

Original Article

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 analyse 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.

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

INTRODUCTION

In Madhya Pradesh Gond is the largest tribe community that resides here. Gond art is more than a painting style. It's all about how the community tells its history and shows its attachment to nature. By making the drawing of daily life scenes, spirits, and animals, they create stories that pass down their traditions to the next generation visually. Gond art is in an interesting period of change, while artists still value their traditional symbols and natural pigments. The artists of this community are also exploring modern techniques to share their work globally. At the time of making a painting, the use of dots, lines, and bright colors creates a unique identity for this art. Many scholars found that the Gond people have kept their culture alive in today's modern era. By painting the plants, animals, and myths that define their world. Historically, these symbols or painting styles were painted on mud walls. However, modern life has opened up new opportunities, moving the art onto paper, fabric, and digital platforms. By keeping their

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original themes while using new tools, artists have gained international fame and reached markets far beyond their villages. This research looks closely at how tradition and modern innovation live together. The goal is to see how Gond artists protect their cultural origin while meeting modern demands, ensuring their folk traditions continue to grow and inspire others in the future.

OBJECTIVES

The objective of this research is to make a detailed understanding of the harmony between the traditional connections of Gond art and its modern innovations in Madhya Pradesh. Gond art isn't merely a painting technique; it's a tradition that expresses the community's religious beliefs, folklore, social values, and its connection with nature. The identity of this art form is defined by its special use of dots, lines, shapes, geometric patterns, and natural symbols. The aim of this research is to analyse these traditional patterns to see how they've created the unique look of the art. Then, it is important to discuss the changes and innovations taking place in modern times. Gond art is changing day by day; it has moved from mud walls to canvas, fabric, and digital screens, swapping forest pigments for modern tools. The goal is to see how today's artists keep their traditional spirit alive even as they move into the digital world. This study looks at how they hold onto their traditional symbols and themes while experimenting with new tools and technology. This process has allowed for a successful synthesis of tradition and modernity. This research analyzes the social and economic impact of Gond art. This art is not just about saving traditional culture. This study is also looking at how Gond art can keep their culture alive while helping communities earn a better living. This study focuses on using the art to build a stronger future and create new opportunities for the people who create it. This paper explores how global markets and the internet can open new doors for Gond artists to share their work. It helps make sure their beautiful traditions stay exciting and relevant for the next generation.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research paper is based on a qualitative methodology. Collected the primary data and information from fieldwork, which was conducted in and around Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh. Focusing on areas where practicing Gond artists reside. During the fieldwork, photographs were taken for the documentation process, and detailed discussions were held with local artists. These artists provided valuable insights about the traditional paintings of the Gond community and explained how innovation is reshaping this traditional art in the modern era. They also shared a balanced perspective on contemporary changes, noting the advantages and disadvantages that innovation brings to the art form. To make sure the information which collected is accurate and trustworthy, it's double-checked using the following steps. This helped confirm that the data was reliable before using it in this study.

Secondary Sources: For this, trusted sources such as peer-reviewed journals and research papers were used to back up the work. Also looked through relevant books to make sure the information was solid and accurate.

Official Records: Government publications and specialized literature on Gond art.

Institutional Research: Visited the Indira Gandhi Rashtriya Manav Sangrahalaya and the Madhya Pradesh Tribal Museum in Bhopal. Discussions with the resident artists and museum officials. These organizations helped to see how tradition and modern ideas work together, giving a much clearer picture of the whole subject. Their insights made it easier to understand how the art is changing without losing its roots.

GOND ARTISTIC TRADITIONS

Natural Colors and Mediums: Gond painting was practiced directly on walls and floors in the beginning. Including the specific mural styles such as Digna, geometric patterns, and wall paintings, etc. Gond artists have historically depended on the limited resources available around them in their environment. 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 Jangarh \(2006\)](#).

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 represent 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 \(1955\)](#).

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 \(2018\)](#).

Socio-Religious Importance: Gond art is not made only for decoration purpose. Gond art is created at festivals, weddings, or especially during rituals. The belief 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 \(1955\)](#).

