



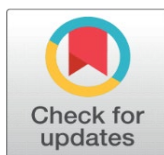


FROM FOREST WALLS TO GLOBAL GALLERIES: TRADITION AND INNOVATION IN THE GOND ART OF MADHYA PRADESH

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ABSTRACT

Gond art is a traditional tribal art & culture famous in Madhya Pradesh. This art is a medium that uses the theme of nature, folk stories, religion, and daily life to tell a story. As an important part of India's tribal heritage, this art form represents more than just religious beliefs. Memories and experiences of the entire Gond community reflects in this art. The beauty of this art painting is its unique use of dots, lines, shapes, and vibrant colours. The subject of this painting is natural landscapes, traditional myths, stories of deities, and various social day-to-day life activities, etc. Over time, this tradition has adopted several innovations. It was originally started on walls and floors by using natural pigment colours. Gond art has adapted many new art techniques and materials in the Modern era. Like artists use paper and canvas, acrylic and poster colors to make paintings, and meet the demands of today's contemporary art market. Despite these changes, artists have still preserved their old traditional symbols and themes. By integrating new forms and techniques, Gond artists have established this art within the global art scene. Therefore, Gond art has gained recognition not only locally but also on national and international platforms. This art technique creates a bridge between rural and urban societies. The objective of this research is to analyze the balance between the traditional Gond art and its modern evolutions. This paper focuses on how Gond artists maintain their traditional cultural identity by using today's creative experimentation in a contemporary context. The harmony between tradition and innovation in Gond art is an inspiring model. It is the preservation and development of Indian traditional tribal art.

Received 26 February 2026

Accepted 22 April 2026

Published 06 May 2026

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DOI

[10.29121/shodhkosh.v7.i8s.2026.7386](https://doi.org/10.29121/shodhkosh.v7.i8s.2026.7386)

Funding: This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

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Keywords: Gond Art of Madhya Pradesh, Gond Artistic Traditions, Folk Art, Innovation in Gond Art, Contemporary Gond Art



1. INTRODUCTION

Gond tribes are the largest tribal communities who resides in Madhya Pradesh. The Gond art is not just a painting; it is a medium to tell the story of this community and show their connection with nature. The Gond tribe passes down their traditional art culture to the future generation by making drawings of daily life activities. Now, Gond art is in the period of change, as the artist uses readymade acrylic colour rather than the traditional pigment colour. The entire community is trying to explore new modern technology to share their style of work globally. Many scholars found that in the period of change, artists of this community have kept their culture alive in this modern context. Historically, the surface for this art was usually the mud walls of houses. Now the techniques of today's modern era have opened many

opportunities for surfaces like canvas, paper, fabric, or digital screens. The artists of this community are famous internationally, and they also try to help village artists reach the same level. This research looks closely at how the traditional process and the new process work together. This research paper also examines how Gond artists meet the demands of this art form while preserving their traditional art and culture. The artists are striving to inspire others as well to carry forward this art in the future.

2. OBJECTIVES

This research paper focuses on how Gond artists are maintaining their old cultural identities by using new media and experimental techniques in their art. The primary objective of this research paper is to focus on the relationship between traditional Gond art and contemporary innovations within this art form. This is not only an art technique, but it is a tradition that shows the community's identity, social values, cultural beliefs, and the connection with nature. The specialty of this art is the use of dots, lines, shapes, natural patterns, and the vibrant colours that help to identify this art. This research also aims to analyse their traditional art practice and to see how they have created the unique styles in this art. The important part of this paper is to discuss in details about the modifications and changes in these art practices. The practice of Gond art is changing every day, as it started to be made on mud walls. Now its medium has changed from traditional mud wall to canvas, fabric, and other medium. The major change is the use of many readymade market-based colours instead of traditional natural pigment colours. This paper shows how Gond artists keep their traditional art culture alive even as they adapt to new technology and mediums. This study analyses the impact of social and economic factors on the traditional Gond art. It explains how this traditional Gond art helps the artisans to earn a better livelihood while keeping their cultural identities. It also focuses on the future opportunities of the artisans who create this art. This study also talks about how this art creates new opportunities by using the internet & social media in today's modern era. It also helps to identify how this art tradition will be alive for future generations.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The methodology of this research paper is qualitative. Primary data are collected from the field work, from the artists who are living in Bhopal or nearby. The main focus was on those areas where the majority of the Gond artists reside. During the field work and discussion with artisans, the photographs were taken for future documentation. The entire discussion was in detail about their art culture. The artisans provide their insights about how the new technologies and innovations are giving a new shape to this art in the modern era. They also discussed the advantages and disadvantages of the innovations in the art tradition. The collected primary data was verified from the secondary data. Secondary data, such as research journals, research papers, books, and other authentic reference materials. Discussed with some resident artisans, staff, scholars, and experts of the tribal museum and Indira Gandhi Rashtriya Manav Sangrahalaya, Bhopal. They provide detailed information about how the traditional art practice and modern subject in this art are working together, giving a clear image and thoughts of the whole subject.

