

# ETHNOGRAPHY AND CHANGE AMONG THE GONDS OF SONBHADRA DISTRICT IN UTTAR PRADESH

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**ABSTRACT:** (*Gondi Gonds*), “A Dravidian People” are one of the most important tribe of Central India which spreads over Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Chhattisgarh, Uttar Pradesh, Telangana, Andhra Pradesh and Western Orissa. They occupy an important place because of their numerical strength, geographical space they inhabit and great is history. This paper ancient mainly focused on the collection of ethnographic account of their natives and to know the changes prevailing among them.

**KEYWORDS:** Ethnography, Gonds.

## INTRODUCTION

### ORIGIN AND AFFINITIES

Majority of *Gonds* are found today in the state of MP. Their main concentrations are the Satpura Plateau, the state of Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh also contain substantial *Gond* population and the majority of these have traditionally been described as *Raj Gonds*, though in their own language they call themselves *Koitur*, a word common to most *Gondi* dialects. The term *RajGonds*, which in the 1940's was still widely used, it has now become almost obsolete, probably because of the Political eclipse of the *Gond Rajas*. The rulers of Chanda were powerful prince situated now in Maharashtra, were until 1749, whose dominion included a large part of the Adilabad district of Andhra Pradesh.

There is a little accurate information available on the early history of the *Gonds* and it was not until Mughal times that *Gond* states were figured in contemporary chronicles. But the ruins of forts ascribed to *Gond* rajas suggest that in past centuries the *Raj Gonds* population whose style of living was imitated their rulers.

Until comparatively recent times, a feudal system prevailed in the highlands of Adilabad. And myths and epics depict the life of *Gond* Chieftains who were not subject to any outside power. The *Gonds* were then already settled farmers who cultivated their land with ploughs and bullocks. Land was plentiful and individuals could freely move from one settlement to another.

**Ethnography-** Ethnography is a means to represent graphically and in writing the culture of group. Ethnography, as the presentation of empirical data on human societies and cultures, was pioneered in the biological, social and cultural branches of Anthropology.

The word “Ethnography” is derived from the Greek (*ethnos*), meaning “a company, later a people, Nation” & *graphy* meaning “field of study”. Ethnographic studies focus on large cultural groups of people who interact over time. Ethnography is quantitative design where the researchers explain about shared learnt pattern of values, behaviour, beliefs and language of a culture shared by a group of people. It is designed to explore cultural phenomena where the researcher observes society from the point of view of the subject of the study.

### About the People

*Gonds* are among the largest tribal groups in South Asia and perhaps the world. The term *Gond* refers to tribal people who live all over Indian's Deccan Peninsula. Most of them describe themselves as *Gonds*(hill people) or as *poi* or *Koitur*.

Scholars believe *Gonds* settled in Gondwana, now known as eastern Madhya Pradesh, between the ninth & thirteenth centuries A.D. Muslim writers describe a rise of *Gond* states after the 14<sup>th</sup> century. *Gond* dynasties

ruled in four kingdoms (Garha-Mandla), Deogarh, Chanda and Khe in central India between the sixteenth & mid eighteenth centuries Maratha Power swept into Gond Land in the 1740s. They overthrow *Gond* rajas (Princes) and seized most of their territory. Some *Gond* Zamindaris estates survived until recently. However, *Gonds* are similar to many tribal groups today in that they face severe economic hardship.

They live all over Central India & in the states of Maharashtra & Orissa. As “hill People” they traditionally have been associated with hills & uplands in the Deccan Peninsula. Many *Gonds* live around the Satpura hills Maikal range & Son-Deogarh Uplands & on the Baster plateau.

*Gondi* People belongs to the Dravidian family of languages & related to Tamil & Kannada. The language offers a cultural connection between many *Gond* Groups. Many *Gonds* also speak Hindi, Marathi or Telgu.

Hereditary bards and professional storytellers called Pradhans tell stories about *Gond* legends and Myths. This makes for a rich oral tradition. *Persa Pen* is the most distinctive feature of *Gond* religion. Like many other tribes, *Gonds* worship a high God known as Baradeo, whose alternate names are Bhagvan, Sri Shambu Mahadeo and *Persa Pen*.

*Gonds* believe evil spirits and the Gods displeasure because most diseases and misfortunes, sometime Magicians Shamans (Healers) can provide this advice. Magicians use special formulas to control the actions of a deity or spirit that is causing a particular affliction. The main *Gond* festivals are connected to *agri Pola*, a cattle festival and *Nagpanchami*, the snake festival are very popular.

Each *Gond* village has a headman (known by local names such as Mukhia, Mahji) and a village council chosen by villagers. The council consists of headman, priest, and village watchman four or five elders. It helps to keep the village running smoothly and upholds *Gonds* customs. Villages also have service centres such as *Ahir*, *Agaria*, *Dhulia* and *Pradhan*.

