

# ELLIOTT FINE ART

*Nineteenth Century to Early Modern*

Anonymous, c. 1870

*A Bhil woman in profile*

Inscribed in urdu on mount: “زُنِ بِنْد”

Albumin print

30 x 25 cm. (11 ¾ x 9 ¾ in.)

Provenance:

Bruno Tartarin, Paris.

Literature:

W. Shuffelft, “Notes on Bhils, Burmese, and Battaks” in *Popular Science Monthly*, 1897, p. 34.



This photograph depicts a young Bhil woman shown in profile, in a carefully staged studio setting. A related photograph of the same sitter (fig. 1), taken at the same time and inscribed “Bombay”, confirms that the image was produced in the city, most likely by a professional studio photographer active there around 1870. On stylistic and contextual

grounds, the work may plausibly be associated with the studio of Edward Taurines, one of the leading photographers working in Bombay during this period.



Fig. 1, Anonymous, c. 1870, *A Bhil woman*, albumin print, Private Collection

The Bhil are among the largest and most widely distributed tribal groups in South Asia, historically associated with pre-Aryan populations and referenced in early Indian epic literature. The name “Bhil” is thought to derive from the Dravidian word *billu* (bow), reflecting the tribe’s traditional association with hunting and archery.

The sitter’s adornment is highly characteristic of Bhil women, who are known for their extensive use of white metal, silver and brass jewellery, often incorporating beads, chains, coins and large sculptural elements. The prominent ear ornaments, nose ring and layered necklaces seen here correspond closely with documented traditions, in which jewellery serves as a marker of identity, status and regional affiliation.

The photograph was later reproduced in *Popular Science Monthly* in the article *Notes on Bhils, Burmese, and Battaks*, where it was presented as part of a comparative visual study. In this context, the image functioned not as an individual portrait, but as an example of an “ethnographic type”, intended to record physiognomy, dress and ornament for a Western audience.

An Urdu inscription on the mount reads “زِنِ ہند” (zan-e hind), meaning “Indian woman,” reinforcing the photograph’s classificatory purpose.