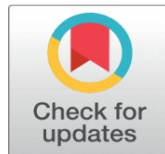
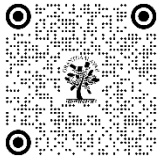


STUDY ON VISUAL SCENARIOS FOR UNDERSTANDING POLITICAL SYSTEM OF THE GOND COMMUNITY OF NUAPADA DISTRICT IN ODISHA

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the political system of the Gond tribe in the Nuapada district of Odisha. The Gond tribe's political structure is a significant component of the broader tribal polity within the state. This study examines the traditional governance mechanisms, leadership roles, and decision-making processes that characterize the Gonds' political organization. By analyzing these aspects, the paper aims to provide insights into how the Gonds maintain social order, resolve conflicts, and preserve their cultural identity. Despite the influence of globalization and modern technology, the traditional ideologies and practices of the Gond community in the Boden block of Sunapur village also known as the oldest village practicing self-managed democracy remain intact. In the primitive and agrarian society of the Gond tribe in Nuapada district, governance is implemented by tribal chiefs and the Gond community Panchayati. In the Gond's traditional political system, functions typically performed by modern states are carried out by social control mechanisms within the community. The rules and working procedures of these organizations, enforced by political institutions, sustain the social order. Here, the primary as well as the secondary source materials is methodologically utilized by the scholar.

Keywords: Political, System, Gond, Community, Tribe, Nuapada, District, Odisha

1. INTRODUCTION

This paper aims to explore the process of political formation in the tribal regions of India, with a particular focus on the Gond tribe in the Nuapada district of Odisha. The government of India, through its statutory agency known as the Panchayati Raj, has encouraged various social groups within villages to interact and compete for power-sharing at the regional level. This system seeks to integrate traditional governance structures into the modern political framework (Panda, 2011, p.20). The Gonds' political organization is primarily based on village-level solidarity, but this does not extend beyond the sub-sections of the Gond community the fundamental political unit of the Gond community is the village council, which operates as a democratic organization led by the "Majhi" (Headman). Other

members of the village council are selected by the villagers and include the village chief, priest, watchmen, and four or five co-opted elderly members representing different lineages within the village (Statistical Handbook, Nuapada, 2011, p.340). Despite their numerical strength, the Gonds have become less influential in the decision-making process under the current political system. The traditional political structure of the Gonds is weakening due to the influence of the modern Panchayati Raj system. The social esteem of traditional leaders is diminishing as politically affiliated members, representing the Panchayati Raj system, rise in prominence. This paper will further examine the impact of these changes on the Gond community and their traditional political structures.

2. OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

- 1) To understand the structure, processes and functions of tribal Self-Governance system.
- 2) To analysis the impact of political system of modernization of the Gond community.
- 3) To focus on political participation of the Gond people.

3. METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

During the field survey conducted in the Nuapada district of Odisha, we systematically observed the political system of the Gond tribe to gain a comprehensive understanding of the political structures within the Gond community, five villages Sunapur, Saradhapur, Binapur, Boden, and Pharsara were selected for in-depth study. A structured questionnaire was employed to gather insights into the perspectives and opinions of the Gond people regarding their political practices. Ethnographic data played a crucial role in this study, providing rich context for understanding the traditional and contemporary political dynamics within the community. The case study method, coupled with frequent use of interview techniques, was instrumental in collecting qualitative data. These methods allowed for a nuanced exploration of the Gonds' political organization, leadership roles, and decision-making processes. By integrating both quantitative and qualitative approaches, this study offers a detailed analysis of the political system of the Gond tribe in the Nuapada district.