*Gond* society is divided into four groups known as *Phratris* or *Sagas* in *Gondi*. Each *Saga* traces its descent to one of the four groups of gods who emerged from the cave after their release by the hero *Lingal*.

The *Saga* is divided into several clans (*Pari*). A clan consists of group of people who believe they share a common ancestor. Generally, it is good to marry outside the clan.

The Thakkar committee report on the partially excluded area of the United Provinces. There were two such areas in the *Jaunsar- Bawar Pargana* in the *Dehradun* district, and the *Dudhi tehsil* and parts of *Robertsganj tehsil* of the *Mirzapur* district. Both areas were found to be in need of urgent corrective measures in view of massive oppression & corruption, but were not recommended for the status of scheduled areas.

The Thakkar report also named a few tribes of the *Mirzapur* region apparently proposed to be deemed ST with regard to United Provinces. *Bhunya Baiswar Baiga Gond Kharwar Kolojha*.

## OBJECTIVES

To collect the ethnographic description which includes their history, habit, climate, dialect, folklore, religion, rituals, family settings, marriage, clothing, food habit, economic status, political life and any other characteristics feature.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

**Observation-** This method implies the collection of information by way of investigator's own observation without interesting the respondents. The information obtained relates to what is currently happening & is not complicated by either the past behaviour or future intentions or attitudes of respondents.

This method is no doubt an expensive method but is very useful in some specific situation during the data collection. The observational method can further provide confirmation & accuracy to the data obtained from the Interview.

**Personal Interview-** The investigator follows a rigid Procedure & seeks answers to a set of pre-conceived questions through personal Interview. This method of collecting data is usually carried out in a structured way where output depends upon the ability of interviewer to a large extent. Structured Interview is applied to data collection which helped the researcher to obtain reliable information of their aim & objective of topic.

**Schedule-** Schedule is the tool or instrument used to collect data from the respondents while interview is conducted. Schedule contains questions, statements (on which opinions are elicited) and blank spaces/tables for filling up the respondents.

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

S. Mendaly (2015), presented the existence and continuation of living Megalith tradition among the *Gond* tribe in *Nuaparha* district of *Odisha*. The Mortuary practice of different tribal community has given many

ethnographical data, which is used as a primary source for reconstructing the past social and cultural history of Megalithic people.

Deogaonkar (2007), stated that Ethnologically, the root of the word *Gond* are 'Go+And' where 'Go' means forest and 'and' means place of origin, hence '*Gond*' meaning forest dwellers in Gondi *Gedameans* forest hence *Gond* could have sprung from this term meaning forest dweller.

Sharma A (2005), presented the ethnographic profile of Thakur Gond of Central India and gave the vast description about present and past culture of Thakur Gond in Hindu, Puranas and Rigveda, they are called civilized people. *Gond* architect is often admired & the house and city planning of 'dasyas' (Gonds) was considered good. They could be traced back to the pre-Aryan invasion period. They particularly belong to Dravidian attack.

Mehta Prakash Chandra (2005), stated that members of the Netam and Markam clans free intermarry & their unions are regarded as very appropriate. It is true that several clans names are indeed obviously of Gondi origin and occur among *Gond* tribe. Netam would be derived from the Gondi word nei for dog and Markam from the Gondi term Marka for Mango.

Pingle U (2002), told that the work that Furer- Haimendorf did for the welfare of the tribal people half a century ago is still so relevant and radical, for providing deep insight in tackling the complex problems facing the tribal in India. The *Gond* of Maralavihave built mausoleums for their beloved ancestors, Christoph & Betty Haimendorf.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In UP, Sonbhadra is the area which is occupied by these indigenous people. The research is mainly focused on the collection of ethnographic account of the natives & to know the changes prevailing among them. The Proposed research first of all deals with ethnographic account as ethnography is the systematic study of people and their socio-cultural phenomenon from the point of view of subject of study. So, it will be a holistic study which will include the study of ethnic groups, formation, composition, resettlement, social welfare, characteristic, materiality, spirituality. In short, it includes a brief history and analysis of terrain, climate and habitat collection of ethnographic account should necessary to make substantial contribution towards the understanding of the socio-cultural life of Native's. This will help to give an insight into the issues by using ethnographic accounts from the tribal area of "Sonbhadra". It is important to note that in 1950 though the tribes in this area are 13 in number Scheduled as Scheduled castes and not tribes. In January 2003 they finally achieved the status of scheduled tribes by the state government. Thus, it becomes extremely important to draw out attention towards the prevailing issues of identity, inclusion of social justice, political representative, and empowerment in the ongoing process of transformation and also after it. It is also important to mention here that as compared to other parts of India Sonbhadra region is still untouched in regards to ethnographic account of *Gond* people. *Gonds* are most flourishing tribal population of India and particularly in special reference of U.P. the *Gonds* are less touched which needs to be worked, as they can excel & flourish more. Therefore, Sonbhadra *Gonds* are chosen and also it becomes essential to draw the attention of other researcher, Anthropologist, social workers, Government officials for documentation of their socio-cultural life and changes with respect to their conversion from to tribes.

