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Dongre, Archana

India's Indigenous Peoples Seek Self-Determination as Techno-Society Encroaches, Undermining a Lifestyle Based on Honesty, Art and Kinship with Guile, Gadgets and Greed

They were here first. The Sanskrit word that describes these people says it all - Adivasi, "the original inhabitants." They are the descendants of the earth's prehistoric people. Their very survival stands as a testament to their practical wisdom, philosophy and sacred rituals - especially their deep respect for every living thing, plant and animal, and being in total harmony with nature.

Condemning their pure lifestyle, Indian society assigned the adivasis the lowest possible social position, especially after the Britishers implanted the idea that the indigenous tribes are "uncivilized."

But all it takes to see their "civility" is to watch a group of young Bengalese Santhals walk by smiling, with garlands of fresh palash flowers brighter than jewels adorning their tawny bodies. Dancing and music are as natural to them as the blooming of a flower. When I was a 7th grader in Nagpur, we had two maidservants and a dhobi who were Gond, from the state of Madhya Pradesh. They moved with a gait so serene and dignified, uncharacteristic of all other servants. I recall my mother telling me to respect their special heritage.

The United Nations has declared 1993 "The Year of the Indigenous Tribes," encouraging all nations to stop condemning and exploiting the earth's oldest

peoples, but instead respect them and learn more about their earth-wise ways and secrets.

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