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## **Livelihood sources of Gond Tribes: A study of village Mangalnaar, Bhairamgarh block, Chhattisgarh**

Srabani Sanyal<sup>1</sup> and Ramyash<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Associate Professor, Department of Geography, Institute of Science,  
Banaras Hindu University, Varanasi

<sup>2</sup>Assistant Professor, Department of Geography,  
Government Naveen College Bhairamgarh, Bijapur, Chhattisgarh  
(Corresponding author's email: srabani72@gmail.com)

### **Abstract**

India has the largest concentration of tribal population of the world with 8.6 per cent population (2011). Gond is the largest tribe in India and most of its concentration is in Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Chhattisgarh, Odisha, Telangana and Jharkhand. As most of the population of Chhattisgarh are tribes (30.6 per cent, 2011), popularly called a tribal state. Gond tribes are mostly concentrated in the southern part of the Bastar region, in seven districts and village Mangalnaar comes under district Bijapur. The Gond tribes are known as Maria and Muriya in Bastar region. Majority of the population of Mangalnaar village are Gonds followed by Yadav. Some of the Gond families have got converted to Christian. The study is based on personal observations, interviews and collecting information about livelihood sources of Gond community, how much they collect and earn from it. Most of them are dependent on traditional sources of livelihood like forest and forest-based products.

**Keywords:** Gond Tribes, Forest products, Traditional livelihood

### **Introduction**

Tribal constitute 8.6 per cent of India's total population, about 104 million people according to the 2011 census. There are some 573 communities recognized by the government as Scheduled Tribes and therefore eligible to receive special benefits and to compete for reserved seats in legislatures, jobs and academic institutions. Central Indian states have the country's largest tribal concentration, and, taken as a whole, roughly 75 per cent of the total tribal population live there (Panduranga 2014 & Singh 2019). Among the tribal populations of India, the Gonds stand out by their numbers, the vast expanse of their habitat, and their historical importance. The majority of Gonds are found today in the state of Chhattisgarh, Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh. Their main concentrations are the Satpura Plateau, where the western type of Gondi is spoken, and the district of Mandla, where the Gonds have adopted the local dialect of Hindi. The former princely state of Bastar, now included in Madhya Pradesh, is the home of three important Gond groups, namely, the Muria, the Hill Marias, and the so-called Bisonhorn Marias. All of them speak Gondi

dialects. The etymological significance of the term Gond is derived from the Telegu connotation "*Kond*" meaning hill. Its roots go back to a pre-Dravidian arrival in south India around 2000 BC. Interestingly, however, the Gonds consider themselves to be later entrants into God's world through the penance of Shiva's son Karta Subal. They were descendants of Ravan (Halkare 2013 & Koreti 2015).

Chhattisgarh one of the tribal-state of India in which most of the tribe are concentrated in the northern and southern parts of the state. The tribes of Chhattisgarh are a unique race who mainly inhabits the dense forests of Bastar. More than 70 per cent of Bastar's population is composed of tribes who account for 26.76 per cent of Chhattisgarh's total tribal population. The three principal sub-castes of the aboriginal Gonds are the Dorla, Madia and Muria races. The Gonds dominate most of Chhattisgarh tribal population and primarily depend upon agriculture, forestry, cottage industries, hunting and fishing for their subsistence. Though traditionally Gonds are agriculturalists and some practice shifting cultivation even today other than collecting forest produces for their livelihood (Paltasingh, 2014). But with time, the social, economic and cultural life of the Gonds in Chhattisgarh has changed. It is very important in this context to know as to how and why these changes have taken places and whether these changes have led to any significant shift in the traditional livelihood sources of the Gond community. To investigate this issue an attempt has been made to acquire information concerning the economic life of the Gond community in Chhattisgarh. The focus of the present study is to understand the Gond tribe and their sources of livelihood particularly settled in Mangalnaar village of Bhairamgarh block in Bijapur district located in the south-west corner of Bastar region. As

per Census 2011, the total area of the village is 949.66 hectares with 137 households and 597 persons (354 women and 243 males) 63.48 per cent (379 persons) of the total population are of scheduled tribe population and total literacy is 39.69 per cent (a total of 237 with 151 male and 228 females (Census of India 2011 & District Handbook 2011).

