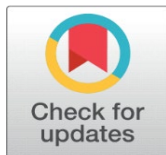
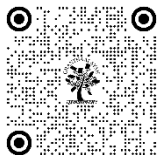


ROLE OF IMBUING INTERACTIONS ON THE SOCIAL FABRIC OF GOND TRIBE - A COMPREHENSIVE REVIEW

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ABSTRACT

A tribal community is symbolic of a country's culture and its values. Comprising 8.6 percent of India's population, the tribal population is a unique microcosm representative of India's history, art, culture, rituals, and its people. The Gond tribe is one such Indian tribe, spread across central India whose roots go back far in history to the times when Gondwana existed. Gond dynasty was powerful and culturally significant from the ninth to the sixteenth century.

This review paper aims to present a concise compilation of the ethnography of the second-largest tribe residing in India and enumerates their kingdom and victories. It also sheds light on the dispersion of Gond population till present time. The paper also attempts to bring forth the role of their various interactions with other societies and how it influenced their social and cultural practices.

Keywords: Gond Tribe, History of Gond Tribe, Gondwana, Gond Society, Colonial India, South Asia, Madhya Pradesh, Hridaya Shah

1. INTRODUCTION

Gond Tribe is the second largest tribe in India after the Bhil tribe. An Australian scientist, Edward Guess propounded a theory in 1885 which claimed that "Antarctica, Australia, India, South America once formed a single continental landmass, which is now called Gondwana land for the Gondwana region of India ". It is stated that "possibly in early Mesozoic time, about 200 million years ago, Gondwana land presumably broke into separate continents which drifted apart like giant terrestrial icebergs, on the plaster mantle of earth". The span magazine has

taken reference from the American Science and Imperial Gazetteers of India [The Span Magazine. \(1963\)](#) : 7 and [Mehta \(1984\)](#): 58. The Gond tribe has inhabited a vast region in the central part of India for many centuries. The tribe occupied several areas, which later became their tribal habitat. They used to reside in areas ranging from Satpura down to the Godavari, from Uttar Pradesh and north Bihar to Andhra Pradesh, and from Maharashtra to Orissa. Their presence in this geographical locale is the reason why this region came to be known as Gondwana, a region that gained prominence during the medieval period. The name Gondwana is said to have been used by the Afghans in the eleventh or twelfth century. The area, politically known as Gondwana, is not the name of the total region inhabited by the Gond tribe [Mehta \(1984\)](#):58-59. The Gondwana of old, seems to have fascinating characteristics, which made it unique and stand apart from the main life and civilisation of India. Its dense forests and hilly country cut it off completely from the outer world. The armies of peaceful traders generally passed along its western side by the way of the fortress of Asirgarh, presently in Madhya Pradesh, and seldom penetrated into the heart of their wild jungles [Eyre et al. \(1916\)](#):1-2. However, with time and advancing civilisation and colonisation of India, the Gond tribe eventually settled in various states of central India. Presently the Gonds are majorly settled in the following areas in India.

- Bastar region in Madhya Pradesh in the Godavari Basin,
- Orissa's Kalahandi area.
- Maharashtra's Chandrapur area,
- Madhya Pradesh's Satpuda, Narmada and Raipur area.
- Andhra Pradesh area of Adilabad [Vahia & Halkare \(2013\)](#): 30

According to the 1981 census of India, the Gond tribe was spread over seven states with a population of 73,88,463. In Madhya Pradesh, their population is the largest amongst various tribes in India, i.e., 53,49,883 including its numerous clans and sub-clans. The second-largest Gond population in 1981, encompassing all the groups, came from the adjoining state of Maharashtra, where their total population was 11,62,735 [Singh \(1997\)](#): 294. The total tribal population of India, as per the 2011 census, is 10.43 crore. The Gond tribe has a total population of 13,256,928 spread over various states like Bihar, West Bengal, Jharkhand, Maharashtra, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Odisha, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, and Gujarat. Of the total tribal population of India, the Gond tribe comprises 13.45 percent. In terms of state-wise distribution, Chhattisgarh has the highest percentage (55.3 percent) followed by Madhya Pradesh (43.69 percent), Maharashtra (19.45 percent), Odisha (9.97 percent), and Bihar (1.57 percent) Uttar Pradesh (50.16 percent) (Census of India, Statistical profile of Scheduled tribes in India, 2013:125-130). Refer to the pie chart in [Figure 1](#).

Figure 1

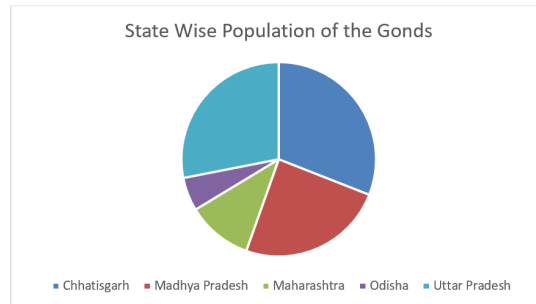


Figure 1 Distribution of Gond Population in Various States of India

Interestingly, the Gond community addresses themselves as 'Koitur' which means human. Their culture is highly outstanding in the sense that they do not discriminate between people and believe in uniformity in ideas. The word koitur is used for all human beings [Rai \(2016\)](#): 1.

2. METHODOLOGY

A systematic and comprehensive review of literature available on the origin, evolution, and structure of the Gond tribe was performed by the researcher. A protocol was developed before searching the data. It included the inclusion and exclusion criteria for selecting research papers. Various databases were used to search journals, book chapters, and e-books.

2.1. INCLUSION CRITERIA

Inclusion Criteria- Papers and books from social sciences, arts, and humanities field were included for study. Research papers and books published on the Gond tribe's history, their dwelling places, the Gond kingdom, and their ruling kings were selected for further screening. Papers pertaining to various sub-clans and subgroups of the Gond tribe were also included for review.

While searching for data, no limit was set on the year of publication. As the present review article also focuses on the historical aspect of the Gond tribe, equal emphasis was given to finding and including historic data as the contemporary one. The last search run was done on 25th April, 2023. The reports included in the review are research papers, review papers, books, e-books, and census studies. Only articles and books written in the English language were included. Libraries including Crafts Museum library, National Museum Library, Lalit Kala Academy Library, Central Library Delhi University, Ratan Tata Library, Economics department, and Delhi University in Delhi were visited. Manav Sanghralya Library and Tribal Museum Library in Bhopal were also visited.

2.2. EXCLUSION CRITERIA

The scholarly articles and papers on the Gond tribe belonging to fields other than those mentioned above, such as health sciences, life sciences, environmental sciences, and astrology, etc. were excluded from the eligibility criteria of selection.