4. GOND ARTISTIC TRADITIONS

- 1) Natural Colours:** Traditionally, this painting was directly created on the floor & wall by using the natural earth colours, including the specific mural-like Digna and other paintings. At that time, artists were dependent on the easily available resources around them. They were using colors derived from soil, charcoal, leaves, and minerals. Specifically, black was obtained from charcoal, red from geru, yellow from ramraj soil, and white from lime or chui clay. For green tones, leaves and cow dung were often utilized (Vajpeyi and Vivek, 2006).
- 2) Symbols and Themes:** In Gond painting, some important symbols hold cultural and spiritual meaning, such as the sun, moon, trees, and various animals etc. These symbols are not just decorative objects, these represents the community's beliefs and their relations with the natural world. The subjects of Gond art are incorporated with oral traditions and stories of deities. As like Trees such as the Saaja, Pakri, Peepal, and Mahua are commonly created, as they hold environmental and spiritual importance for this community. Similarly, animals, birds, fish, and tigers symbolize the range of nature and the connection of the life cycle. Symbols and motifs from Gond tribal myths, and the stories of gods and goddesses are the main features of the artwork's composition (Elwin, 1955).

- 3) **Dots and Lines:** The most unique thing of Gond art is its frequent use of dots, lines, and geometric patterns. These patterns are used as a signature of individual artists of this community to develop their own style and identity. The artists create the artwork with a sense of rhythm and movement. The artist fills the spaces in the art composition with beautiful use of dots and lines. These patterns carry a message about how life keeps going and the never-ending circle of nature (Saxena, 2018).
- 4) **Socio-Religious Importance:** Gond art is not made only decoration purpose. Gond art is created at festivals, weddings, or especially during rituals. The believe of this community is that creating auspicious images or symbols brings prosperity and positivity in the house. Paintings are traditionally created on walls and floors during the community's social and religious celebrations. There is a strong cultural belief that viewing positive imagery enhances one's luck. The subject of paintings is images related to nature, animals, and deities. Visual and cultural stories are passed down from one generation to the next through these visual stories. Gond artists usually create traditional songs and oral legends into their paintings. Giving physical form to their intangible heritage (Elwin, 1955).
- 5) **Innovation in Gond Art:** The future of this Gond art totally depends on the balance between tradition and innovation in this art. Tradition is the soul of this art, and innovation is a part of this art. Both are very important to keep this art culture alive in today's changing world. Lots of initiatives are currently helping to protect this art tradition. We need to host training workshops for the artists, start using natural paints for protecting this community's work culture alive. Gond artists are now showing their work all over the world. By bringing these traditional art cultures to a global platform using social media. They are also making sure that their art stays famous and continues to grow (Sunday, 2024).
- 6) **New Mediums and Materials:** Gond art is no longer confined to mud walls or residential interiors. Today's contemporary artists have begun utilizing modern surfaces such as canvas, chart paper, fabric etc. These changes have made the artwork more durable and collectible. It is allowing Gond artists to move beyond traditional process and establish a global presence. The pioneer of this change was Late Jangarh Singh Shyam. He experimented with these new mediums at Bharat Bhavan, Bhopal. He famously observed that while traditional Gond art was created as murals on walls, it was impossible for an admirer to take a piece of the wall home. By transitioning to paper, the art became portable, allowing it to be easily collected and transported. The major changes were introduced by the late Jangarh Singh Shyam. He tried to make this art on new surfaces like paper and canvas, which are long-lasting. New surface ensures brightness and new materials like acrylic colours are preserved by long time (IGNCA).
- 7) **Modern Colours:** The traditional pigment colours in Gond art have been replaced by the new acrylic and poster colours. These colours are more durable, long-lasting, and attract viewers. The changes towards new mediums are made this art more commercial in competitive markets (Bharadwaj & Ukande, 2014). Ravi Tekam is the son of the famous Gond artist, late Narmada Prasad Tekam. During the personal interview with Ravi, he said that historically, the artists were using the natural colours collected from the village. The process of collecting natural colours is very slow and tough. The result of natural colours is also very dull and faded. Then, Gond artists migrated to Bhopal or urban areas and explored readymade market-based colours. Now all artists have become familiar with the acrylic colours. Gond artists believe that the readymade colours save lots of time, and the beauty and vibrancy of this colour attracts everyone. It preserves the impact of the artwork for a longer duration (Tekam).
- 8) **Contemporary Themes:** Today, the artist has practised and introduced many contemporary subjects in Gond art, such as environmental issues, education, health care, women's safety, and social issues. This is the indication that the artists are using this art as a medium to express their thoughts and ideas. Now this art has become a medium for expressing modern issues and social awareness. (Bose, 2010). In the beginning, the main subject of this art was mythological and nature-related themes. Some artists are using subjects like aeroplanes, bicycles, trains, modern infrastructure, etc., in their paintings. Some established brands are also using this art style theme in their packaging and branding (Mitra, 2025).
- 9) **Expansion of markets:** The credit for the market's expansion from village to urban areas of Gond art goes to late Jangarh Singh Shyam. In 1989, his works received high appreciation and fame when his painting was displayed in the exhibition "Magicians de la Terre" (Magicians of the earth) in Paris. This was the first exhibition of Gond art on an international platform. In the same year, his paintings were also exhibited in the Mithila

