal elements, most profit does not reach the artisan communities.

Government initiatives such as TRIFED India and Handloom Development Schemes have attempted to support artisan cooperatives, but challenges remain in ensuring direct market access for weavers without middlemen (Sharma, 2022).

4.2.3. DECLINING INTEREST AMONG TRIBAL YOUTH

The younger generations of Bhil, Gond, and Baiga communities are increasingly moving away from traditional textile work, opting for jobs in cities instead. Many youth see handloom weaving as outdated and financially unstable, making it difficult for the tradition to pass down through generations (Kapoor, 2019).

Thus, sustainable initiatives must focus on making tribal textile work economically viable by integrating it into modern industries, fashion education programs, and direct-to-consumer sales models.

4.3. SUSTAINABILITY AND REVIVAL EFFORTS IN TRIBAL FASHION

4.3.1. ROLE OF NGOS AND GOVERNMENT INITIATIVES

Efforts to revive tribal textiles have been supported by NGOs, government programs, and independent fashion designers. Initiatives such as TRIFED (Tribal Cooperative Marketing Development Federation of India) have helped promote handwoven tribal fabrics in both domestic and international markets (Singh, 2022).

Additionally, government-backed programs such as the National Handloom Development Program (NHDP) and Artisan Cluster Development Initiatives have provided skill training and financial incentives to tribal weavers (Mehta, 2020).

4.3.2. DIGITAL MARKETING AND E-COMMERCE FOR ARTISAN VISIBILITY

With the rise of digital platforms, e-commerce websites such as Okhai, Jaypore, and Gaatha have successfully provided direct market access to artisans, allowing them to sell their textiles without middlemen. These platforms ensure fair pricing and ethical sourcing, benefiting both artisans and consumers (Joshi, 2023).

4.3.3. ROLE OF FASHION EDUCATION AND TEXTILE SCHOOLS

Integrating tribal textile studies into design schools and academic programs can help revive interest in traditional weaves among the younger generation. Fashion institutes such as NIFT (National Institute of Fashion Technology) have started programs that connect students with tribal weavers, encouraging innovation while preserving traditional craftsmanship (Kapoor, 2019).

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1. CONCLUSION

This research confirms that Bhil, Gond, and Baiga textiles continue to shape regional and national fashion trends, with their handloom textiles, embroidery, and motifs being adapted into mainstream and sustainable fashion. However, several economic and ethical challenges remain, particularly in ensuring fair wages, preventing cultural appropriation, and promoting direct-to-consumer models for artisans.

Despite these challenges, there is growing recognition of tribal craftsmanship in ethical fashion and sustainability movements, providing opportunities for the revival of traditional weaving practices.

5.2. RECOMMENDATIONS

1) Stronger Legal Protections for Tribal Textile Designs

- Establishing Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) and Geographical Indications (GI) for Bhil, Gond, and Baiga textiles.
- Preventing unauthorized mass reproduction of tribal motifs by commercial brands.

2) Government and NGO Support for Artisans

- Expanding government-backed handloom development programs.
- Strengthening direct market access platforms for tribal artisans.

3) Sustainable Fashion and Ethical Consumer Awareness

- Encouraging fair trade practices and ethical sourcing in fashion.
- Promoting artisan-run online platforms to ensure fair wages.

4) Education and Fashion School Collaborations

- Incorporating tribal textile courses in fashion and design education.
- Creating internship programs between students and tribal weavers.

5) Digital and Social Media Initiatives

- Encouraging social media marketing for tribal artisans.
- Using Instagram, Etsy, and other platforms for direct sales of handmade textiles.

By addressing these challenges and opportunities, the study suggests that tribal textiles can be preserved while simultaneously contributing to the global sustainable fashion movement.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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