2.3. SEARCH STRATEGY

Relevant research studies concerning the history and evolution of the Gond tribe were identified using databases like Scopus, Google scholar, the national digital library of India, e-Resources provided by the University of Delhi, and web of science. Additionally, websites like internet archives and rare books of India were also explored to access e-books.

For searching databases on various platforms, several keywords were used, for instance on Scopus, the keywords used were TITLE-ABS-KEY (GOND AND TRIBE) with a limit set to the subject area of social sciences, arts, and humanities. In the next step, a detailed examination of the retrieved articles, reports and books was done by first exporting the title, abstract, author's name, journal name, year of publication and keywords to an excel spreadsheet. Duplications of records were taken care of and further removed as various search engines provided the same

studies. The titles and abstracts of articles were screened according to the inclusion criteria. The reference lists of articles selected were also reviewed to find out additional papers and books.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Kol, Bhil, and Gond are some of the ancient tribal populations known from the times of Ramayana, one of the Great epics of India [Chaubey et al. \(2015\)](#): 1. According to experts they have been present for almost 60,000 years [Mani \(2020\)](#). These three major Indian tribes have also been widely acknowledged in the epic Ramayana, particularly in the portions known as the Ayodhyakanda, Aranyakanda, and Kishkindhakanda [Ramadas \(1925\)](#): 1-5, [Sharma \(1967\)](#), [Vidyarthi & Rai \(1977\)](#), [Guruge \(1991\)](#), [Govind & Bhatt \(1961\)](#), [Bhatt et al. \(1975\)](#) and [Chattopadhyaya \(2003\)](#).

The Gonds who spoke dravidian tongue came from south India by the way of the Godavari River and gradually settled all over the hills of Central India. By the fourteenth century, the Gond kingdom was established in Betual, Chhindawara, Mandla, and Chanda. The evidence of their presence is seen in the royal tombs, lakes, and palaces of Chanda. The kings of the Gond kingdom weren't great warriors and also lacked the organisational skills to build and maintain an army so as to be able to declare war. For this reason, they were defeated first by the Mughals and later by the Marathas [Elwin \(1958\)](#).

The region between the Narmada and the Godavari rivers, was popularly known as 'Gondwana', as it was largely inhabited by the Gond communities, and it later constituted parts of the British Central Provinces. It was ruled by four powerful Gond dynasties for 400 years from the mid-fourteenth century to the mid-eighteenth century. The four independent Gond Kingdom arose more or less simultaneously- in the north Garha- Mandla kingdom which is present-day Chhattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh, in the centre of the Deogarh Nagpur Kingdom, which is present-day Nagpur plains, and Kherla and in the south Chanda- Sirpur covered parts of the old Chandrapur terrains which is present day Chandrapur, in Maharashtra [Eyre et al. \(1916\)](#): 10. Before fourteenth century, Gondwana region was under various kings. The rulers were seemingly tolerant and kind towards Gond tribesmen. The Gondwana region prospered under the various Gond Rajas from 14th century onwards [Elwin \(1964\)](#): 116-117. The Garha Mandla Gonds, were the descendants of the Tripurikalachuris who rose to prominence in the second part of the 14th century AD. After the collapse of the Kalachuris, the founder Vadavarai, also known as Jadurai or Yado Rai, took advantage of the political chaos in the Jabalpur region and established himself as an independent king [Gazette of India \(2000\)](#). Jadurai was the first Gond king of Garha-Mandla [Pallavi \(2014\)](#). He ruled during the latter half of the fourteenth century [Mishra \(2007\)](#): 296. Garha Mandla comprised of small principalities, which underwent a rapid expansion, making the Gond, a powerful kingdom in a short span. This expansion was witnessed during the reign of King Amandas, who later assumed the title of Sangram Shah. He was an important ruler of the Raj Gond dynasty and he made Chauragarh his main capital. He constructed the fort of Chauragarh to protect his territories of the Narmada valley because of its strategic location. During his reign, the Gond kingdom had an east-west extent of 475 km and a north-south extent of 390 km. He ruled the empire for 33 years from 1510 to 1543 AD Chauragarh continued to be Gond capital for a long time till 1634. After Sangram Shah, his son, Dalpatshah took over the throne in 1543 AD and shifted the capital to Singoregarh. After he died in 1550 AD, his wife Rani

Durgavati moved the capital of Garha Mandla once again to Chauragarh, as she considered it more secure than Singoregarh [Mishra \(2018\)](#): 5-6, 18-22, 296.

Figure 2

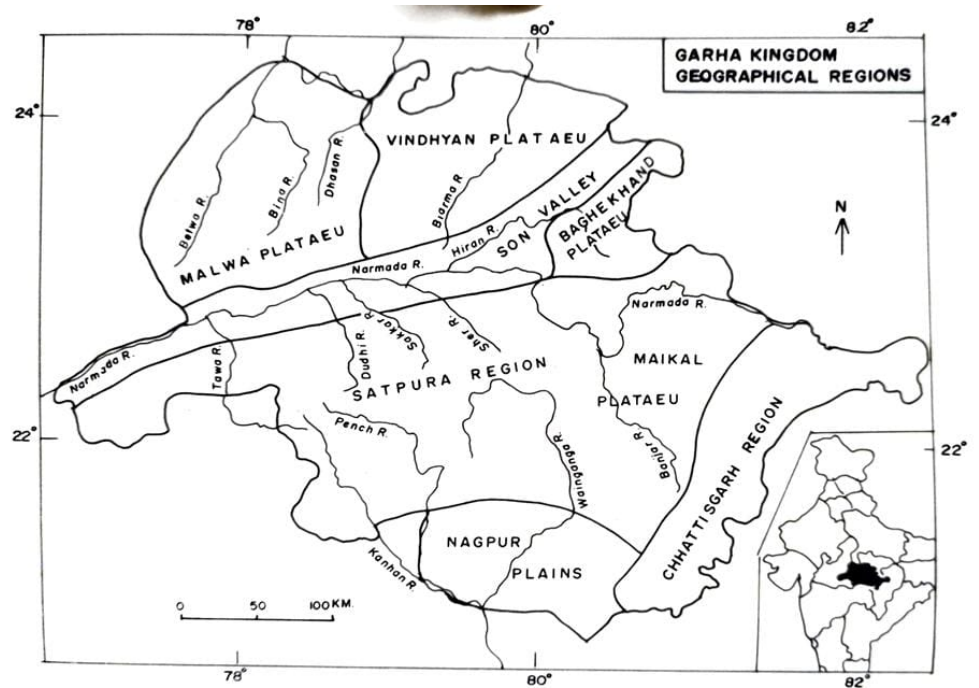


Figure 2 Geographical Regions Under Rule of Garha Kingdom [Mishra \(2007\)](#)

Sangram Shah wanted to have liaisons with Rajputs; therefore, he got his son Dalpatshah married to a Rajput princess Durgavati. Rani Durgavati became a widow with a young son, Bir Narayan at an early age. She was considered the most illustrious ruler and an iconic queen of this dynasty, who fought against Mughal ruler Asaf Khan in the war of Narrai near Garha. In the war, the Gond army was defeated, and she committed suicide on the battlefield. She ruled from 1550 AD to 1564 AD [Mishra \(2018\)](#): 7, 24.