4. SCOPE OF STUDY

Nuapada district, situated in the western part of Odisha, lies between 20° 20' N and 21° 5' N latitude and 82° 20' E to 82° 40' E longitude. It is bordered by the Mahasamund district of Chhattisgarh to the north, west, and south, and by the districts of Bargarh, Bolangir, and Kalahandi to the east. These tribes belong to the Indo-Dravidian linguistic family and maintain distinct traditions and political systems (Sahay, 2005, pp.142-152). The district is administratively divided into five Tahsils: Nuapada, Komna, Khariar, Sinapali, and Boden. According to the 2011 Census of India, Nuapada district has a population of 610,382, of which 225,841 (37.11%) are Scheduled Tribes. The Gonds are the most prominent tribe, comprising 66.56% of the tribal population, followed by the Sabars (12.30%), Saora (5.82%), and other tribal communities (15.20%). (Xaxa, Vol.40, No-13, 2005, pp.1363-1370). The study focuses on tribal-dominated villages, primarily located in isolated forested areas of the district. By examining the political systems of these tribal groups, particularly the Gonds, this study aims to provide a comprehensive

understanding of their traditional governance structures, their interaction with modern political frameworks, and the challenges they face in maintaining their cultural and political identity within the broader context of the district's administration (Ranganatha, Vol.2(1), 2014, pp.27-40).

5. DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

5.1. POLITICAL ORGANIZATION OF THE GONDS OF NUAPADA

Every human society whether primitive or advanced has its own built-in social-political apparatus to govern its member's behaviour and preserve law, order, justice, discipline, conformity, and social control in society. Gond is no exception to it since the Gonds are the citizens of an independent nation; they are subjected to the constitution, law, government and administration of the state. Most of them live in villages with other castes and communities and come under the traditional administrative and political control of the village organization last but not the least, their traditional caste Panchayat a well-knit organization to handle the internal and external affairs and safeguard the interest of the caste. Thus, Gonds live under dual control-one organized in association with neighbouring castes and communities at the village level and the other organized among them at their caste level (Chatterjee, Vol.2(2), 2014, pp.55-60).

5.2. THE ADMINISTRATIVE SETUP OF THE GOND TRIBE

The Gond king of Chandrapur was the highest authority of the Gond community in the Adilabad area (now in Andhra Pradesh), not only as a king or political chief but also as a tribal chief. He presided over the Panchayat, where disputes that could not be settled by local chiefs were resolved. Even after the Gond kingdom was abolished, he retained his position as a tribal chief in matters related to rituals, purification, social problems, and more, and his decisions prevailed in all such matters. This continued until 1941 A.D. during the reign of Raja Akbarshah. Though the Gond kings (and their successors) came from other clans, there were subordinate kings and chiefs, including Maharajas, Zamindars, *Rais*, Thakurs, *Jhakar*, and *Gatihar*, who were under the military authority of the Gond king. Thakurs, the local chiefs, were responsible for collecting and depositing revenue, and they supplied military support when needed. They maintained law and order, kept watch over criminals, and had the authority to impose fines and confiscate property (Jose, Vol.5(12), 2020, p.78).

5.3. THE AHERI ZAMINDARI

During the reign of Gond king Ramshah at Chandrapur, two Sardars under him, *Sadho* and *Mula*, started a mutiny against the king. In response, the king sent his relative, *Kokshah*, who killed *Sadho* and *Mula* and took control of *Surjyagad*. As a reward, the king granted *Kokshah* the Zamindari of the area, and *Kokshah* established his seat at *Aheri*. This occurred in 1703 A.D. marking the establishment of the Zamindari. *Kokshah* was from the *Sedmake* clan, but in 1871 A.D. the Zamindari passed to *Dharma Rao*, who was from the *Atram* clan. The last Zamindar was *Dharma Rao*, who continued in this role until the Zamindari system was abolished in 1950 A.D. Since then, the *Aheri* Zamindars have continued to hold power as tribal chiefs, wielding influence among the Gonds in matters related to rituals, social issues, cultural affairs, and other community matters. They remain central figures in the traditional *Dussehra* celebrations. Currently, *Raja Visheshwar*

Rao Maharaj, the Zamindar of Aheri, is well-educated and a former Member of Parliament (Prasad, Vol.3(1), 2015, pp.37-45). Each village has a headman called the *Gahita* he also serves as the Bhumia, or religious headman, of the village. The Panchayat is not a permanent body but is convened as needed. Upon receiving complaints, the Gaita calls two or three elders (the number is not fixed), and together they listen to the parties involved and decide the case with the help of the elders. Different elders may be called for different occasions (Sahoo et. al., Vol.5(4), 2018, pp.23-28).