### **The study area**

The Mangalnaar village is remotely located and badly affected by Naxals. In the past decades in fear and exploitation, the tribes have crossed over the Indrawati River and made their home in the Mangalnaar village, about 1 km from National Highway in the south. It is accessible only by National Highway 30 running from Raipur to Jagdalpur and National Highway 63 from Jagdalpur to Bijapur. In 2005, the local tribes were given training and weapons against the Naxalites by the state government, called the '*Salwa Judum*' campaign. The word *Salwa Judum* is derived from the Gondi language meaning 'peace march'.

### **Data sources and methodology**

The social and economic perspective of the tribes is considered for a better understanding of their present condition in the study area. Participant's observation regarding their socio-economic and cultural aspect is at close proximity through field observation, recording and photography. The help of secondary information is taken from sources such as documents, journals, books and newspapers. Further, information is also collected through primary investigation which involves personal observation, informal interviews, schedule and photography. Mangalnaar being predominantly a tribal village, 96 percent of the total respondent are scheduled tribe and 4 percent belongs to other class. A well-structured interview schedule is distributed among the Gond community both from male and female of

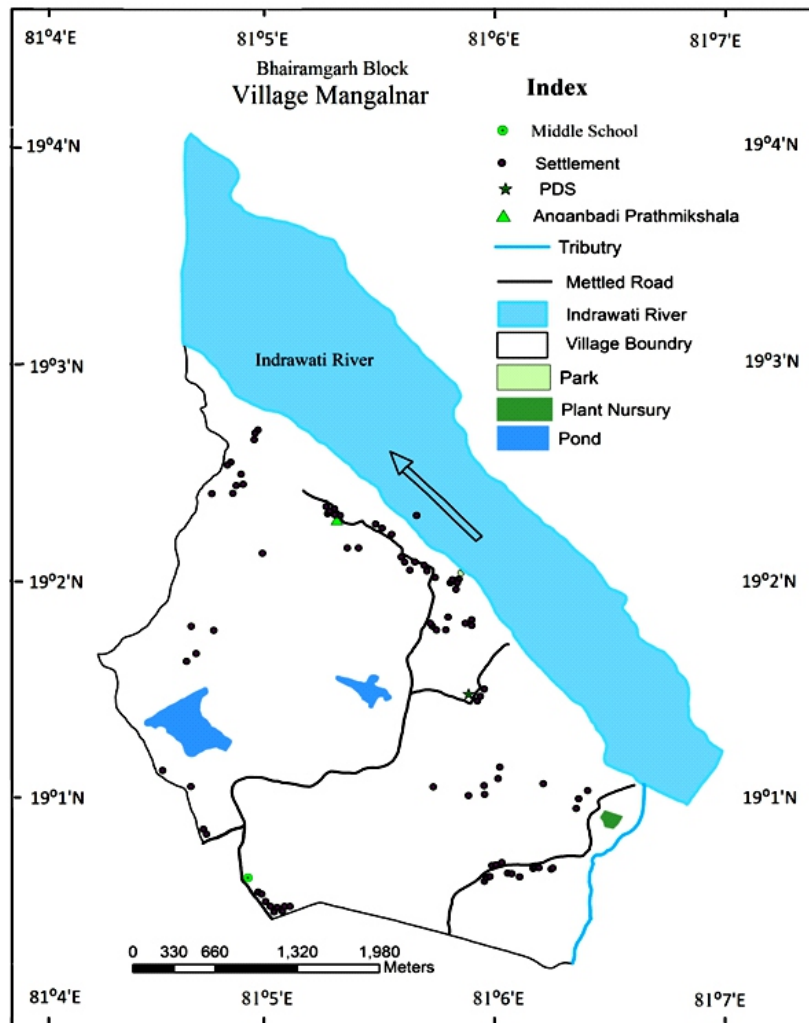


Figure 1: Location of the study area

different age groups.

For this 100 respondents are selected which is 16.75 percent of the total population (597 persons) of Mangalnar village (Figure 1). Out of the total respondent, 35 percent are in the age-group of 18 to 30 years, 49 percent are 30 to 60 years and 14 percent are above 60 years. About 95 percent of the households in this village that belong to Hinduism and 5 percent to Christianity. Further, 92 percent of the total interviewed are illiterate, while, 8 percent have only attained primary education. One of the key reasons for their illiteracy is Naxalite interference, lack of awareness, inaccessibility etc. However, today a good number of them are sending their children to school. Besides, 100 per cent of the respondent practice traditional sources of livelihood such as forestry, hunting and fishing. Men go for hunting and for collecting forest products or fishing the entire family participate. About 20 per cent of the respondents are casual labours who are

