



## **GONDS OF INDIA: A LEGACY OF CULTURE, A STRUGGLE FOR PROGRESS**

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### **Abstract :**

*The Gond tribe is one of India's largest indigenous groups, with a rich history, culture, and traditions rooted in the belief system of Koyapunem, which emphasizes the spiritual connection between humans and nature. Predominantly residing in central Indian states, the Gonds have a deep heritage of agriculture, hunting, warfare, and art. Their distinctive Gond art and music reflect their religious and cultural beliefs. Despite their cultural richness, the Gonds face challenges such as economic marginalization, land alienation, and cultural exploitation. The decline of the Gondi language due to the dominance of Hindi and other languages further threatens their heritage. While the Indian government recognizes Gondi as a scheduled language, modernization, climate change, and political underrepresentation continue to impact their traditional lifestyles. Efforts are needed to preserve their language, promote economic development, and ensure their cultural and political inclusion. Additionally, limited funding and infrastructure hinder their economic development. lack of infrastructure, and political underrepresentation.*

**Keywords:** Gonds, Culture, and Persa Pen and Koyapunem.

### **Introduction:**

The Gond tribe is one of the largest and most prominent indigenous groups in India, with a history, culture, and heritage dating back centuries. The Gonds believe in 'Koyapunem,' which includes the belief that everything in nature possesses a soul and can communicate with humans. The Gonds have a long and fascinating history steeped in mythology and legend. The Gonds, giving them their unique language, culture, and traditions, and art have thrived for centuries.

According to 2011 census Gonds, the major tribe of the country has been notified as

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scheduled tribe in the following states: Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Jharkhand, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Odisha, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Uttaranchal and West Bengal having a total population of 1, 13, 44,629, and represent 8.6 percent of the country's total population. However, Gondwan Land is spread from South Godhavari river to North Narmada River.

The Gond people predominantly follow their traditions of nature worship, which have influenced other religions of India. The Gonds believe in a greater God or Maha Dev. They have a specific tribal name which is “*Bada Deo*” or “*Persa Pen*”. In spite of that, there are other gods and goddesses in their belief system that represent natural features. So according to the Gonds, every hill, river, lake tree etc has a spirit. This tribe lacks a uniform socio-economic and cultural identity. The tribe speaks regional languages such as Hindi, Telugu, Marathi, and Odia. Apart from regional languages, they also speak Gondi, an unwritten language belonging to the Dravidian family. The majority practice either their own indigenous religion, Koyapunem, or Hinduism.

However, the Gonds ruled over a large kingdom of middle India for many centuries and had developed their own social, religious, and cultural base during those long years. Gonds were subdivided into Raj-Gonds, Khatola-Gonds, Madia Gonds, Dhur Gonds, Dadve Gonds, Mokasi Gonds, Gaita Gonds, and Koyas etc. The ruling class among the Gonds was known as Raj Gonds (Dr. Shyamrao K, 2016).

Art displays a cohesion of geometrical patterns, nature, and the Gods the tribe believes in. The natural elements of their art display flora, fauna, and human figures dancing, gathering, or hunting. Festivities are celebrated rather joyously, with music and dancing. Their folklore features the Dandari style of dancing wherein events from the Gond mythology are told. The Dhulia and Pardhans are professional musicians and the Thoti's are professional storytellers. Their folklore aims to preserve their history and legends, upholding the value of passing on traditions orally. Apart from the tattoos, their people favour silver ornaments, and the women use colourful glass bangles and necklaces.

### **Back ground of The Gond tribe of India - Rich culture**

**Art:** Gond art is known for its vibrant colours, intricate designs, and bold patterns. It's often painted on walls, floors, and other surfaces using natural colors made from soil, charcoal, and plant sap. This art depicts the tribe's mythology, nature, and daily life. In addition, it's a unique form of traditional art that originated from the Gond tribe from Central India. Thus, those were of the values in Gond culture, which were worth preserving. The geometric and symbolic designs carved on wall and door, on comb and tobacco-case were thousands of years old, going right back to the ancient civilization of the Indus Valley (Dr. Shyamrao K. 2016).

**Folklore Songs and Dance:** The Gond tribe's culture is enriched by music and dance. They have a vibrant tradition of art and music that is deeply intertwined with their cultural and religious beliefs. The Gond tribe's musical heritage is diverse and rich, with a wide range of folk songs and dances that are an integral part of their culture. The tribe's musical tradition includes devotional songs and

other songs, which are sung during religious ceremonies and festivals. These songs express the tribe's deep spiritual connection with nature and their belief in the interconnectedness of all living beings. The Gond tribe has a rich culture and folklore songs. These are oral songs and based on particular ceremonies such as birth, marriage and death.