5.4. POLITICAL AWARENESS OF THE GOND TRIBE

Political awareness among the Gond tribe in Nuapada district, Odisha, is shaped by factors like education, socio-economic conditions, and exposure to political processes. Efforts such as voter education programs, leadership training, and community meetings aim to enhance engagement, supported by government and NGO initiatives to improve infrastructure and access to information. Notably, tribal women in Patadhar Boden block have shown significant and commendable participation in community development and governance, reflecting a growing awareness and active involvement in political and social activities (Begum, Vol.3(5), 2015, p.55-66).

Figure 1



Figure 1 Political awareness among Gonds women was noticed at Patadhar village of the Boden block of Nuapada district.

Internet Source <https://idronline.org/idr-explains-local-government-in-india/>

5.5. IMPACT ON LOCAL GOVERNANCE SYSTEM

When it comes to its own governance, the Gond tribe is actively involved in the administration of its affairs, provided there is no outside interference. Even in cases of petty crimes, they devote themselves to handling the situation without the involvement of the police. This self-governance reflects their commitment to maintaining order within their community. Moreover, the active political

participation of members of the Gond tribe has significantly impacted decision-making processes at the local level, allowing them to address their unique challenges and uphold their cultural values effectively. An election was observed in the fields of Sunapur village, located in the Boden block of Nuapada district, Odisha. The event marked a significant moment of democratic participation, with villagers actively engaging in the voting process. This showcased their awareness of the importance of elections in shaping their community's future (Jacob, Vol.2(1), 2014. pp.1-16).

Figure 2



Figure 2 An election is noticed at Sunapur village of the Boden block of Nuapada district.

Internet Source <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/constituency-watch-jat-community-dominates-in-baytoo/story-vU3uzcmr1FLkkqLyrCVugl.html>

5.6. POLITICAL STRUCTURE WITHIN GOND TRIBE

Within the Gond tribe of the Nuapada district of Odisha, political power is vested in a village council known as the "Panchayati." The Panchayati Raj consists of elected representatives who make decisions for the community based on traditional rules and values. Leadership roles within the Panchayati are determined either through hereditary succession or through elections within the Gond community, ensuring that both tradition and democratic principles play a role in governance. This system allows for a balance between the preservation of cultural heritage and the inclusion of community members in the decision-making process (Ota, 2010, pp.12-23).

5.7. POLITICAL SYSTEM

In the political system among the Gond community, the Gond elders share their powers with the officials of the Panchayati during its deliberations. Women and children are not eligible to participate in the discussions of the Panchayati Raj system. Additionally, Gond elders and Panchayati officials do not need to observe any initiation rites for membership in the traditional Panchayati. This image depicts the Gond political system as observed in Dhangarital village, located in the Sinapali block of Nuapada district, Odisha. It highlights the traditional governance practices of the Gond community, reflecting their unique cultural heritage and societal structure. Such systems play a crucial role in preserving their identity and resolving

local issues through collective decision-making (Babu, Vol.40(3), 2020, p.3946-3951).

Figure 3



Figure 3 Gonds Meeting is noticed at Dhargarital village of the Boden block of Nuapada district.
Source The photograph was practically taken by the scholar.

5.8. VILLAGE ORGANIZATION

The Gonds are part of the village community within the traditional social hierarchy among Hindu castes and tribes. Historically, the Gonds were regarded as an inferior and untouchable caste in rural society. As a result, wealthier upper castes and communities dominated village social-political activities, overshadowing the Gonds and other lower tribes. However, villagers, regardless of their different tribes, communal backgrounds, or personal and inherited differences, share common interests, problems, and views as bona fide members of the same village. Over time, they have developed various interrelated institutions to regulate their social life and enforce social control for the well-being of their community (Gangadhar, Vol.12(3), 2024, pp.481-483).