Table 1: Socioeconomic Status of Respondent

Category	Respondent	
Age-group	Total	Percentage
<18	00	00.00
18-30	35	35.00
30-60	49	49.00
>60	14	14.00
Total	100	100.00
Religion		
Hindu	95	95.00
Muslim	00	00.00
Christian	05	5.00
Other	00	00.00
Total	100	100.00
Educational level		
Illiterate	92	92.00
Primary ( 1 <sup>st</sup> to 5 <sup>th</sup> class in Anganwadi)	8	8.00
Middle	00	00.00
Secondary	00	00.00
Higher Secondary	00	00.00
Graduate & above	00	00.00
Total	100	100.00
Occupation (multiple answers)		
Hunting	100	100.0
Fishing	100	100.0
Forest based	100	100.0
Agriculture labour	00	00.00
Casual labour	20	20.00
Other	00	00.00
Total	100	100.00
Income-group		
<1000	79	79.00
1000-2000	16	16.00
2000-3000	00	00.00
3000-4000	00	00.00
>4000	05	05.00
Total	100	100.00
Landholding (in acre)		
Landless	34	34.00
1 to 5	60	60.00
5 to 10	6	6.00
Total	100	100.00
Social-group		
General	00	00.00
SC	00	00.00
OBC	04	4.00
ST	96	96.00
Total	100	100.00
Fuel used for cooking		
Fire wood	100	100.00
Dunk Cake	00	00.00
LPG	00	00.00
Total	100	100.00

Source: Field Survey, 2018

involved in construction work in and around Bhairamgarh town. This is generally after the rainy season when they are unable to collect the forest products and in the same condition when there is no forest cover. As they practice traditional source of livelihood or are casual workers the monthly income remains very low (ranging from less than Rs.1000 to more than Rs. 4000 only), moreover, 34 per cent of the Gond family are landless, 60 per cent own 1 to 5 acres of land and 6 per cent have 5 to 10 acres of land (Table 1).

#### Livelihood sources of Gond tribe

Livelihood is defined as a set of economic activity, involving self-employment and wage employment by using one's endowment to generate adequate resources for meeting the requirement of the self and household on a sustainable basis with dignity. In everyday

discourse, the term livelihood is referred to as how people make a living, access resources to sustain themselves and their families. Traditionally the linkage between the tribal community and forest is well established. Tribes are economically and ecologically inseparable from the forests. For their day-to-day requirement, be it food, fodder or fuel they are dependent on the surrounding forest for substance (table 2). Their dependence on the forest is such that they constitute the integral components of the forest ecosystem, forests have been the pivot on which tribal habitat and life revolves and has evolved so far; their religion-culture artefacts, belief system, cultural practices, technologies, and tools have been nurtured and cultivated under perennial plant associations and benign environment (Mishra 2012, Hasrat 2006 & Tumsare 2016).

Table 2: Forest produce and its use

Forest products	Procurement season	Uses
Mahua Flower	Mar-Jun	For brewing liquor
Chironji	April-May	As a <i>mewa</i> for <i>khir</i> and sweets
<i>Tendu Patta</i>	April-May	For Making <i>Bidi</i>
Tamarind Seed	April- June	For starch manufacture
<i>Tora</i>	May-July	Oil for soap manufacture and cattle feeding
<i>Charota seed</i>	Aug-Sep	For soap manufacture
<i>Amchur</i>	May-Jun	For condiments and <i>mashala</i>
<i>Salfi</i>	April-Jun	As a liquor

Source: Shristi\_Products, <http://www.banajata.org/pdf/case-studies/Chattisgarh.pdf>

Shifting cultivation also known as *Jhum*, *Khallu*, *Podu* etc. is also in practice at small scale as govt. has banned shifting cultivation. About 1.6 per cent of the tribal people depend on shifting cultivation and 10-15 per cent depend on hunting for their livelihood (Mehta, 2000). The Gonds of Mangalnaar village are mostly dependent on traditional livelihood sources as observed in table 3. About 100 per cent of the respondent mentioned that they collect *tendu patta*, mahua flower, fishing, leafy vegetables, *tora*, *chironji* and *tendu* fruits from the nearby forest. Most of these forest

products are consumed by the locals. As a result, children remain undernourished, suffer from malnutrition and the tribal community as a whole is forced to live in under poverty.