Seventy years after the first attack by Mughals in 1634 AD, Chauragarh was attacked by the Bundelas. King Prem Narayan Shah was on the throne at that time when Jujhar Singh Bundela attacked with an army of 4000 soldiers and 60 elephants. Premshah sent a message to the Mughal emperor in Delhi via his son Hridaya Shah but in the end, left with no choice, he had to kill all the women of the fort and fight with his army of 300 men against Jujhar Singh Bundela. He fought with bravery but was defeated and killed. The Mughal emperor sent Bundela an offer to compensate for the non-consensual attack, but he refused the offer, of giving the Mughals an equal share of the acquired territory. He was later killed by a combined army of the Mughals, Hridaya Shah, and the Nawab of Bhopal [Mishra \(2018\)](#): 25-27.

King Hridaya Shah, thus, successfully survived the wars. His reign was from 1634 AD till 1671 AD. He was a learned man with a vision and good knowledge of politics. He was popular and had profound knowledge of contemporary art, science, sculpture, and architecture. He also composed two classical works of music in the Sanskrit language 'Hridaya Prakash' and 'Hridaya Kautukm'. However, after approximately fifteen years, Jujhar Singh Bundela's brother Pahar Singh got an opportunity to avenge his brother's death. He, with the help of the royal Mughal army, attacked Chauragarh and Hridaya Shah had to vacate the fort and take shelter at Rewa. Later Hridaya Shah and the King of Rewa, Anup Singh were also attacked

by Pahar Singh. As the Gond King Hridaya Shah, was defeated, the kingdom had to be shifted eastward and the glorious fort of Chauragarh was taken over by the Mughals around 1651 AD [Mishra \(2018\)](#): 4-9, 22,28.

In 1784, Gond King Narhari Shah along with Ganga Giri attacked Marathas. In defense, the Marathas under the command of Moropant, attacked the Fort of Chauragarh and they were successful in taking over the fort after some time. This was the last battle of Chauragarh and Narhari Shah was the last Gond king. King Narharishah, Gangagiri Gosain, and Lakshan Paswan were imprisoned in the Khurai Jail [Mishra \(2018\)](#): 28-29. Genealogy of Gond Kings of Garha Kingdom is shown in [Figure 3](#). However, some of the descendants depicted in the figure were clan members but not rulers, the details of their lineage, therefore, were not traceable in literature.

The Gond kingdoms had lasted for nearly four centuries from fourteenth to eighteenth and thereafter, Marathas held sway over this land for nearly 100 years, subsequent to that, the region was governed by Britishers [Eyre et al. \(1916\)](#): 9. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, Gonds had split into several wild and warlike groups, making their living by plundering caravans and raiding the smaller towns from their mountain stronghold. However, under British rule, they became less aggressive, were no longer nomadic and started settling down and took up farming [Elwin \(1964\)](#): 9.

Figure 3

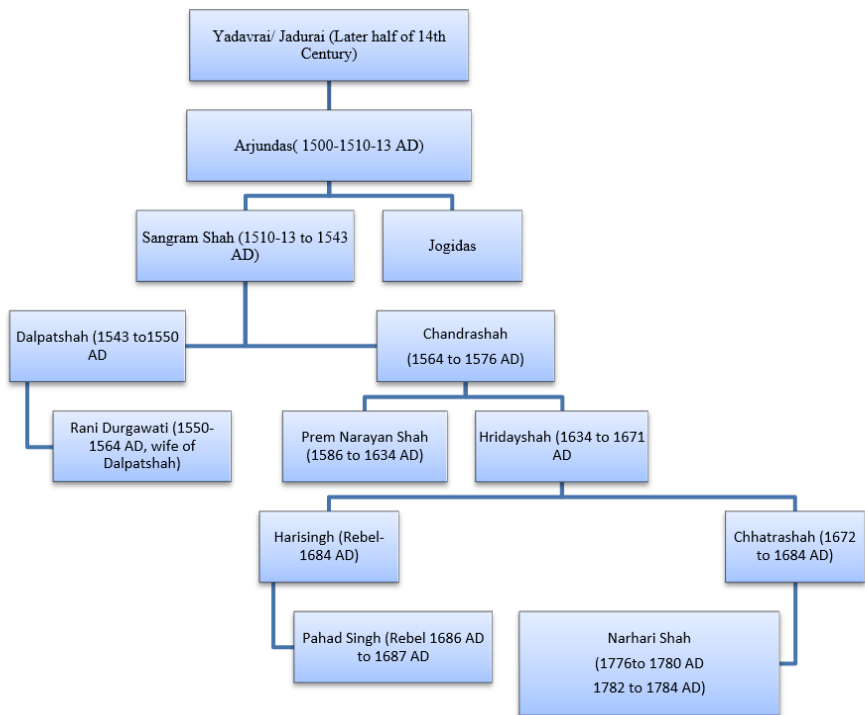


Figure 3 Genealogy of Gond Kings of Garha Kingdom [Mishra \(2007\)](#)

3.2. GOND SOCIETY

A society is a large, heterogeneous, undefined group of individuals possessing some common characteristics like origin, race, history, habitat, and culture. Each of these chief elements, making up the society is interlinked with others. Different functions performed by the members of society help shape it. Social structures

created within the society, help the members to perform their functions from time to time.

The Gonds are believed to be one of the earliest societies in India and a pre-Dravidian society. Owing to their vast size, ancient origin, and large area that this tribe has occupied, Gond society has had social interaction with other similar widely spread groups like the tribal Kaularians, the Dravidians of south India, Rajputs and the Marathas, who later came to the Gond homelands from the northern and the western parts of India. Migration, interactions with non-tribal groups, and inter-relations with other tribal groups helped the Gond tribe to intermingle and imbibe different cultures, beliefs, and values which made it relatively heterogeneous [Mehta \(1984\)](#): 397.