5.9. LOCAL POLITICAL SYSTEM

The traditional political structure of the Gonds in the Nuapada district has been steadily weakening due to the influence of the modern Panchayati Raj system. As this contemporary governance framework takes hold, the social regard and authority of traditional Gond leaders have diminished. These leaders, once central to the decision-making processes within their communities, are increasingly marginalized by politically affiliated members who represent the Panchayati Raj system (Bag, Vol.7(8), 2017, pp.204-22). This change not only affects the political dynamics of the Gond community but also poses challenges to the preservation of their cultural identity and traditional governance practices. The Gonds, who inhabit the village areas of western Odisha, are not merely territorial and socio-cultural units; they also function as independent and autonomous political institutions. In addition to collecting land revenue and other dues levied upon their tenants, these feudal chiefs discharge police and judicial functions, as well as executive duties such

as maintaining and constructing public utility structures, upholding law and order, judging civil disputes and criminal offenses, and organizing periodic rituals, festivals, and ceremonies (Sahoo, 2012, p.128).

5.10. SINAPALI BLOCK OF THE NUAPADA DISTRICT

The Sinapali block in the Nuapada district of Odisha is known for its rich cultural heritage and diverse communities. This area is home to several tribal groups, including the Gond tribe, who have their own traditional governance systems. The block is also recognized for its natural beauty, with picturesque landscapes and a close-knit community that values local customs and traditions. The people of Sinapali are deeply connected to the land, and their agricultural practices play a vital role in the local economy. In addition to its cultural richness, the Sinapali block faces challenges related to infrastructure and access to basic services. However, the community remains resilient, relying on traditional knowledge and mutual cooperation to address issues. The unique governance systems of the tribal groups, including the Gonds, have proven to be effective in resolving local disputes and maintaining social harmony. These traditional structures continue to play a crucial role in shaping the future of the region, blending cultural preservation with modern development (Ramesh 1972, pp.76).

Figure 4



Figure 4 This image is showing the Sinapali block of the Nuapada district of Odisha.

Source The photograph was practically taken by the scholar.

5.11. THE FEUDAL SYSTEM-PAST AND PRESENT

In the feudal administrative system, the offices of *Jhakar* and *Choukidar* were very important and ranked below that of the *Gahitia* in the village. These officials discharged certain police functions and basic services, assisting higher officials as required. The *Choukidar* was responsible for keeping watch over the village and patrolling it at night. He assisted the police and government officials in the prevention and detection of crimes and other anti-social activities within the village (Bailey, 1957, p.83). The *Choukidar* reported to the police station any incidents of offenses, criminal activities, epidemics, and births and deaths in the village. In addition to these duties, he rendered various other services to the villagers, the *Gahatia*, and government officials. He assisted the *Gahatia* in the collection of

revenue and other dues, accompanying him when depositing the collections in the government treasury. The Choukidar also conveyed important messages, orders, and announcements within the village and gathered the villagers for meetings and discussions (Basu, 1985, p.69).

5.12. GRAM SABHA OF THE GOND TRIBE (VILLAGE COUNCIL)

The Gond villages traditionally have a Gram Sabha or Panchayat as their village council, responsible for major community decisions. During a field study, a Gram Sabha meeting at Boden block, Nuapada district, was observed. This democratic institution, likely initiated by villagers to address local issues when distant administrations were ineffective, oversees public works such as construction, repair, and maintenance of community structures and resources. Traditional roles like *Gahatia*, *Jhakar*, and *Choukidar* have been abolished post-independence (Chaudhury. 1982, p.89).

Figure 5



Figure 5 A Gram Sabha (Village Council) meeting of the Gond tribe was noticed at the Boden block of Nuapada district.

Source The photograph was practically taken by the scholar.

5.13. JATI SABHA (GOND TRADITION PANCHAYAT)

The traditional caste council of the Gond community is referred to as the Jati Sabha or Jati Panchayat. The traditional Gond Panchayat of the Gond tribe was observed in Kamalmal village, located in the Boden block of Nuapada district, Odisha. This meeting reflected the community's longstanding practices of self-governance and decision-making, where local issues are addressed through collective discussion and consensus (Kumar, 2018, pp.45-50). The Gond Panchayat, a traditional council, plays a central role in maintaining social order and resolving disputes within the community in Kamalmal village, the Panchayat gathers regularly to deliberate on matters concerning land disputes, family issues, and the overall well-being of the villagers. The council is led by respected elders who are seen as wise and just, guiding the community in accordance with ancient customs and tribal laws. The meeting not only serves as a platform for conflict resolution but also strengthens social bonds among the villagers, reinforcing their sense of unity and

cultural identity. This practice of self-governance is a vital part of the Gond tribe's heritage and continues to be a significant aspect of their communal life (Kumar, Vol.8(4), 2021, pp.50-52).