**Forest:** Forest is a major part of tribal life. They provide a source of livelihood among the community in the form of direct employment, self-employment and secondary employment. They collect flower of *mahua*, *tora*, *tendu patta*, *tendu* fruits, *salfi*, leaf plate, tamarind, honey and *lakh* from the forests.

**Mahua:** Mahua is a large deciduous tree with mahua flowers growing widely under dry

Table 3: Dependency of the tribe on forest and agricultural commodities

Forest commodities	Multiple responses	
	Respondents	Percentage
<i>Tendu Patta</i>	100	100
Mahua Flower	100	100
Salfi	92	92
Fish	100	100
Paddy	66	66
Kodo	24	24
Leafy vegetables	100	100
<i>Tora</i>	100	100
<i>Chironji</i>	100	100
Tamarind	76	76
Bhusa <i>Til</i>	32	32
<i>Charota</i> seed	78	78
Tamarind seed	76	76
<i>Tendu</i> Fruit	100	100

Source: Field Survey, 2018

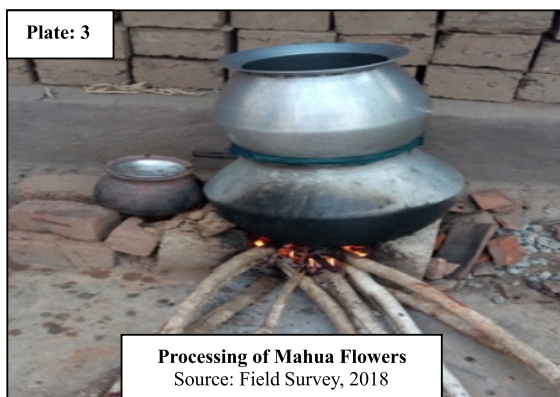
tropical and sub-tropical climatic conditions. The tree has religious and aesthetic value in the tribal culture. The entire families including small children are involved in the collection of mahua flowers beginning from the first week of March. After drying the flower its filaments are removed and kept warm in the sack with



appropriate moisture (Plate 1 & 2). About 10 to 20 kg of Mahua is taken along for selling in the weekly market in Bhairamgarh. In exchange, the families purchase the goods of their daily needs. In the summer months, the Mahua is sold for Rs. 15 to 20 per Soli (approximately one-kilogram Mahua is a Soli) (Plate 1 & 2). The price varies according to the seasons with the highest cost (Rs.35 to 40 /Soli) in the rainy season. In return, the family earns around Rs. 400-500 per day. *Daru* or *Suram* is also prepared after processing the Mahua flowers which are also sold in the weekly market (Plate 3 & 4).



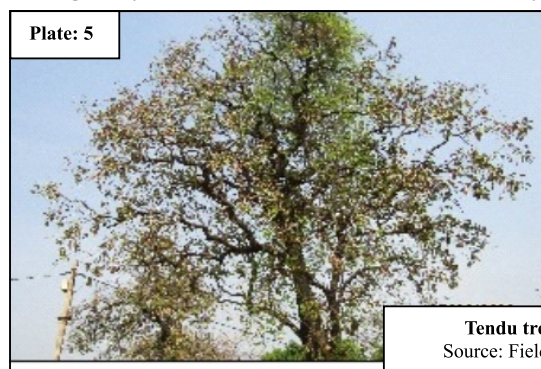
**Tendu Patta and Tendu fruits:** Tendu Patta is called the green gold of the tribes



because of its value. The tribes generally earn approximately Rs. 5000-6000 in a week which they use for storing food grains during the rainy season (June-September). It is one of the main sources of their livelihood. All family members earn an average of Rs. 5000-6000 per week during May which is sent to their account by

the government. While Tendu fruit is ripened in March to April, the tribes sometimes use them as one-time food due to its delicious taste (Plate 5, 6, 7, 8 & 9).

This money is then used on various occasions during the year. The Tendu fruits are also collected in March- April when the Tendu



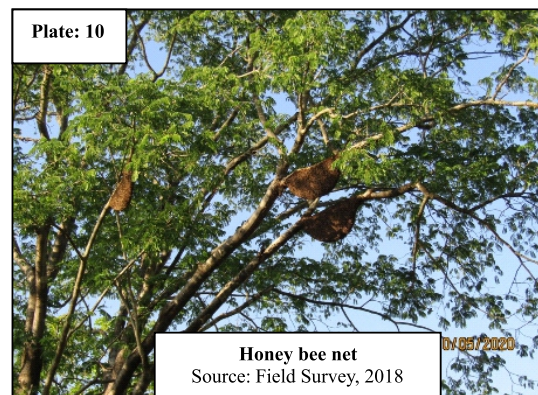
fruits start ripening. They are also used as cough medicines.