Museum, Tokyo. His works were again appreciated widely in those exhibitions. Due to those efforts and exhibition on an international level, this art is recognised at global stage. Today, Gond art has expanded in various national & international commercial markets, such as fashion, interior design, and book illustration industries, etc. This commercial growth not only improved the economic structure of this art but also improved the cultural heritage on a global platform (Rani, 2019). The special patterns of Gond motifs are used on different lifestyle and fashion products like kurti, saree, cushion cover, bags, curtains, and furniture (Rana, 2024). 'Touch the Gond' organization is supporting Gond artists to connect with national and international markets & exhibitions (Touch the Gond).

10) Participation of Women Artists: Today, lots of Gond women artists are making this art, participating in exhibitions, and selling commercially. Involvement of women artists in art has added a new dimension to the art culture. They are changing the traditional themes by bringing new themes like social issues and feminist ideas into their work. They are also giving an emotional touch to the art by using their own stories and thoughts (Rana, 2024). The article "women financial empowerment" says that the Gond female artists are achieving financial independence by selling their own art in the market. They are participating in many art fairs and markets to sell their art. They are also using online social media platforms, like Instagram and Facebook, for selling their art (Dey, 2022). The research paper named "Gond painting and their women artistic journey from tradition to modernity" explores the experiences and challenges faced by these women artists. This paper also analysed the critical role of women's efforts in their professional journeys (Rana, 2024).

11) Innovation within Traditional art: Gond art is a medium to connect with the past. It gives the community a chance to express their connection with nature & their beliefs. Traditionally, the community of Gond artists used natural colours taken from soil, charcoal, and leaves. The theme of this painting was animals, trees, the sun, the moon etc. By using dots and lines, these paintings show how life goes on and how everything is connected to nature and the cycle of life. Over time, Gond art has gained new dimensions within a modern context. Artists have switched to the new mediums like canvas, paper, and fabric, and replaced natural colours with acrylic and poster colors. These innovations made Gond art more competitive in the commercial market. It also provides a new identity in global market. Now the contemporary themes are environmental conservation, social equality, education, healthcare, and women's empowerment. This artform has become a bridge in tradition and innovations in the present day. The combination of traditional and new concepts shows how Gond art is alive. It also proves that the tradition stays true and can change & grow with the times. So overall, the Gond art is not just saving its past, it is also building its future by maintaining its creativity.