**Figure-1: Holy place- Kachargad Caves in Gondia, Maharashtra**



**Figure-2: Holy Place - Jangu Bai Caves, in Kerameri mandal, Kumram Bheem Asifabad**



**Figure-3: Gussadi Dance from Adilabad and Komu Dance from Badhradri Kothagudem**





**Ceremonies:** The Gond tribe's culture includes traditional ceremonies. Also, throughout the year various rituals taken place.

**Gond Language:** The mother tongue Gondi belonged to Indo-Dravidian family of languages.

The Gondi language is an important part of the Gond cultural heritage, and efforts are being made to preserve it. According to the 1991 and 2001 censuses put the figure of Gondi language speakers at 2.1 and 2.7 million respectively. The Indian government has recognized Gondi as a scheduled language under the Constitution, and initiatives have been taken to promote its use and teaching in schools.

**Figure-4: Orissa Damesa Dance and Koya Dance**



**Beliefs:** The Gonds believe in a greater God or “Mahadeve” and other gods and goddesses that represent natural features. They pray 36 Lakhs gods in the universe.

**Village priest:** The Gond tribe has a village priest who is appointed mostly according to heredity and performs all the ceremonies and sacrifices in the village.

**Marriage:** Marriage between blood relatives is not allowed, but marriage between children of paternal aunts and maternal uncles is common. They have 1 to 12 clans/surname in community the sum of 750.

**Figure-5: Damesa Dance in Orrisa and Chhattisgarh**

The Gond tribe historical roots stretch back for centuries. The various Gond tribe were divided into many other smaller clans and were built near a mountain or river which were later fortified with dense forests. Nevertheless, the increasing use of Hindi and other dominant languages in education and media has leads to the decline of Gondi. The Gonds are an indigenous tribe in India, known for their rich cultural heritage and traditions.

**Figure-5: Baster Dance and Chhattisgarh**



Despite their cultural richness, they face significant challenges in terms of economic development and conversion of their cultural assets into tangible benefits. But their interaction with modern development has been fraught with challenges. Understanding the reasons behind this difference between cultural wealth and socio-economic disadvantage requires examining the historical, socio-political, and economic contexts that have shaped their journey.

This paper depicted about the legacy of Gond culture struggles for progress in India. Data is derived from primary, secondary data, and oral observations, different Gondi exporters professors. The major objectives are; To study the legacy of Gond Culture in India. To study the issue and challenges in promoting the Culture.

### **Section -1: Legacy of Gond Culture in India**

The Gonds are an indigenous tribe in India, known for their rich cultural heritage and traditions. The Gond tribe, spread across central India, is known for its vibrant traditions, folklore, and art. Their culture is a blend of animism and Hinduism, worshipping deities linked to nature, like the earth, water, and forests. The Gonds have a deep connection with nature, and their rituals often revolve around agriculture and the changing seasons. We can classify various component but certain important factors determine the rich cultures. Following factors are;

**Table-A: Gond Community System**

<b>Gav Gada</b>	Village System	Patel, Devari, Mahajan, Gatial, and Aavaldhar (panch mutti System)
<b>Pen Gada</b>	Prayers offer by Village priests	Devari
<b>Raj Gada</b>	King and his subordinate	Raja, Mokasi,
<b>Varav Gada</b>	Spread the culture	Pradhans (pattadi), Thoti's (Storie Tellers)

In tribal community social bonding is very high, they work collectively in all works. Tribal community bonding is based on kinship ties, which are the primary social bonds among members of a tribe. Kinship is a principle of social organization, inheritance, division of labor, and distribution of power and privileges.

**Table-B: Gond Kingdoms in Central India**

The Gonds ruled over a large kingdom of middle India for many centuries and had developed their own social, religious, and cultural base during those long years. The major Gond kingdoms which ruled over Central India were i.e. The first Gond king was Jadurai, who deposed the Kalchuri Rajputs to grab the kingdom of Garha Mandla Garha Mandla (1300 AD. to 1789AD), he second kingdom of Deogarh was created by King Jatba in 1590 AD Deogarh (1590 AD to 1796AD), Chanda (1200 AD to 1751 AD) and Kherla (1500 AD to 1600 AD). The Garha-Mandla Kingdom in the north extended control over present Chhattisgarh & Madhya Pradesh. The Deogarh-Nagpur kingdom dominated over Nagpur plains. While Chanda-Sirpur covered parts of old Chandrapur & Bhandara District. Kherla lies in Satpura terrains. In spite of that, similar small and independent Gond kingdoms were ruled but not come forefront and internal revolts were existed but officially not records.