They are essentially a primitive tribal community involved in hunting and food gathering, pastoral occupations, agriculture, martial tasks to ensure the safety of their own tribe, herbal medicines, and basic trade and commerce. The tribe has over a period of time, developed a unique tribal culture and language affiliation according to their place of habitation [Koreti \(2016\)](#):1.

Gond society is divided both vertically and horizontally, and while the cessation of the raja families has diminished the impact of the hereditary rank stratification, the segmentation of the society into exogamous patrilineal groups has preserved its significance.

3.3. MIGRATIONS AND SETTLEMENT OF THE GOND CLANS

There are various views regarding the place of origin of the Gond tribe. According to Stephen Hislop, 'Gonds' and 'Konds' of Andhra Pradesh are the same people, with just the first letter differing. As a result, the Ghotulghar of 'Gonds' becomes the Kotulghar of 'Konds'. Thus, when Hislop refers to the 'Konds in his text,' he is referring to the 'Gonds' (Hislop papers: 13,15). In around eleventh and twelfth century, the Gonds referred to themselves as 'Koithur' or 'Koi' or 'Kui'. According to Grierson, the Khond 'k' is connected to the Gond 'kui'. He claims that Telugu speakers swap the terms 'Gond' and 'Kond' with 'Khond'. A review of the linguistic structure reveals that the origins of both Gond and Khond may be traced back to Tamil and Telugu [Grierson \(1906\)](#): IV, 485. It is highly likely that Konds and Gonds are essentially the same people, and in the North, the tribe is generally referred to as Gonds, while in the south the term 'Kond' is more commonly used for the tribe. There are contradictory views regarding their land of origin while some researchers believe that they came to central India from south, as was deduced from similarities seen in their folktales etc., and also from the fact that Gonds have a strong belief that Yadavrai, the founder of the Garha dynasty, other believe that they arrived from the north, from the banks of the Godavari river. Similarly, another evidence shows, the Gond King Sangramshah's coins have engravings in Telugu [Mishra \(2007\)](#):10. Hemendorf, on the other hand, believes that just because the Gond language belongs to the Dravidian family doesn't mean they came from south India. He claims that the Gonds spoke several tribal dialects, which they dropped in favour of learning the Dravidian language of their rulers.

The Central Indian highland population of tribes such as the Gond tribe is dynamic due to evolving economic, social, religious, and political factors. Over many generations, a large community of tribes in India lived as hunters in isolated woodlands and underdeveloped areas of central India. The hunting economy was commonly followed by the Gonds, Oraons, primitive yuanges, Bhuniyas and Kalaularies. However, other outsider groups like the Rajputs, Mohammedans,

Marathas, Telanganans, and some others attempted to invade and permeate the forest areas of central Indian highlands which led to an exchange of culture among these groups. There is an absence of concrete information on the constant migration of various tribes throughout Central India as for thousands of years the dense forest areas were impermeable for the general public. While the majority of Gonds remained in their homelands, it was only the Bastar clan who got the opportunity to escape their remote woodland on several occasions. The Gond population is therefore sometimes divided into two subgroups- one which remained in their homeland and the others who migrated. Even though Gonds are spread over significantly large areas in Central India today, they may have existed as small, isolated clans in the past. There is a high likelihood that, the early migrations must have taken place due to compelling reasons of survival in times of disease, calamity, war, food shortage, and/or in search of a mate.

Apart from the above classification, there are various texts outlining another basis for defining various clans in the Gond community. Most popularly the Gonds are categorized under 'Raj-Gonds', 'Khatola-Gonds', 'Madia-Gonds', 'Dhur-Gonds', 'Dadve-Gonds', 'Mokasi-Gonds', 'Gaita-Gonds', and 'Koyas' etc. Amongst these, the 'Raj-Gonds' were the rulers in the medieval period. The emergence of the Raj Gonds who are considered an elite sub-caste in Gond is also seen in the Gond legends, folktales, and in other forms [Mehta \(2016\)](#): 894-895. The Raj Gonds are considered different from the rest of the Gonds, like Naik-Gonds, Dadwe-Gonds, Gaita-Gonds, Maria-Gonds, Ware-Koitor, and so on. In parts of the Chanda district, there is demarcation among different Gond castes thus, giving rise to social stratification [Thusu \(1980\)](#): 264.

In Maharashtra, Gonds reside in the Chanda district, where they divided themselves into four endogamous tribes: the Raj Gonds, the Maria or Madia Gonds, the Dhurve Gonds, and the Khatulwar Gonds. Further, the Koyas, the Gaitas, the Pardhans and the Kolams are considered as other minor sub-tribes. These sub-tribes spoke the dialect of the Gondi language [Central Provinces District Gazetteers, Chanda District. \(1909\)](#). The Gondi language spoken by the Gonds is related to the present Dravidian language family [Singh \(1997\)](#), [Russell \(1916\)](#).

The Maria Gonds is further split into two groups: those who live in mountainous terrain are known as the Marhes or Abujh Maria, and those who dwell in plain areas are known as the Marias or Madias or Dandami Maria, they typically live in the plains, south of the Indrawati River, which is a tributary of the Godavari River. A large number of Dhurve Gonds dwell in a city, in Bastar district of Chhattisgarh known as Jagadapur. The Dhurwas are mostly engaged in making baskets as their habitats are found in areas with a lot of bamboo grooves [Sarkar & Dasgupta \(2007\)](#): 100). Most Khatulwar Gonds live in the region that borders the former Durg District in the erstwhile Madhya Pradesh, which is presently, a part of the Chhattisgarh State [Deagaonkar \(2008\)](#): 26.

Barhul or Birhor is another cognate of Gond tribe. They are firm believers of Ravan (the antagonist in the Hindu epic Ramayana). Birhors call themselves as Ravanvanshi or Ravanbansi. They consider monkeys as their enemy because Lord Hanuman was a devotee of Ram and ignited the kingdom of Ravan [Risely \(1892\)](#): 292.

The Gond tribe's migration must have gone on for more than a thousand years. The Godavari river's northern territory and the hilly area of Bastar, which connects to the Eastern Ghats, appear to have been the ancestral homeland of this tribe. There are various sub-clans like Koitors, Dorela whose abode can be linked to different regions near the Godavari River, as well as the Albaka and Gollapalli mountains, the

Marias appear to have resided near the Indravati river, a tributary of the Godavari River, and the Abujmahar mountains, a hilly forest area in Chhattisgarh. The Koitors seemingly travelled westwards on the Godavari River and are now known as Koyias. Marias appears to be the first sub-group to aid in the expansion of Gond society through inter-marriage between Koitors and Marias. The Marias and Koitors appear to have met and formed a formidable tribal group that later spread to create the Chanda, Mandla, and other Gond kingdoms on both sides of the river in the eastward direction towards Chanda [Mehta \(2016\)](#): 11-12).