## Organisation & Leadership

*Gond* history is found in all historical books of India. *Gonds* settled in the Gondwana in the 9<sup>th</sup> & 13<sup>th</sup> century A.D. In the 14<sup>th</sup> century they ruled several parts of the central India. They built number of forts, places, temples, tanks and leeks during the rule of *Gond* dynasty. *Gonds* have been the warriors since the British period. During the British regime in India, *Gonds* challenged the Britishers in several battles. They also gained control over the Malwa after decline of the Mughals followed by the Marathas in the year 1690.

The basis of the social structure is a system of four phrateries, each subdivided into clans & the origin of this system is attributed to a divine culture hero.

The members of each clan worship a deity described as Persa Pen ("Great God") and in some cases the shrine of this deity lies within the ancestral clan land. Clans form a Permanent framework which regulates marriage and many ritual relations.

## Language & Identification

*Gond* tribes speak Gondi language which is related to the Telgu and the other Dravidian languages. In Northern parts *Gonds* are often seen speaking the local Hindi and Marathi. Some of the *Gonds* in the southern parts also speak Parsi or Persian. *Gonds* are mainly divided into four tribe namely- *Raj Gonds*,

*MadiaGonds, DhurveGonds, KhatulwarGonds*. Gonds men wear Dhoti, women wears soft cotton sari. The staple foods of Gonds are the two millets known as Kodo or Katpi. Rice is the ceremonial feast of the *Gonds*, which they prefer eating during the time of festivals. Most of the *Gonds* are the Meat consumers. Animal sacrifice of the religious occasions is the common practice among the *Gonds*.

## Customs & Festivals

*Gonds* fair and festivals are influenced from the Hindu traditions. KeslapurJathra is the important festival of the *Gonds* in this Festival they worship the snake deity called Nagoba. *Gusadi* dance is the most famous dance performed by the *Gonds* it is performed by wearing head gears decorated.

Madai is another festival celebrated among the *Gonds*. It is the festival when *Gonds* meet their relatives settled in various parts of the country. Apart from this they also celebrate Hindu festival called Dusshera.

## Religion

*Gonds* have been largely influenced by the Hindus and for the long time, they have been practicing the hindu culture and traditions. *Gonds* are the worshipers of Janani or the mother of creator. They use the title Thakur. *Gonds* mainly worship Pharsa Pen, who is worshipped under the form of Nail and sometimes a piece of Iron chain. According to them every hill, river, lake, tree is also inhabited by a spirit. They say that the earth, water and air are ruled by the great number of deities which must be appeased by sacrifices. They have priests (devari) who perform all the religions formalities on all the occasions. *Gonds* also pay homage to the *Gods of household, God of cattle, Gods of fields*. Animal sacrifice on the religious occasions is the common practice among the *Gonds*.

## Rites Of Passage

*Gonds* protect pregnant women against spells and evil influences and perform several rituals after a baby is born. A mother's brother generally names a baby boy, while father's sister names a girl. Children grow up as a part of family, clan and phratry (one of the four main divisions of *Gond* society).

But now-a-days, in urban areas it is difficult to distinguish between *Gonds and non-Gonds* at social gathering. The *Gonds* have suitably accommodated a number of things in their household articles human attires, food habits and personal hygiene. Their endeavour to adapt new has made significant changes in their traditions, customs, values and religious beliefs and rites, in the light of the Hindu way of life. Once upon a time the *Gonds* were the most cultured community. However, many of them are living in poverty today. They have lost their royalty to paramount powers. They were good looking, happy and hearty and regular in their habits, though financially not very sound but they managed their affairs without getting indebted. They observed perfect gender equality and attempted to keep their tribe widow free. No high handedness is found in their behaviour. They were docile, modest, honest, and painstaking. Loyalty to their tribe, tradition, systems, organizations is praiseworthy & worth to be followed by elite class.

## Art and Craft

The *Gonds* were expert in arts and crafts. They were also expert in beautiful wall paintings and floral designs that depicted geometric designs and stylistic figures of plants and animals on the walls of their houses. They were masters in the art of personal decoration. Thus, those were of the values in *Gond* culture, which were worth preserving. The geometric and symbolic designs carved on wall and door, on comb and

Tobacco-case was thousands of year's old, going right back to The ancient civilization of the Indus Valley. [19] However, a colourful drawing on walls is a fast disappearing feature due to urban influence. Now the walls are decorated with framed or unframed pictures of Hindu deities, national leaders, cinema stars, animals and birds which are purchased from weekly market centres and towns.

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