**Table-C: Gondi Months and Festivals**

S.No.	Months	Purnima/Amavasya	Months	Describe Month Meaning
1	Akadi	○ Purnima	July	Rajulu pen and Tiger Pujja (to be protect the village animals from Tigers)
2	Pora	● Amavasya	August	Nandi Pujja, jamud Amus
3	Akur Pok	○ Purnima	September	Dasara
4	Divadi	● Amavasya	October	Divali
5	Kaarthi	○ Purnima	November	Karun and Tulisi Marming
6	Satti	● Amavasya	December	Persa Pen Pooja
7	Poosh	○ Purnima	January	Jangu bai Pooja
8	Maho	● Amavasya	February	Keslapur Pooja
9	Dhuradi	○ Purnima	March	Holi
10	Chaith	● Amavasya	April	Ugadi and Puna & Pdan Saal
11	Bhavai	○ Purnima	May	Persa Pen Pooja
12	Bhud bhavai	● Amavasya	June	Chanchi bheem marming

The **Gonds** have its own set of festivities apart from the regional ones. They worship gods related to their clan, family, cattle, field, and diseases. They believe in nature spirits, every village has two representatives that are worshipped during the festivities - the village guardian and the village matriarch. The priests have the responsibility to carry out sacrificial practices during these festivals. The priests also tend to the clan shrines and totems. For familia festivities, the head of the family is entrusted with the responsibility. The regional festivities they have been known to celebrate include Nagpanchami, Dussehra, and Pola. The Gond people have deep faith in ritualism.

There were several religious festivals of the Gonds. These were Akhari, Jiwati, Pola, Diwali Nawo tindana, Dussera, and Phag or Shimga festivals. Many of them were connected with agricultural season.

**Figure 6- Calendar of Culture of the Gond Adivasi**



The Gond festivals were collective rituals. They were celebrated with great zeal and enthusiasm. The logic behind of celebrating festivals was nearly same all over the middle India. However, with influence of Hinduism and other religions the basic ingredients of the festivals changed to some extent. Today, they celebrate Hindu festivals like Ganesh Chaturthi, Raksha-bandhan, Nagpanchmi, Diwali, Dashara, Holi with the same enthusiasm as that of the Hindus (Dr. Shamrao Koreti, 2016) Music and dance are vital parts of tribal culture. They serve as a means of expression and community bonding. Some important aspects such as: Folk Songs, birth ceremony songs, marriage songs, and death ceremony songs. Passed down through generations, these songs often narrate historical events or daily life.

**Table -D: Music and Dance**

16 Dhemas (Dances)	18 Eighteen Vadhyalu-Instruments (Music)
1. Pen Dhol	1. Para
2. Pen Yehaval	2. Turupudi
3. Seyvida penyehaval	3. Turumu
4. MarmiDhol	4. Dappu
5.SaanaDhol-Death event	5. Gumela
6. Sathik Dhol	6. Sanayi
7. LagadingDhol.	7. Kikiri
8. Gerava	8. Kalikom
9. Dhemsas	9. Tura
10. Duraadi	10. Suludi (flute)
11. Bheema Dhol	11. Jatur
12. BhuriDhol	12. Karnat (kinnera),
13. BhovaniDhol	13. Dapali



14. AvanaDhol	14. Talams
15.Nouri-Naura, Yehaval Dhol	15. Gajjelu
16. Koda Kurusa Dhol	16. Mandar
	17. Timki
	18. Dhakki-Damaru or Oggu.

700 Ekmasuru Pen- 900 Betal pen

16 Dhemas and 18 Vadyalu

64 kalalu:32 Malayu

The sixteen dance forms are: Divided for God-Goddess Worshipping, marriage and festivity and Death ceremony (Ark. Manik Rao)

### **E. Marriage System**

Marriage system development was developed by Pahandi Krupa ling, they were practicing ‘add’ number and ‘even’ number. Total 750 sagh/gothrams, from 1 to 12. People are forget about their traditional system but 12 Sagas (Gothram) alive in all areas.