Historically, the patrilineal Gond society was organised into four exogamous phratries, the origins of which are credited to Pahadi Kupar Lingal, a mythical hero. The Gond civilization is built around this system. Totemic artifacts are related with each phratry. The four divine brothers (Nalwen Saga), the five divine brother group (Siwen Saga), the six divine brother group (Sarwen Saga), and the seven divine brothers (Yaduwen Saga) are four groups of phratries. The tortoise, crocodile, and monkey are considered gods by the Nalwen Saga because they are their saviours. Sui Weilar, the procupine woman, is revered in the Siwen Saga. The tiger is revered in the Sarwen Saga, and it is regarded as a relative. The snake is the totemic emblem of the Seven Brother group [Singh \(2003\)](#). However, when the population data started getting documented by the Britishers in India, the history, and internal dynamics of adivasis was overlooked and it was presented and documented from an 'outsider' perspectives. In their efforts to codify the Indian population, British authorities, merged culturally and linguistically diverse tribes under the generic label of Gond making it difficult for the present-day researcher/documenter to identify and segregate [Kabeer et al. \(2019\)](#): 16.

The Gond's historical background displays major social patterns that have resulted in the huge and diverse Gond society of today. Presently, the Gond tribe members reside throughout the central Indian Highlands, and this is the main reason that a cultural divide appears due to this expansion of the Gond population. This dispersion of the large Gond population across Central India has resulted in disparities in the socio-economic and cultural foundations of distinct tribal and non-tribal groups. All of these elements worked together to establish Gond feudalism and create a distinctive society. As a result of their migration, they were able to settle in new areas and search for more land [Mehta \(2016\)](#): 559-560.

3.4. GOVERNANCE IN GOND SOCIETY

Local governance has been practiced effectively in India for many centuries. The structure of local governance gradually evolved as a formal system after the Independence of India in 1947. The following text gives a brief description of the federal system of governance followed by the Gond Community, particularly in Chhattisgarh. The three tiers of governance, as followed by the Gonds of Chhattisgarh are Saskiya, Samajik, and Sarvajanik [Kabeer et al. \(2019\)](#): 18-19.

Presently, the Gond tribe is obliged to follow the rules of the national polity. This holds true for Gond tribes all over India. The Gond tribe locally calls this tier of governance Saskiya. It is the broadest part of the federal governance structure. Within this structure, the representatives are the elected members or officials of the state government. However, under this broad system of government, the poor and illiterate Gond men could hardly differentiate between different state officials. They only contact them during registration of births and deaths or sometimes for some special provisions and schemes provided by the state. The next tier of governance is the Samajik level. This level is responsible for resolving matters and aiding jurisdiction within the community. Matters which are not resolved at the lower-tier,

are taken to the samajik level of governance. A pyramidal structure of governance is followed under this domain: first comes the district level forum, then block-level or kshetra and lastly the village level forum. The last domain is the sarvajanic realm. While the Gond community's boundaries are contiguous with the larger Bastar area (a district in Chhattisgarh) and its affairs are controlled by samajik domain laws; its members' everyday lives are spent at the village level in contact with the other groups that also reside there. This domain is known as Sarvajanic. These groups are conversant with each other's customs and respect each other's gods and goddesses. It is regulated by precise regulations that govern inter-dining and inter-marriage between different tribes and establish the restriction within the different groups [Kabeer et al. \(2019\)](#): 18-19.

3.5. GOND SOCIETY - LIVELIHOOD AND VOCATION

The Gonds have gone through various stages of economic growth over the previous centuries. The change happened gradually as we moved to the industrial age. Initially, the raw material had to be collected from the surrounding forests. Work mostly comprised of procuring food and preparing meals. Elwin, an anthropologist, revealed that Gonds in the Bastar region of Chhattisgarh do not want non-tribals to know about their cuisine and eating habits. Gonds engage not just in the gathering economy and also in the hunting economy, however, by 19th century it evolved further, and they started settling and adopted farming and cultivation. On the highlands, some sections of the Gond tribe population still get the necessities of life in the same way that their forefathers did. Traditional rights of use of woods, grasslands and undeveloped areas were implicated in the gathering economy. Food items consumed by Gonds, and people's eating habits have also been mentioned in Gond folktales and ethological investigations conducted by anthropologists and administrators. People's eating habits evolved in response to the botanical diversity of the woods in which they dwelt. For instance, the Gonds' affection for the Mahuwa tree appears to have sprung from their encounters with the 'ippa', the mahuwa tree's name in Dravidian-influenced places [Mehta \(2016\)](#): 519-522,537.

The hunting economy, which grew over many generations, not only provided food for the tribals of central India but also shaped their eating habits and tastes. The tribe had a gathering economy initially, which later transformed into a hunting economy, which probably lasted hundreds of years. The traditional division of labour between man and woman appears to have originated with the early gathering economy. Presently, when the Gonds cultivate their field, the women play an important, if not crucial part in it [Mehta \(2016\)](#): 522-537. Rural women work in different agricultural tasks, such as pre- and post-harvest processes, from dawn till dark. The Gond women mostly helped with weeding, processing, harvesting, transplanting, and storing, etc. Although the Gond women work on the farms, yet they had the least involvement in marketing, harrowing, and ploughing [Thakur and Jahanara. \(2018\)](#):198-200. However, this pattern of division of labour may not have existed earlier when the work involved was simply the collection of food and other items for daily needs and survival [Mehta \(2016\)](#): 522-537. There isn't enough information to clearly delineate their active participation in a variety of agricultural activities. The information available is non-specific and indirect on Gond women's role in agriculture [Thakur and Jahanara. \(2018\)](#):198-200.

As land settlement, acquisition, and farming made significant progress on the plains and lower altitudes, the hunting economy declined [Mehta \(2016\)](#): 567-568. During the late 19th century, agriculture was the Gond tribe's primary occupation, [Banerjee & Bhatia \(1988\)](#). The Gonds gradually moved towards shifting cultivation,

it could also be due to their desire to augment their diet with millets, having previously tried mixing their drink with a variety of components. Following the decline of the hunting economy, other types of economic activities also emerged such as wild animals, like bison, were domesticated, and breeding of wild goats, and some of them even started raising pigs. They also started breeding lambs and sheep for their hair so as to make woollen blankets for winter. Wild poultry was also domesticated by a great majority of Gond hunters [Mehta \(2016\)](#): 567-568. From an economy of sustenance, it grew further as the Gonds started gathering tendu patta, mahua flowers, green vegetables, tora (mahua seeds), tendu fruits and tamarind from neighbouring forests. The collection of natural produce was no longer for consumption but was now commercially sold in the market. Additionally, the by-products made out of these raw products are also largely sold in the market such as the liquor prepared after processing mahua flowers, tendu fruits used in making cough medicines, honey, a dried fruit known as Chironji, which is a *Salfia* specie of the palm plant used to make beverage [Sanyal & Ramyansh \(2020\)](#): 175, 179-184. Along with agriculture, fishing also became a commercial activity as it was not only for consumption but the extra was sold in the market. Therefore, the Gond tribal economy is highly reliant on the use of locally and easily accessible resources. However, the issue they are facing is with the marketing of these products, which has now become very competitive with multiple sellers [Sharma & Mittal \(1998\)](#): 103).