**Leafy plate:** The Gonds use the leaflets made by breaking the new leaves. The small



leaf is called the bowl (*chokni*) and big leaflet is called a plate. The indigenous bamboo thin sticks are used to give them a proper shape.

**Honey:** The Gonds use it in medicine, eating and fulfilling certain traditional beliefs. Some Gonds also sell it. They are unaware of

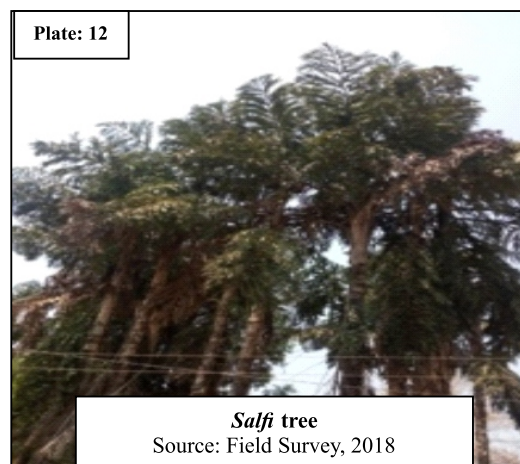


their value and importance (Plate 10).

**Chironji:** Is a type of dried fruit, which gets ripen during April-May. Though Gond tribes use it very little, they dry and sell it in the weekly market and get a good return from non-

tribals (Plate 11).

**Salfi:** It is a species of palm plant from which beverages are extracted. It is also known as *Bastar Beer*. During April and May, the Gond tribes cut the top of the salfi tree to extract



beverages. It can also be called local stomach medicine. Family members drink and women also sell in the weekly market (Plate 12).

**Tamarind:** The Gonds use the tamarind trees largely found in the village. The Tamarind tree produces pod-like fruit that contains an edible pulp used in cuisines, as traditional medicine and also for metal polish.

**Agriculture:** Other than forest and forest-

based products the second major source of livelihood among the Gonds is agriculture. Only the paddy crop is grown. Sowing of the rain-fed paddy seeds is done by ploughing in the field and leaving it to germinate. They harvest the crop directly after they are mature and ripe with the help of family members. Other than sustaining their demand sometimes they also sell out in the nearby weekly market.



Culturally Gonds are deeply associated with paddy cropping. After every harvesting, they celebrate in which people visit each other's house, sing and dance and exchange new rice is grown (plate 13). Other than paddy Gond tribes traditionally use rice for making local beverage *Landa* and *Pej*. It is observed that out of the total respondent (100) only 66 of them mentioned that they owe land. Further, out of these 66, only 42 (63.63 per cent) stated that they practice single cropping of traditional paddy cultivation in their land, while, 36.36 per cent of them leave their land uncultivated (table 4).

The probable reasons for hindrance in cultivating land are undulating land, plateau soil, lack of irrigation facilities and dependency on monsoon rainfall in these regions.

Table 4: Type of land use

Type	Respondent	
	Number	Percentage
Cultivated	42	63.63
Uncultivated	24	36.36
Total	66	100.00

Source: Field Survey, 2018

Moreover, the use of Indrawati river water for irrigation is very negligible as reported (table 5) the north is the lifeline of the tribes of Bastar in general and the Gond tribes of Mangalnaar village in particular. Indrawati is very close to

**Fishing:** The Indrawati River flowing in

Table 5: Source of water for Irrigation

Type	Respondent	
	Number	Percentage
Pond/Well/Canals	00	00.00
River	00	00.00
Monsoon rainfall	100	100.00
Total	100	100.00

Source: Field Survey, 2018

the heart of the Gond community as they are dependent for their livelihood and rituals. Fishing is practised throughout the year. However, after every rainy season, the river water is mostly used for fishing. Dried fish or *Suksi* in the local language is eaten throughout the year. After the rainy season, they sell *Suksi* to the nearby weekly market and buy their essentials (Plate 14).

**Hunting:** Though poaching is banned by the government it is not strictly followed in this tribal-dominated area. Involvement of Naxals also restricts vigilance by government agencies for controlling poaching. The Gond tribals hunt collectively but only to sustain their family and

prefer not to sell it in the market. Though hunting is a major part of the life of the Gond tribes, it is not very popularly practised in Mangalnaar village because of its proximity and influence of the Nagar Panchayat. Though Gond families come together only the young members in small numbers go for hunting wild boar, bird and deer etc.