Figure 6



Figure 6 The traditional Panchayat of Gond community is noticed at the Boden block of Nuapada district.

Source The photograph was practically taken by the scholar.

5.14. INTER-VILLAGE COUNCIL

As described so far, each caste group in the village community functions as an independent and autonomous entity. Although they have their respective Jati Sabha and traditional leaders to manage their day-to-day internal caste affairs, certain unavoidable situations involving quarrels and conflicts can arise between individuals or between castes and communities from different villages. Since these issues are beyond the jurisdiction of the village Panchayat, they are referred to an inter-village council constituted for this purpose. However, inter-village caste issues may be referred to extra-village territorial caste councils, depending on the severity of the cases. Minor disputes relating to irregular marriages, widow remarriage, mutual love affairs and elopements, bride price, divorce, separation, land property, and professional or religious matters are also addressed by the Gond community councils in the Nuapada district of Odisha (Koreti, Vol.6(4), 2016. pp.33.34).

5.15. PANCHAYAT

A Government Gram Panchayat meeting was held in Sunapur village, Boden block, Nuapada district, providing a platform for villagers to discuss governance, development, and welfare. As a local self-government institution, the Gram Panchayat addresses community needs and implements government schemes. Topics such as infrastructure, healthcare, education, and agriculture were discussed, with villagers actively raising concerns and offering suggestions. These meetings promote transparency, accountability, and collaboration, highlighting rural communities' growing democratic engagement. Despite modern administrative systems, the traditional Panchayat in Sunapur, led by the headman

and elders, remains integral to governance and maintaining social and cultural order in Gond society (Sraavya and Kumar, Vol.24(2), 2019, pp.45-53).

Figure 7



Figure7 A Government Gram Panchayat at Sunapur village, Boden Block of Nuapada district.

Source The photograph was practically taken by the scholar.

5.16. CRIME AND PUNISHMENT

The Gond tribe has its own customary laws, which are strictly enforced by the elders of the community. Breaches of these laws are taken very seriously, especially in cases of grave offenses. When such an offense occurs, the elders convene to discuss the matter and decide on the appropriate course of action. Punishments are designed to restore harmony within the community and ensure that the offender takes responsibility for their actions. In more severe cases, such as physical violence or serious breaches of trust, the punishment might involve social ostracism or more substantial reparations (Hembrom, Vol.3(2), 2017, pp.40-41).

5.17. SEX OFFENSE OF THE GOND TRIBE

In the Gond tribe, sexual relations with someone with whom there is an avoidance relationship are considered a serious offense. Such offenses are very rare and almost unimaginable, according to informants from the Gond tribe. Avoidance relationships typically involve certain kinship ties where sexual relations are strictly prohibited, such as between specific in-laws or other relatives defined by cultural norms. Violating these boundaries is seen as a severe breach of social conduct and morality.

5.18. PRE-MARITAL RELATION

In traditional Gond society, pre-marital relationships were not widely accepted or encouraged. The Gond tribe generally followed a system of arranged marriages, where parents and elders played a significant role in selecting suitable partners for their children. Marriages were viewed as social and economic unions aimed at strengthening alliances between families and communities. However, the Gond tribe is not a homogeneous group, and customs can vary among different sub-groups and

regions. In some areas, traditional norms might still prevail, while in others, modern influences have led to more flexibility in social practices. Some individuals within the Gond community might choose to engage in pre-marital relationships despite traditional expectations. Although these instances are less common, they reflect the evolving nature of cultural practices within the tribe. The community's response to such relationships can vary, ranging from acceptance to social disapproval, depending on prevailing attitudes and specific circumstances (Bodhi & Jojo, Vol.71(3), 2021, pp.3-4).