Over the years, however, due to receding forests, urbanisation, migrations, and other similar issues they have adopted stable agriculture, vocations like agricultural labour, work in domestic industry, etc., while the prevalence of practicing shifting agriculture, hunting, and fishing has declined [Sanyal & Ramyansh \(2020\)](#):178. In addition, presently, the government has ordered a majority of Gonds to abandon shifting cultivation because it harms the forest (UKPSC notes). Therefore, these days Gonds are practicing settled agriculture [Sanyal & Ramyansh \(2020\)](#):175,179-184.

During the British period, many Indian tribes faced existential issues, as a result of new administrative, political, and economic actions. A substantial number of them became impoverished, and had no option but to work as bonded labourers or serfs for Zamindars, contractors, or moneylenders [Sarkar & Dasgupta \(2007\)](#):99. The Britishers did not assert direct authority over the region where Gond tribesmen resided but instead used the Maalguzari system to collect taxes. In this system, the powerful leaders who had strong influence on other community members, as well as certain local Brahmins were 'gifted' vast areas of land and entrusted with collecting rent from their tenants, generally through forced labour, with a portion of the money going to the state as tax [Sundar \(1997\)](#): 247-250. After independence, this system was dissolved, but many maalguzar families remained major landowners in these areas, with the greatest landholdings and favoured positions within communal hierarchies. [Von Fürer-Haimendorf \(1982\)](#).

The economics of the Gonds in the central Indian highlands is an interesting subject of Indian economics. The social framework of relationships between individuals and groups, articulated in various ways as values, symbols, standards of conduct, and behavioural patterns, serves as the foundation for the economic organisation as a result, social action is viewed as economic action [Mehta \(2016\)](#): 552.

3.6. POSITION OF WOMEN IN THE GOND SOCIETY

The tribal women have a significant role in all economic, social, and cultural activities of their community. Their participation in the workforce, in fact, is

significantly greater than non-tribal women of India [Mitra \(2008\)](#): 1203. Tribal Gond women, in general, labour hard and this aspect of their personality is also highlighted in several indigenous proverbs of the community which emphasize their daring and industrious nature. Men, on the other hand, are portrayed as pleasure-seeking and happy-go-lucky [Sharma & Mittal \(1998\)](#): 37). Even after playing a crucial role in their community's well-being, a Gond woman is not treated equal to men and her education is not given much importance [Singh \(2003\)](#), 644.

It is common knowledge that women in India, have always been the victim of a patriarchal society and this is also true for Adivasi communities in the country, including the Gonds. Gender relations among Adivasi communities are less documented, studies on women's position in Chhattisgarh brought forth some of the Adivasi patriarchy's contradictions [Sen \(2004\)](#). As one might anticipate in a patrilineal society, land and home ownership were more common among males than among women. Some women were landowners, but those cases are rare and an exception. In these instances, even if the women were the owners, the land was mostly managed and controlled by the men of the family. Women of the community have often complained and found these land rights threatening and unjust. They noted that, while national law acknowledged children's equal rights to ancestral property, daughters were subjected to significant communal pressure to transfer their rights to their brothers. In most situations, women opted not to assert their rights in order to maintain a peaceful relationship with their brothers [Kabeer et al. \(2019\)](#): 23, 35.

Men's rights over children, their preferential access to property, and their dominating position in the family and community are some examples of patriarchal limitations that limit Adivasi women's life options. The same is seen in agricultural activities too. The Gond women's engagement is in the form of collection of fuel and fodder, but it is the men of the community who clearly have a stronger influence over agricultural output and goods [Kabeer et al. \(2019\)](#): 23-24.

In patriarchal societies, women often do not have economic independence and therefore are subjugated to lower household and social status [Mitra \(2008\)](#): 1206-1207. Girls look after younger siblings and do housework and also assist in farm work. As a result of this, there is a gender gap in education, as girls are not able to dedicate proper time to their studies [Bhasin \(2007\)](#). In a study, it was revealed that education levels among the women of the Gond Tribe in Chhattisgarh were lower than that of men, over 40 percent of women were illiterate compared to just 22 percent of men. The illiteracy among women is one of the major reasons for their subordinated position in society; [Kabeer et al. \(2019\)](#): 32. It is evident via data published in Statistical Profile of Scheduled Tribes in India, 2013 that the Literacy rate amongst Gond women is 48.7 percent as compared to 72.8 percent literacy rate amongst Gond men (Statistical Profile of Scheduled Tribes In India, 2013). A stereotypical pattern of work division was followed within the community too. Women were responsible for household chores like fetching well water, washing clothes, cooking, collecting food and fodder, most of which were unpaid and undervalued [Kabeer et al. \(2019\)](#): 24. Women seldom engage in official political decision-making in indigenous societies, and the Gonds are no exception, but they are frequently consulted, either by their husbands or at community meetings. However, they cannot become village chiefs because they are not members of village councils. Decisions regarding marriage, fertility, and divorce on the women's part are also severely constrained [Mitra \(2008\)](#): 1206-1207. The sluggish pace of diffusion of education among indigenous women is to a large extent responsible for their failure to secure a place in emerging sectors of the economy [Sharma \(1967\)](#):21.