#### Significance of forest product for Gond tribes

Gond tribes depend on the forest for survival, from the wood, waterways, providing habitats to more than half of the world's land-based species and livelihoods for the people. It also provides shelter, medicines, water, food



and fuel. All these activities directly or indirectly involve forests. For livelihood, they sale of fuel, use wood and fodder, grazing, forest-based agriculture handicrafts and cottage industries, sericulture, lac cultivation, beekeeping, charcoal burning, leaf plate making, liquor making, rope making, basketry, medicines, food processing and marketing of non-timber forest products, cultivation of crops, under silvicultural practices, livestock

rearing, social and farm forestry etc. After leafy vegetable, Tora (Mahua seed), Bhusa til, Charota seed, Amchur (Mango Powder), Tamarind seed, Tendu fruit are also collected and sold at a reasonable price by the tribes during the year (table 6).

Further, the respondents also informed that these forest products are purchased by the *kochiya* or the buyers of forest products in the weekly market (Friday market) and they do not

Table 6: Income generated from different commodities

Name of commodities	Approximate income (Rs./Year)
<i>Tendu Patta</i>	5000-6000
Mahua Flower	4000-5000
<i>Salfi</i>	3000-4000
Fish	3000-4000
Paddy (Traditional cultivation)	3000-4000
<i>Kodo</i>	2000-2500
Leafy vegetables	2000-2500
<i>Tora</i>	1000-1500
<i>Chironji</i>	600-1500
Tamarind	500-1500
<i>Bhusa Til</i>	500-1000
Charota seed	500-800
<i>Amchur</i>	500-700
Tamarind seed	500-600
<i>Tendu Fruit</i>	400-500

Source: Field Survey, 2018

pay a fair price to the poor and innocent tribes (table 7).

The *kochiya* is one who generally comes from other states for trade and has permanently settled down and exploit local people.

Table 7: Weekly market rate of different agricultural and forest products

Months/ products	Rate of products (Rs./kg)									
		Tora (Mahua seed)	Tamarind (Imli)	Tamarind seed	Paddy	*Chironji (char bija)	*Amchur	*Kodo (kosar)	*Bhusa til	*Charota
Jan.	35-40	-	-	-	10-12	-	-	25-28	-	-
Feb.	35-40	-	15-20	-	10-12	-	-	25-28	-	-
Mar.	15-20	-	15-20	-	10-15	30-40	30-40	25-28	25-30	10-15
April	15-20	-	20-25	10-12	10-15	30-40	50-60	25-28	25-30	15-20
May	20-25	-	20-25	10-12	10-15	40-50	70-80	25-28	35-40	15-20
June	25-30	13-15	20-25	10-12	10-15	50-70	50-60	25-28	35-40	-
July	25-30	15-20	20-25	-	10-12	70-100	-	25-28	-	-
Aug.	30-35	15-20	-	-	10-12	-	-	25-28	-	-
Sep.	30-35	15-20	-	-	10-12	-	-	25-28	-	-
Oct.	30-35	-	-	-	10-12	-	-	25-28	-	-
Nov.	30-35	-	-	-	10-12	-	-	25-28	-	-
Dec.	35-40	-	-	-	10-12	-	-	25-28	-	-

Source: Field Survey, 2018

Note: \* Other important products

## Conclusion

The Gonds are distinct tribal groups with their unique life, culture, traditions, style, customs, festivals and social environment. It is interesting to notice that the tribal culture among the Gond community has changed in Mangalnaar village in compare to the same tribal community in other parts. They are adopting settled cultivation, agricultural labourers, household industry etc. whereas, rate of practising shifting cultivation, hunting, fishing for their livelihood is low. Moreover, significant change is observed in Mangalnaar village due to its proximity to the urban centre. But still, Gond tribes rely on the forest as their means of livelihood in these regions. They are fed by the forest and forest produce. They have their indigenous expertise particularly in the field of medicine. If proper support and handholding facilities are given to these people they can preserve their tradition and culture

and also contribute to the developmental process of the country. Although cultural changes among the Gond tribe's communities in Bhairamgarh block is significant but still slow, nevertheless the pace of improvement indicates that the cultural changes among them seem to be spreading across the tribal villages. The Gond tribes are now getting the benefits of the schemes run by the government.

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