



Quick Facts

Pop. in India: 13,000,000

State Populations:

Madhya Pradesh: 4,300,000

Rajasthan: 3,000,000

Gujarat: 3,000,000

Maharashtra: 1,600,000

Religion: Tribal/Hindu

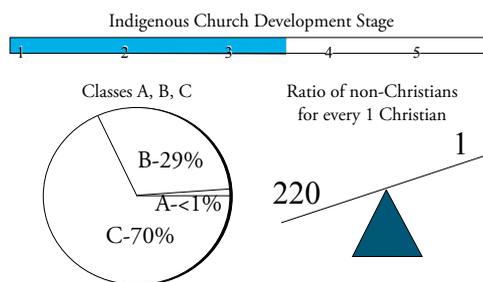
Believers: 0.45%

Scriptures: NT

Ministry Tools: JRGT

C Status: 3 **M Status:** 2

MS Subgroups: 20+



Class A- Are members of a Culturally Relevant Church
 Class B- Have close access to a CRC, but have not yet joined
 Class C- Have no reasonable or close access to a CRC

Identity: The Bhil are the largest Indo-Aryan speaking tribe in South Asia, and genetically they share more in common with Gujarati and Hindi peoples than with Dravidian or Munda tribes. Although their origins are unknown, they are believed to be the original inhabitants (and were once the rulers) of West-Central India, before the coming of the Rajputs and Mahrattas, which drove much of the population into the hills and forests.

Lifestyle: Most Bhils live in small villages or even hamlets of one or two extended families. The villages are usually a considerable distance from one another. Women have an important role in the Bhil economy, including collecting firewood, raising livestock, fishing, planting and harvesting, and other small micro-enterprise.

Customs: The Bhil have a recognized tradition of elopement, which is the most common form of marriage ar-

rangement. Girls may select their own spouses, and even divorce them if they choose. The children then became the responsibility of the father. Besides elopement, a Bhil family may employ a bride service to find an acceptable match. If someone marries a non-Bhil they and their offspring are no longer considered as tribal members.

Religion: The Bhil have been significantly influenced by Hinduism and worship Shiva as their supreme deity. However, of the 17 Bhil tribal divisions, only six employ the services of non-Bhil Hindu priests. The others have their own specialists which settle disputes, caste spells, and perform sacrifices. The Bhil also worship tigers, trees and rivers. They believe in the “evil eye” and wear charms to ward off harmful spirits.

Christian Outreach: Over twenty Indian mission agencies are now planting churches among the Bhil, and much progress has been made especially in

Rajasthan. Radical Hindu groups have reacted with concerted efforts to recon-vert these new believers to Hinduism, and the Bhils themselves have tried to isolate Christians into the lowest caste in their tribal society. However, the movement continues to grow despite the obstacles.

How to Pray:

☞ The highest caste in Bhil society, the Bhagat Bhil have a tradition of prophetic oracles given by their gurus. One of their prophetic songs speaks of a sinless incarnation who will be born of a virgin and bring salvation. Pray that those who hold to this prophecy will find its fulfillment in the saving power of Christ.

☞ Pray for unity and effective partnership between the many organizations and churches seeking to reach out to the Bhils.

☞ Pray for the completion of the Old Testament in Bhili and for the effective use of the Bhil Bible by pastors and missionaries.

☞ Only 20% of the Bhil are literate. Pray for the development of evangelistic literacy programs as well as oral-based discipleship resources.

**Every year 110,000
 Bhils die
 without Christ.**