Women are also not part of communal decision-making institutions, as a result, despite its seeming egalitarianism, patriarchal prejudice is there in the Adivasi communities, even though the form may be different than that of wider society. Women also rarely play any significant part in religion. The biases seen in other communities of Indian society have cast its shadow upon the Gond Community as well. Married men were older than their wives and more likely than women to engage in polygamy. This age gap between married couples, men being much older than women, could also be the reason for a higher number of widowed women in the community. Forced marriages and child marriages are common in the Gond community, similar to what has been observed in some of the other Adivasi communities [Kabeer et al. \(2019\)](#): 24. It was simpler for men of the Gond community to divorce their spouses and remarry/marry other women. Women, on the other hand, faced enormous social pressure to stay with their husbands regardless of their behaviour [Kabeer et al. \(2019\)](#): 32. Evidence of domestic violence was also noted within the community. A few Gond men felt disconcerted about domestic violence; the majority, however, felt that the violence issue was within appropriate bounds and as per the community standards that were well defined. The community permits men's right to beat their spouses, however, there are equally explicit rules prohibiting women from raising their hands against their husbands under any circumstances. It is acceptable for a male to give a woman one or two hand slaps and punishment is imposed on him only if he strikes her with his shoes. A woman, however, is not allowed to hit or raise her hand at a man, otherwise, a severe societal penalty is imposed on her if she does so [Kabeer et al. \(2019\)](#): 28-29. The "community standards" have normalised domestic violence in the Gond community and this issue of violence is further aggravated by the habit of alcohol consumption by the men of the Gond tribe [Kabeer et al. \(2019\)](#): 33.

Alcohol was historically only consumed at festivals by the members of the Gond tribe, however over time, drinking has become a significant communal issue, impacting their health, well-being, increased poverty and at the same time increased violence towards women which has had a detrimental impact on women's physical and mental well-being [Kabeer et al. \(2019\)](#): 29.

With time, however, things are changing slowly, and presently, women's role is not limited to the house, they are now participants in all aspects of life, including earning a living, side by side with males [Srivastava \(2005\)](#): 15. Even though inequality exists, tribal women now have some protection against rigid social standards, for instance, women are free to take part in social activities of their choice, in many cases, there's no dowry and remarriage of widowed women are also welcomed. [Misra \(2008\)](#).

3.7. GOND CULTURAL TRADITIONS, CRAFTS AND FESTIVALS

All ancient communities have a rich cultural heritage of extensive traditions, rituals, festivals, language, and handcrafts. The social interactions during the festivals and celebrations are essential for passing on these underlying systems of beliefs, folklores, legends, mores, mythos, and knowledge to the next generation. In the Gond community, as in other all indigenous societies, these socio-cultural practices bring a sense of belonging, peace, and harmony in the community. These are almost always also linked to nature and its elements. The socio-cultural and religious components of their existence highlight a certain reverence towards life. Their cultural and religious practices are linked and reflective of their philosophy of "well-being of all".

3.7.1. FESTIVALS

Tribal festivals, ceremonial practices, religious systems, and traditions play a significant role in tribal culture and have a distinctive place in Indian society [Meena & Meena \(2014\)](#). It showcases their rich heritage. Gonds, being one of the oldest Indian tribes are deeply rooted in their customs and rituals.

The Gond tribe has always been intimately associated with the festivals which incidentally also correspond to a particular stage in the cultivation of a distinct crop during its life cycle. Festivals like Hareli, Hariyali Teej, Bidri Puja, Dauli, and Nawakhani are celebrated with a goal to produce a bountiful crop yield [Kumar & Baudh \(2021\)](#): 766. [Table 1](#) showcases certain festivals that are celebrated by the community, along with the significance of the festival and the specific element/s of nature that is/are worshipped.

Table 1

Table 1 Festivals of Gond Tribes Kumar & Baudh (2021)			
S. No.	Name of the festival	Elements that are worshipped	Significance
1.	Bidri Puja	Cloud, Earth, and Grain Food	To initiate the sowing of the seed, Bidri pooja is performed by worshipping Khermai deity
2.	Dauli	Crop	The Gonds carry out the Dauli rite after the rice plant has grown but before the seeds emerge.
3.	Hareli	Agricultural field, farming equipment, and livestock.	Hareli is conducted to purge the land and elements or people that cause suffering as well as to bring prosperity and good fortune. All the agricultural tools are worshipped and praised.
4.	Hariyali Teej	Pods of the grain	The Gonds of Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand, commonly practice Hariyali Teej. It is believed that, their religious rituals maintain a balance with nature. Women visit their maternal villages for the festival of Teej. In the evening, women perform puja in their houses.
5.	Nawakhani	New paddy grain	This festival is celebrated after the harvest of rice. The farmers honour the outcome of labour by preparing traditional dishes from rice.

3.7.2. RELIGION

The Gond tribe is thought to have its origins in the pre-Dravidian time in south India during 2000 BC, making it one of India's earliest tribes [Mehta \(1984\)](#), p. 214. Over the years, distinct religious practices and customs have been followed by the Gonds of central India [Koreti \(2015\)](#). According to Mehta, there is subsequent impact of the Brama on the Gond folklores and rituals. [Mehta \(1984\)](#), p.185. Their main deity is Bada Deo or Mahadev (Pen), who is typically identified with Shiva in Hindu mythology [Vahia & Halkare \(2013\)](#). Gonds were originally not Hindus however, the Hindus have had a significant impact on the Gonds' religious beliefs. They have long practiced Hindu culture and traditions [Meena & Meena \(2014\)](#). However, it's interesting to note that the Gonds believe they entered the domain of the gods later because of Karta Subal, the son of Shiva [Mehta \(1984\)](#):177. In addition to Bada Dev, they also worship Bhimsen, a Hindu God, and Marai, a goddess of plague and other maladies. In addition to these Gods and Goddesses, the Gonds have a large variety of other deities and spirits (good and evil spirits). They believe that every hill, river, lake, and tree is also home to spirits. They contend that several deities who govern over the land, sea, and air must be pleased by sacrifices. Therefore, the tribe sacrifice animals on sacred occasions [Meena & Meena \(2014\)](#). The animal

sacrifice made on several religious occasions is not just to bring prosperity and good health for the people of the community but has a dual purpose of cleansing the soil thereby making the land more productive [Kumar & Baudh \(2021\)](#).

3.7.3. HAND CRAFTS

The Gond tribe and its subtribes are all skilled in archery, dancing, singing, metalwork, woodwork, and playing musical instruments. However, the Madia and the Pradhan Gonds tribes are particularly adept at skills in woodwork and wall paintings respectively. The Madia tribe has many skilled artisans who make Pog-gota, a tobacco box made using carvings from the Shivam tree. The speciality of this box is that no joints except at the lid are there. In addition, bamboo basket weaving, bamboo knives, and bottles made from thick bamboo for carrying oil are also made by the Madia Gond tribe [Deagaonkar \(2008\)](#). Moond, a pillar used in wedding ceremonies made from a branch of a salai tree is also one of the specialties of the Madia Gond families [Koreti \(2015\)](#).

The eponymous art of Gond was traditionally done as wall paintings that originated from folk and tribal art as practiced by one of India's major tribes and bears the name of that tribe. Lines, dots, and dashes are commonly used in these paintings by employing bold hues like red, green, yellow, and blue. Natural materials such as cow dung, colours obtained from sand, plant leaves and flowers have been used as source of colour traditionally [Gond and Roy \(2008\)](#). However, presently these paintings are done on paper and canvas with synthetic paints.