5. CHALLENGES OF TRADITIONAL ART AND INNOVATION

- 1) Loss of Traditional Techniques:** The traditional process of collecting pigment from different sources is gradually declining. The main reason of declining this process because it takes a very long time to complete. Sometimes it was very difficult to collect natural colours from the raw materials. Today, even after receiving the geographical indication (GI) tag, many artists believe that Gond art is losing its authenticity. Because Gond artists are moving away from traditional pigment colour processes, and they are using modern readymade acrylic colours (Arur & Wyeld, 2016).
- 2) Art becomes commercialized under market pressure:** This art becomes commercial under market pressure. The market demand and the popularity of this art encourage the artists to create more artwork in a quicker way. This art is cost-effective and customized according to the customer's choices. Sometimes, the quality of the artwork and the meaning of the particular artwork are sacrificed due to this process. Although the variety of themes and the market prices have increased in this art form. Critics warn that this trend may negatively impact the original style and traditions of this art (Das, 2014). In the recent research on marketing of this art suggest many emerging artists are creating this art only to satisfy urban and international customers. If this trend continues, the traditional art culture will become only commercial products in the future (Banerjee and Dutta, 2019).
- 3) The problem of copy work and mass-produced goods:** After the commercialization of this art, it is very difficult for consumers to identify which one is original and which one is machine-made. Some senior and local Gond artists show their concern that many commercial vendors sell copies of the original Gond art by altering

its colours and compositions. Because of this trend, the original meaning and story behind the tree and animals are missing from this art. These types of artwork products always create confusion among buyers and reduce the credibility of the art (Chaturvedi, 2023). Some researchers say that the new trends of making this art process easy by the use of digital tools and software like Photoshop and CorelDRAW. Traditionally, the artist were making this art on the wall by using their hand and extra effort. The new technologies and use of AI have reduced the efforts and time. It creates the art perfectly in short times and with minimum efforts. Digital designs can be reused multiple times without extra effort. One recent research shows that the use of AI and different types of digital tools is helping in commercial industries to create motifs as modern design elements (Sakshi, 2017).

- 4) **Reducing Interest Among the Younger Generation:** Artist of the young generation are losing their interest in this traditional art culture. They are moving away from this for the reasons of higher education, better jobs, or the exciting city lifestyle. Today's commercial markets are more competitive, so young people think they have to change their style frequently to survive in the modern market. There is also a possibility that young generation artists will not work in tradition. This tradition may gradually disappear from society (Sharan, 2024). During the personal interview with Gond artist Ravi Tekam, he said the trend is changing, young people are fail to understand about the old traditional art and culture. They are copying the work of senior artists instead of making their own art style. They do not understand the story or concepts behind the traditional themes or motifs. The reason for losing interest in Gond art is that it is a time-consuming process, and it also requires patience. He observed that many young artists lack patience; they prefer immediate results. All these things are the main reasons for detachment from this traditional art culture (Tekam).

6. CONCLUSION

A traditional Gond art today becomes a good combination of old traditional and new innovative art. This is the only reason for this art for long-term survival on the national and international platform. This art style strikes a balance between saving traditional techniques and fulfilling the demand of today's commercial market. These changes show that old traditional arts are alive today in modern culture & lifestyle. It preserves its original origin and develops styles according to the social requirements. Gond art has established the balance with old themes like nature, mythological stories, and new themes and mediums like colour, canvas, fabric, and digital platforms. The contemporary themes like environmental issues, social awareness, and women's empowerment have made this art more famous on a global platform. This Gond art faces some challenge including the loss of traditional techniques, over-commercialization, and lackness the interest among youth artists. If these issues are not addressed, then the importance of this art may be lost in this community. If these issues are addressed, then there is a chance for the development and more growth of this art in the future. These issues can be addressed with the help of government & non-government organizations. These organizations can organize training workshops and run a digital awareness program for the community artists. Online selling platform & international exhibitions can play an important role in the empowerment of practicers Gond artists. Introducing the Gond art in educational systems can be an effective way to create interest among future generations. Gond art is not only an art style, but it is also a powerful source of inspiration and vision for the world, using innovations & themes.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

None.

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