



Socio Economic Study of Gond Tribe in India: A Geographical Study

Professor (Dr.) Sanjay Raosaheb Sawate

Head Dept. of Geography,

Kalikadevi Arts, Commerce and Science College, Shirur Kasar

Tq. Shirur Kasar Dist. Beed

Corresponding Author – Professor (Dr.) Sanjay Raosaheb Sawate

DOI - 10.5281/zenodo.17663482

Abstract:

The Gond tribes are one of the largest indigenous groups in India, with a significant presence in Maharashtra. They are known for their distinct language, Gondi, and rich cultural traditions, including unique art forms like Gond painting. In Maharashtra, they are primarily found in the eastern and central parts of the state, particularly in areas with forests and hilly terrain. The Gond tribal community in Maharashtra embodies a living heritage an intimate blend of art, nature, spirituality, and collective life. Their unique institutions like the gotul and rich oral traditions have sustained identity for generations. Yet, modernization, language erosion, and socio-economic challenges threaten this legacy. Efforts like language documentation, community schools, cultural art workshops are vital and promising. Would you like a deeper dive into any specific area be it festivals like Gussadi, revival of the Gondi script, or the role of Pardhan bards? I'm here to explore with you!

Keywords: Gond, Tribal, Gussadi, Gotul, etc.

Introduction:

Gond society is divided into several exogamous patrilineal units known as *sagas*. The number depends on the region, with Gonds in the hills of Madhya Pradesh and the northern Nagpur plain having only two and those in the southern Nagpur plain and Adilabad having four. In Adilabad, these *Sagas* are called *Yerwen*, *Sarwen*, *Siwen*, and *Nalwen*, and their names refer to the number of ancestors for that *saga*.^[a] In Adilabad, there is a fifth *saga*, *Sarpe saga*, which for marriage purposes is linked with *Sarwen*, although their origin myths are different. According to Gond mythology, all *sagas* once lived in a single village but soon moved out and established individual villages. The names of these ancestral villages are preserved in culture and sometimes

identified with present-day locations. The number of ancestors for each *saga* is its symbol, and on many ceremonial and ritual occasions, the number of involved animals, people, actions, or objects corresponds to that *saga*'s number.

The Gond tribes are one of the largest indigenous groups in India, with a significant presence in Maharashtra. They are known for their distinct language, Gondi, and rich cultural traditions, including unique art forms like Gond painting. In Maharashtra, they are primarily found in the eastern and central parts of the state, particularly in areas with forests and hilly terrain.

According to the 2011 census, there were 1,026,344 followers of the “Gondi” religion in India, with the majority residing in Madhya Pradesh (584,884) followed by Chhattisgarh (368,438) Maharashtra (66,857)

Uttar Pradesh (3419) and Jharkhand (2419). the majority of Gond people still follow their own traditions of nature worship but like many other tribes in India their religion has been influenced by other religion.

Key aspects of the Gond tribes in India:

- **Location:** The Gond tribe is widely spread across several states in India, with a strong presence in Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Andhra Pradesh, and Maharashtra. In Maharashtra, they are concentrated in regions like Gadchiroli, Chandrapur, and Nanded districts.
- **Language:** Their native tongue, Gondi, belongs to the Dravidian family, but its usage is declining—only one-fifth of Gonds now speak it actively. The endangered **Madia (Madiya)** dialect is now receiving focused preservation efforts. Maharashtra's government has allocated funds to document and conserve it through dictionaries and vocabulary lists The Times of India. Community-led initiatives like the Aheri Ashram School in Gadchiroli integrate Gondi teaching with regular schooling an inspiring model for cultural retention. Gondi is the traditional language of the Gond tribe, which belongs to the Dravidian language family. However, many Gonds in Maharashtra also speak Marathi, the regional language, or Hindi.
- **Culture:** The Gonds have a rich cultural heritage with unique customs, traditions, and art forms. Gondi art, particularly painting, is well-known for its vibrant colors and depictions of nature, animals, and mythological figures.



- **Economy:** Agriculture forms the base of their economy, with many Gonds also engaged in daily wage labor. They also traditionally gather forest produce and engage in hunting and fishing.
- **Social Structure:** The Gond tribe is organized into clans and subgroups, with a system of social hierarchy. They have a strong community life and participate in various festivals and rituals.

Key Components of Gond Social Structure:

- **1-Sagas:** These are large, overarching groups within Gond society, divided into smaller units called pari. The number of sagas varies by region and is tied to ancestral mythology and symbolism.
- **2-Pari (Clans):** Each pari is a large, unilineal (patrilineal) grouping of families descended from a common ancestor. Membership is crucial for social identity and marriage.
- **3-Kita (Lineages):** Within some pari, there are smaller, parallel groups called kita, which often have specific ritual functions.