From the above text, it can be understood that traditional religious practices, festivals, customs, folksongs, and handicrafts profoundly affect individuals of a tribal or urban society. They significantly contribute to the preservation of the common ethnicity, faith, and heritage of a community. These practices bring all the generations of a family and members of a community together which in turn helps strengthen the bond and value system of a society. [Chacko \(2005\)](#).

These cultural and ritualistic practices besides enhancing the sense of kinship, have ecological significance. These contribute to peaceful co-existence, with other members of the family, fellow villagers, the entire community, with ancestors, and with nature.

Image 1



Image 1 Huts of Gond Tribals Decorated with Gond Paintings

Source Researcher

Image 2



Image 2 Patangarh Village in Mandla-Dindori District, Madhya Pradesh

Source Researcher

4. DISCUSSION

During the previous centuries, the Gond society has experienced many changes in their social and economic life. After Independence, India embarked on the path of human and social development. Consequently, even the most primitive societies residing in the country were also affected by these developments. Like other primitive tribal societies, the Gond tribe, too, was influenced by the changes in the natural and physical environment, contact with other groups, and religions with time [Mehta \(2016\)](#): 888- 889. The impact of the natural environment and climatic changes, changes in their homeland, migration, battles, and increasing contact with other societies leads to the phenomena of acculturation. This change got amplified during British rule and continued even after the country's independence. The universal adult franchise has made it easier for everyone to participate in the political process, while the subsequent five-year plans have encouraged the adoption of new technologies in industry and agriculture, as a result, the rate and spread of urbanisation and industrialization accelerated. People's mobility and other interactions have risen due to the development of established modes of transportation and communication, as well as the growth and dispersion of community and commercialised services. Even indigenous tribes in the forest and on the hills have been able to break their semi-isolation as a result of this modernisation/industrialisation. [Bhattacharyya \(1968\)](#).

The physical environment where the Gond tribe resided was a vital factor, which affected human development and social change in the past and is to date of great significance. The Gonds have inhabited the forests and highlands of the central India region. The natural surroundings in the region acted as an advantage as well as a disadvantage to the tribal members of Gond society. They have survived and adapted in the forest region for many centuries and hence have contributed to the country's economy and culture by adapting and preserving nature. Their activities mainly affected the agricultural economy of India. However, years of British rule, colonisation, imperialism, resulted in detribalisation of the old traditions. The aborigines and primitive tribe members found themselves labelled as the backward

classes of the nation at the time of independence. Due to the origin of the class structure on the plains and urban areas in the northern and southern parts of India, the tribal community of India became a victim of this class structure. Even in the Gond society, this class structure emerged, and gradually the Raj Gond, Raj Khonds, Raj Murias, and Raj Korkus manifested themselves as a superior group resulting in Gond society being structured on the basis of class [Mehta \(2016\)](#): 889-891.

After independence, agricultural capitalism accelerated, and in subsequent decades, the commercial market economy expanded competitively. With this increasing focus on the market economy, the tribal communities began cultivating cash crops. This resulted in economic disparity, and with this increasing economic polarity, the trend of stratification became even more apparent within the tribe. The processes of social divergence and sanskritisation have slowly changed the social structure within the tribe. Each tribal group now is endogamous and their ranking within the tribe is done at individual, family, and clan level. The changing environment, in which modernity and industry play a significant role, tribal civilization, like any other community, is no longer homogeneous [Sarkar & Dasgupta \(2007\)](#): 101.

The Indian government played a major role in safeguarding the scheduled tribes, post-independence. The tribes that were subjected to the apathetic colonial system and had to bear its adverse effects, were included in the development policies. The Indian constitution has a number of measures for the protection of disadvantaged tribal communities. For the welfare and overall development of the tribes, development projects have been launched throughout the past 60 years. However, the Gond tribes in India, still fall behind the rest of the population even after 60 years of planned development. Several factors that have had a negative influence on their ability to survive economically are liberalism, privatisation, and commercialisation. For instance, due to pressure on land and forest resources prompted by land alienation and forest policies, the indigenous tribal population experienced severe livelihood issues that contributed to their suffering and discontent [Sastry & Rao \(2011\)](#): vi).

5. SUMMARY

From the review analysis, it can be surmised that the Gonds are an ancient tribe of great magnificence that even finds mention in the spiritual ancient Indian texts like the great Ramayana.

Due to factors like colonisation and modernisation, the rulers of the tribe might have faded from our present conscience, but the tribe's history and the stories of the glorious Gond Kingdom still have a place of significance in the illustrious history of the land of India. Various factors have led to the transformations in the way the Gond tribe organises itself today. Over the centuries, the tribe has continuously adopted the cultural practices of the Kingdoms that they came in contact with and made these practices their own. The brave rulers of the Gond Kingdom fought commendably against the advancing armies of the Marathas, Mughals, and British. Majorly dwelling in and around Central India initially, the Gonds are now spread in different Indian states. The Gond tribe grew as a result of marriages between tribes, and sub-clans, as well as migration and changing environment, and some tribes even adopted new names. These new clans, sub-clans and other tribes coalesced into the Gond community. The paper also enumerates how the Gonds' social, cultural, and economic life has evolved owing to multiple factors like migration, colonisation, and modernisation. This recasting of the social and cultural fabric were necessary adaptations so that the community could better assimilate with the changing world.

A tribal nomadic community that began its subsistence as a hunting economy, gradually adopted cultivation and domestication to sustain itself. The tribe that had thrived in the previous centuries could not cope so well in the new environment. Post-independence, due to the loss of their natural habitat and new systems of governance, their position has consistently declined and presently many of the Gond tribe members are dwelling in slum areas in metropolitan cities or in small towns.

After reviewing several written pieces and interviewing the members of Gond tribe, it can be inferred that the present literature has not given much space or prominence to this indigenous tribal group. The Gond tribal community has had a glorious past but in present times, they are struggling for livelihood and well-being.

Tribes had to adapt and make changes in various aspects of their life and vocation/s, over the years, and despite that, they continued to make significant contributions to Indian culture, history, and art forms. The waves of modernity and industrial growth have benefited Indian society as a whole in terms of better social status of women, more work opportunities, and legal rights, however, for Gonds, one of its greatest achievements, its unique art forms, culture, and language, have not been adequately represented. There is an urgent need to acknowledge and assign representation and value to their art forms, culture, linguistics, and other traditions before they are lost to the world.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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None.

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