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 \(2024\)](#).

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. This visionary change introduced by Late Jangarh Singh Shyam has granted artists the freedom to work on long-lasting surfaces. The use of modern materials ensures that the vibrancy and brightness of the colors are preserved over time (IGNCA).

Modernization of Colors: In today's Gond art traditional natural colours have been replaced by acrylics, poster colors, and inks. These modern mediums are not only more durable but also possess a vibrant brilliance that attracts viewers. This shift toward modern materials has made the art form more competitive in the commercial market [Bharadwaj and Ukande \(2014\)](#).

During the personal interview on this transition. Gond artist Ravi Tekam, son of the famous gond artist late Narmada Tekam, said that the traditional artist used natural colours collected from their villages. The process of collecting colour from natural sources is very slow. The result of that colour was also very muted and had faded tones. Then, Gond artists moved to urban areas, and they became familiar with acrylics and other ready-made colors. The availability of these commercial colours saves significant time and provides a lasting luster that preserves the visual impact of the artwork for a longer duration.

Contemporary Themes: Gond art has developed beyond its traditional focus on nature and mythology. Today, there are lots of contemporary themes added to this art tradition, such as environmental conservation, education, healthcare, women's empowerment, and social equality. These changes in Gond art have become a medium for expressing modern social issues and cultural awareness [Bose \(2010\)](#). Modern subjects like bicycles, portraiture, buses, and airplanes have also taken a place within the Gond art. This indicates that artists are now moving beyond ancestral topics to depict the changing world around them, including modern infrastructure and issues related to social transformation [Mitra \(2025\)](#).

Market Expansion: The global recognition of Gond art can be largely attributed to the late Jangarh Singh Shyam. His work received immense acclaim in 1989 when it was featured in the exhibition 'Magiciens de la Terre' (Magicians of the Earth) in Paris. This marked the first international exhibition for Gond art. Same year his paintings were also exhibited at the Mithila Museum in Tokyo. In that exhibition, his unique style was widely praised. It is primarily due to his artistic vision that Gond art is recognized today both in India and on the global stage [Rani \(2019\)](#).

Today, Gond art has expanded into international exhibitions, online platforms, fashion, interior design, and book illustrations. This commercial growth has not only improved the economic status of Gond artists but has also provided their heritage with a global platform [Rani \(2019\)](#). Gond motifs are now featured on diverse fashion and lifestyle products, including cushion covers, bags, curtains, apparel, and furniture [Rana \(2024\)](#). Furthermore, organizations such as 'Touch the GOND' are actively connecting local artists with foreign markets through international events and exhibitions (Touch the Gond).

Participation of Women Artists: The involvement of women artists in the Gond art tradition has added a new dimension. Women artists are changing the traditional theme by bringing new social issues and feminist ideas into their work. They are using their own life stories and unique points of view to give the art a personal touch [Rana \(2024\)](#). These artists have successfully adapted to changing circumstances, evolving the themes, mediums, and overall aesthetic of Gond painting. In the article "Women Financial Empowerment: Gond," it is noted that women in rural Madhya Pradesh are achieving financial independence by selling their Gond artworks [Dey \(2022\)](#). The research paper "Gond Painting and Their Women Artists: Journey from Tradition to Modernity" analyzes the specific experiences and challenges faced by these women, highlighting the critical role that market access plays in their professional journey [Rana \(2024\)](#).

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. This mix of old and new concepts shows how Gond art is full of life. It proves that the tradition stays true so it can still change and grow with the times. Overall, Gond art isn't just saving the past; it is building a future by staying creative.

CHALLENGES OF TRADITIONAL ART AND INNOVATION

Loss of Traditional Techniques: The use of natural colors, materials, and techniques is gradually declining. The main reason for this change is that preparing natural pigments is time taking. Sometimes, the sources of raw materials have become difficult to collect. Even with the protection of the Geographical Indication (GI) Tag, many artists believe that "Gond art is losing its authenticity." This concern stems from the fact that a growing number of practitioners are moving away from traditional colors and original symbols, opting instead for modern or cheaper alternatives [Aru and Wyeld \(2016\)](#).