There existed various type of marriages in the traditional Gond society, like *Ostasana Marmi* (Regular), *Lamsede or Lamhade Marmi* (by Service), *Kotavalda or Ata sata* (by Exchange), *Poyse Ottur or Kals Ottur* (by capture), *Arwitana /Harvittur or Haiwar Marmi* (by Elopement), *Haiwark wat/Paitu or Odiyattur Marmi* (by Intrusion), *Pat or Tiks Tasana Marmi* (Adult or Widow Marriage), *Yer Dosana Marmi* (Bhul Bihao) etc. Among the Gonds marriage was forbidden between blood relatives. Apart from the wishes of the boy and girl, receiving the consent of the father and mother was paramount. The Raj Gonds, the ruling Gonds, married according to Hindu customs, while in the common Gonds the marriage ceremonies were conducted by *doshi*, or *Baiga or devari*. An important aspect of marriage system was bride price. In addition, widow marriage was allowed in the Gond society. Their marriage systems were also pro-women. Remarriage, divorce systems are not clumsy but simple and easy to follow. The position of polygamy among the Gonds no longer exists now. At present Gonds consider monogamy as an ideal form, and resort to polygamy in certain unavoidable circumstances. Moreover, the Gonds now disassociate themselves from the marriages by capture, intrusion and elopement, and consider these anti-socials. They admire marriage by proper settlement and all of them participate in it most cordially. Cross-cousin marriages are still prevalent in Gond society (Dr. Shamrao Koreti, 2016).

### **Section-2: Challenges in Promoting the Culture**

The Gonds, like many other indigenous communities, faced numerous challenges in the existing situation. Several key challenges are facing Gondi culture:

**Oral Tradition:** Gond society has a rich oral tradition, where stories, legends, and songs have been passed down through generations. These oral histories preserve their myths, beliefs, and historical events, emphasizing a deep connection to their ancestral land. But, present situation oral tradition



gradually disappearing due the impact of the globalization. Thus, documentations is important in global scenario and preserve the promote the future generation.

**Dissipation of Language:** The Gondi language, which is part of the Dravidian language family, is increasingly endangered. With younger generations speaking Hindi, Marathi, Telugu, or other regional languages for better educational and job opportunities, Gondi is at risk of disappearing. This loss threatens the transmission of cultural knowledge, oral traditions, folklore, and history that are embedded in the language.

**Language:** The Gondi language, part of the Dravidian family, holds cultural significance, though it faces decline due to the influence of dominant regional languages like Hindi, Telugu, and Marathi. Efforts to preserve and revitalize the language are underway, but it remains vulnerable. However, even small communities has script but specific gondi script is not identified by the government.

**Cultural Erosion and Assimilation:** The forces of globalization and urbanization have led to the erosion of traditional Gondi customs, rituals, and lifestyles. Modern education systems and media promote mainstream values that often overshadow indigenous practices, leading to a slow assimilation into dominant cultural norms. This shift threatens traditional dances, music, festivals, and even the social structure of Gondi communities. **Cultural exploitation:** Unauthorized use of Gondi art, symbols, and traditions. Cultural homogenization: Loss of unique cultural identities.

**Marginalization and Social Discrimination:** The Gondi people, like many indigenous groups in India, have historically been marginalized and excluded from mainstream society. They often face discrimination based on caste, ethnicity, and poverty, which limits their access to resources, education, and political representation. Despite legal protections for Scheduled Tribes (STs), many Gondi people still struggle with inequality and social stigmatization.

**Lack of Education System:** Education among Gondi children often lags behind national standards. Many Gondi communities live in remote areas where access to quality education is limited. Even when education is available, it may not be culturally relevant or sensitive to the needs of indigenous children. As a result, Gondi youth may be less equipped to navigate modern economic systems, contributing to cycles of poverty and disenfranchisement.

**Displacement and Exploitation:** The Gonds' traditional lands, rich in natural resources, have attracted mining, logging, and industrial interests. Many Gond communities have been displaced by large-scale development projects, often without adequate compensation or resettlement. This displacement disrupts their traditional way of life and exacerbates their economic vulnerability.

**Political Underrepresentation:** Despite being a sizable community, Gonds have historically been underrepresented in political processes. This has limited their ability to influence policy decisions

that affect their welfare, including issues related to land rights, employment, and access to social services. However, limited voice in decision-making processes.

### **Conclusion:**

The Gond tribe, the largest and most diverse tribal group in Central India, has a rich history of art, architecture, and resistance, actively participating in revolts against Muslim and British rulers. Despite their vibrant cultural heritage, they face socio-economic marginalization and struggle to convert their cultural wealth into economic and social progress. Gondi traditions, language, and rituals are increasingly diluted due to the influence of non-tribal cultures and dominant regional languages. This intermixing threatens the survival of the Gondi language, as younger generations adopt non-tribal languages and practices. Additionally, many Gonds live in poverty, having lost their former status and autonomy. To address these challenges, a multifaceted approach is needed, including cultural preservation, improved education, the inclusion of Gondi in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution, and greater political representation. Strengthening these aspects can help the Gonds maintain their cultural identity while achieving economic and social progress.

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