5.19. EXTRA-MARITAL RELATION

In traditional Gond society, marriage is considered a sacred bond between a man and a woman. Like many other cultures, extramarital relationships are generally frowned upon and discouraged within the Gond community. Some individuals may enforce these norms more strictly, while others might show more leniency. Social repercussions for extramarital relationships can range from social ostracism to formal sanctions imposed by community leaders. Despite these potential shifts, trust and fidelity within marriage remain crucial for maintaining social harmony and stability in Gond society. As the Gond community balances tradition with modernity, attitudes toward extramarital relationships may evolve, reflecting broader societal changes (Ambagudia, Vol.5(1) 2019, p.44-58).

5.20. THE CUSTOMARY LAWS OF MARRIAGE

The Gond tribe has strict customary laws that prohibit marriage outside their caste or tribe, with violators facing potential excommunication. However, increased interaction with other communities has led to occasional inter-caste marriages, causing tension within the tribe. Some Gond people believe such marriages can elevate their social status, and a few women have married men from other castes. The tribe's customary laws are enforced through the Panchayat, where breaches are discussed and punishments assigned. However, the influence of statutory Panchayats has led to disagreements, creating a conflict between traditional practices and legal regulations. The political leadership of the Gond tribe, observed in a meeting at Sagunbhadi village in Nuapada, highlights their deep-rooted governance system. Elders and leaders address key issues such as land management, social justice, and cultural preservation, ensuring the community remains unified and resilient in maintaining their traditions amidst modern challenges (Sunaram, Vol.3(2), 2017, pp.39-44).

5.21. THE CHANGING AND TRADITIONAL LEADERSHIP OF THE GOND TRIBE

The leadership structures within the Gond tribe have undergone significant changes over time. Traditionally, the community was guided by customary leaders, such as the village headman and elders, who were deeply connected to tribal norms and practices. Today, contemporary leadership has been influenced by government policies, modernization, and contact with other cultures. The introduction of statutory Panchayats has brought about a formalized system of governance that often intersects with or replaces traditional leadership roles. This shift has resulted in a blend of traditional and modern practices, creating a dynamic leadership landscape (Rajole, Vol.13(7), 2023, p.2-6).

Figure 8



Figure 8 The political leader of the Gond tribe of Nuapada district in Odisha.

Source The photograph was practically taken by the scholar.

6. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The entire surrounding area of the Boden block focuses on the political system of the Gond community in the Nuapada district of Odisha. The Gond people adhere to their own political system as part of their social formation, with limited interaction with other cultures. Those living deep in the forests and hilly regions maintain their traditional political participation strictly. Generally, most tribals, including the Gonds, were considered animists in earlier times before adopting Hinduism. The political participation of self-government involves the Gond communities actively. This cultural practice fosters both social and cultural unity among the Gond community in the Nuapada district of Odisha.

7. FINDING OF THE STUDY

The Gonds have a rich cultural heritage with unique traditions, including their art, music, political, and rituals. There might not be specific and widely recognized studies or findings on traditions political system of the Gond community. They are reasons behind the politicalsystem, are often linked to self-Government of the Gond community of Nuapada district of Odisha.

8. CONCLUSION

Thus, it can be concluded from the preceding discussion that the political system of the Gonds in the Nuapada district of Odisha is closely related to the village, with all political activities reflecting their way of life both directly and indirectly. When the current researchers conducted a study in the area, they found that the majority of the Gond people are involved in collecting forest resources. The Gonds maintain a simple political system that is both separate and distinct from other tribal groups in Western Odisha. Regarding literacy rates, children from Gond families are often at a disadvantage due to their parents' lack of awareness about

educational opportunities. The Gonds have their own economic system, particularly in trade, which fosters relationships and cooperation among community members. They have learned to live and work together while pursuing common goals. The Gond tribe expresses its cultural identity and uniqueness through its social organization, language, rituals, clothing, ornaments, art, and crafts. Traditional tribal leaders, who are officials of the tribal Panchayat, play a crucial role in this community. The traditional Panchayat has been functioning as an institution of self-rule since ancient times, based on a hereditary system of tribal leadership. These traditional leaders have maintained the solidarity of the tribal society through customary laws transmitted from one generation to another. In the present study, we observe that due to cultural contact, a new trend in tribal leadership is emerging in the Nuapada district of Odisha. So, the political life of the Gond tribe in the Nuapada district offers an interesting perspective on the tribal polity of Odisha in Eastern India.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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