- **4-Khandan (Subclans):** Pari can also be divided into khandan, which are organic, mini-clan-like units that sometimes develop around new centers for ritual worship.
- **5-Village Structure:** Each village has a headman, priest, and elders who form a council (panchayat) to manage village affairs and uphold customs.
- **6-Service Castes:** Villages also host specialized service castes, such as Ahir (cowherds), Agaria (blacksmiths), and Pardhan (bards), who perform specific roles within the community.
- **Key Social Practices**
- **7-Exogamy:** Gonds practice clan exogamy, meaning they marry outside of their own pari to a member of a different clan.
- **8-Marriage Rules:** Senior pari members cannot marry widows from junior pari, as this is considered analogous to the relationship between an elder and a younger brother's wife.
- **9-Family Life:** The family is the smallest social unit, traditionally a joint family system that is increasingly giving way to individual families.
- **10-Patrilineal Descent:** The social system is patrilineal, where lineage is traced through the father.

Youth Institutions: The Gotul:

Central to Gond youth life, especially among Madia Gonds, the gotul serves as a communal dormitory for unmarried boys and girls. It fosters discipline, public service, and social values. Gotuls play a vital role in festivals, weddings, and mourning rituals nurturing the next generation's cultural identity.

Gond Sub-Groups in Maharashtra:

The Gond in Maharashtra are divided into several sub-tribes. The most prominent include:

- **Madia Gond** (or Maria): Designated a Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group (PVTG) by the government, the Madia Gond primarily inhabit the wild, forested areas of Gadchiroli and Chandrapur. They are known for their traditional lifestyles and strong ties to their land.
- **Raj Gond:** Historically, the Raj Gonds were the ruling class among the Gonds and established prominent kingdoms in central India, including parts of Maharashtra's Vidarbha region.
- **Pardhan:** This sub-group historically served as bards and chroniclers for the Raj Gonds, preserving the clan histories and myths through oral traditions and song.
- **Dhurve Gond and Khatola Gond:** Other endogamous sub-groups also exist within the state.
- **Culture and traditions**
- **Koyapunem religion:** The Gonds have their own indigenous religion, known as Koyapunem ("the way of nature"), which emphasizes a spiritual connection with the natural world. They worship clan and village deities, and practice ancestor veneration.
- **Festivals and rituals:** Major Gond festivals include Pola, Phag, and Dassera. A distinctive part of their culture is the *Ghotul*, a traditional youth dormitory system where unmarried boys and girls gather for dancing, singing, and socializing.
- **Art forms:** Gond art is a vibrant form of tribal painting celebrated for its intricate patterns and storytelling. Traditionally, the art was used to decorate the walls and

floors of houses and featured natural elements, animals, and mythological tales.

Socio-Economic Conditions:

Historically, the Gond economy was based on agriculture, including shifting cultivation, and the collection of forest produce. However, many now work as daily wage laborers. A 1997–98 survey found that over 91% of Madia Gond families were living below the poverty line.

Challenges and Government Response:

The Gond tribes in Maharashtra, particularly the Madia Gond, face significant challenges:

- **Human-animal conflict:** Increasing human-animal conflicts, driven by deforestation for coal mines and infrastructure, have forced some Madia Gond to leave their ancestral lands in reserves like the Tadoba Andhari Tiger Reserve.
- **Naxal violence:** Communities in eastern Maharashtra are caught between Naxalites and the police, leading to displacement and violence. This conflict has also disrupted traditional cultural practices like music and dance.
- **Cultural erosion:** The Gondi language is under threat as younger generations adopt dominant regional languages like Marathi.
- **Economic marginalization:** Many Gonds experience economic hardship, land alienation, and cultural exploitation.

The government has implemented several initiatives to support tribal communities in Maharashtra:

- **PVTG Development Program:** This scheme targets particularly vulnerable

groups like the Madia Gond to improve access to essential services.

- **Welfare schemes:** State and central government programs, including the Pradhan Mantri Janjati Adivasi Nyaya Maha Abhiyan (PM-JANMAN), provide assistance for housing, education, healthcare, and infrastructure development in tribal regions.
- **Cultural promotion:** Efforts are made through organizations like the Tribal Research Institutes (TRIs) and festivals like the Aadi Mahotsav to preserve and promote Gond culture.
- **Modern Challenges:** Like many tribal communities, Gonds in Maharashtra face challenges related to poverty, lack of access to education and healthcare, and displacement due to development projects. However, they are also actively working to preserve their culture and traditions while adapting to the changing times

Conclusion:

The Gond tribal community in Maharashtra embodies a living heritage an intimate blend of art, nature, spirituality, and collective life. Their unique institutions like the gotul and rich oral traditions have sustained identity for generations. Yet, modernization, language erosion, and socio-economic challenges threaten this legacy. Efforts like language documentation, community schools, cultural art workshops are vital and promising. Would you like a deeper dive into any specific area be it festivals like Gussadi, revival of the Gondi script, or the role of Pardhan bards? I'm here to explore with you!

References:

1. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gondi_people
2. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Komaram_Bheem
3. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gundadhur>
4. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ramji_Gond
5. <https://www.google.com/search?q=Social+Structure>
6. <https://www.google.com/search?q=gond+tribe>