Commercialization Under Market Pressure: The popularity and market demand for Gond art encourage artists to produce more works in a quicker way. It is also cost-effective, and tailored to customer choices. In this process, the artistic quality and meaning of the work are sometimes sacrificed. While the scale, variety of themes, and market prices of Gond art have increased significantly, critics warn that this trend may negatively impact the original style and cultural context of the tradition [Das \(2014\)](#).

Recent research suggests that many emerging artists now create primarily to satisfy urban and international consumers. This market-driven approach risks damaging the authentic essence of Gond art and may diminish its spiritual significance. If this trend continues, there is a concern that this sacred tradition could be reduced to a mere commercial commodity in the future [Banerjee and Dutta \(2019\)](#).

The Problem of Imitation and Mass-Produced Goods: After commercialization of this art has become difficult for consumers to identify which is authentic hand-painted and which are machine-made art. Local Gond artists have expressed concern that many vendors sell copies of Gond paintings, often altering original symbols and color schemes. Because of this, the cultural narratives, "stories behind every tree, animal, and deity" are missing from the art form. Such products undermine the credibility of the art and create confusion among buyers [Chaturvedi \(2023\)](#). Research shows a significant shift from the traditional, labour-intensive method of painting by hand on walls to modern technological approaches. Advances in software, such as CorelDraw and Adobe Photoshop, now allow these intricate designs to be created digitally. Computer-Aided Design (CAD) and AI have introduced a higher level of precision and significantly reduced the time required to adapt art for commercial needs. These digital designs can be reused multiple times without additional effort. Recent studies show that AI and this digital adaptation are being used aggressively to promote Gond art within the fashion market, rebranding traditional motifs as modern design elements [Sakshi \(2017\)](#).

Declining Interest Among the Younger Generation: The young generations are losing interest in this traditional Gond art and getting away from their traditional art & culture. Young people are moving away from this because of school education, better jobs, or the exciting lifestyle of city life. The modern world is so competitive that young artists often feel they must continually change their style to survive in the art commercial market. There is also a danger possibility if the next generation doesn't embrace these traditions, this art form could gradually disappear from society [Sharan \(2024\)](#). During the interview with a young Gond artist, Ravi Tekam. He shared his perspective on this changing trend. He said that the young generation fails to grasp the true essence of their traditional art & culture. Instead of creating original works, many young artists simply copy the paintings of other artists. They do not understand the philosophy or stories behind the actual motifs. This lack of connection is the only reason to loss of enthusiasm and interest. Tekam also said that Gond art is a time-consuming process that requires patience. He observed that many young people today lack this patience, they prefer immediate results. Which further contributes to their detachment from this meticulous and sacred art form.

CONCLUSION

Gond art is a traditional art that is a combination of old tradition and new innovation. It's only the reason for long term survival on national & international platform in today's modern era. Its balance between preserving traditional techniques and meeting the demands of the modern market. This shows that traditional art also remains vibrant. It can preserve its original origin and adapting & evolving to society. Gond art has successfully established this balance. It shows a connection with nature, mythological symbols, and social values. Innovation has allowed this art to expand into lots of new mediums like canvas, fabric, and digital platforms. Contemporary themes like Environmental conservation, women's empowerment, and education have made Gond art more relevant to a global audience. This old art faces some challenges including the loss of traditional techniques, over-commercialization, and a declining interest among young artists. If these issues are not addressed, the depth of Gond art may be compromised. There is a great chance for continued growth and preservation of this art in future. Governmental and non-governmental organizations can organize training workshops and digital awareness program in collaboration with each other's for this communities' artists. International exhibitions and online platforms can serve as important tools for the economic empowerment of Gond artists. Integrating Gond art

into the educational system could also be an effective way to inspire interest among future generations. Gond art is not only protects its cultural legacy. It also remains a powerful source of inspiration and vision for the world by harmonizing tradition with innovation.

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