

# “A Research on Traditional Gond Art and Its Contemporary Adaptations”

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## **Abstract**

Gond art, one of the famous India's most vibrant traditions, involves the memories, belief and lived experiences of Gond community, those cultural Identity is deeply linked to Nature and oral story telling. Traditionally painted on mud walls using natural pigments. This art form was never merely decorative, it served as a living archive of myths, seasonal rhythms, community rituals, and the gaunt world-wise, where every leaf, animal, and landscape process its own spirit. First off, over the last four decades, gaunt art has undergone a remarkable transformation. First off, from the pioneering journey of artists like Jangad, Singh, Shyam, to the emergence of new creative collectives in Patangarh and beyond, this once-local tradition has entered global exhibitions, publishing houses, fashion ateliers, and digital platforms.

This research paper explores the transformation with a dual lens. It documents the visual and cultural foundation of traditional gond art painting while critically examining how contemporary adoptions reinterpret this tradition in new mediums such as textile, illustration, product design, and public art through analysis of secondary literature, artist case studies, and cultural documentation, the study identifies the opportunities and tensions that arise when a scared, community rooted art enters commercial and global circuits. While contemporary platforms have expanded visibility and provided economic pathways for many gond artists, they also raise sensitive questions about authorship, cultural ownership, appropriation, and the preservation of ecological and ritual knowledge.

## **Key Words**

- Artistry
- Contemporary Adaption
- Cultural Heritage
- Indigenous Art
- Craftsmanship

## **1. Introduction**

Gond art is one of India's most ancient and cultural heritage tradition, originating from the Gond community, one of India's largest Adivasi groups in central India, primarily found in Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, and Odisha, rooted in animism and oral storytelling, with deep spiritual connecting with nature. Gond art visually expresses the community's belief that “Seeing a good image brings good luck”, a philosophy that shaped both their ritual practices and aesthetic choices. (Dastkar, India’s Crafts, 1999).



**Fig. 01 Gond Tribes India Map**

### 1.1 Historical Evolution of Gond Art

The origins of Gond art are closely tied to household wall paintings and mud murals, traditionally done by Gond women during festivals, harvests, celebrations, and rituals. Basically, it was found by women of Gond tribes because it was their most happening work they do while they are celebrating any fest or any cultural rituals. First of all, these paintings, executed using natural colors made from charcoal, plain sap, clay and cow dung, leaves and soil and the all-natural suspects, were not considered art in the formal sense but were expressions of cultural memory and identity. (Singh, Tribal Art of Central India, IGNC A Publication).



**Fig. 02 Cultural Gond Art**

A major turning point in the history of Gond art came in 1980s, when the legendary artist Jangarh Singh Shyam from Patangarh village was discovered by modern artist J. Swaminathan. Jangarh was the first Gond artist to paint on a paper or canvas, marking the beginning of what is known as “Jangarh Kalam”, a contemporary school within Gond art. (Clark, The Painted World of the Gond, 1997).

Jangarh's work travelled to exhibitions in Japan, France, and the USA, transforming a village-based tradition into a recognized global art movement. His success encouraged many others in his community to adopt contemporary materials like acrylics, inks, canvas, and later digital platforms. This global exposure not only preserved the art form but also redefined it with new narratives, styles, and audiences (Ruth, Indian Indigenous Art Space, 2016).

### 1.2 Cultural and Traditional Impact

Traditionally, Gond art has always been more than decoration, it reflects the Gond cosmology where every cultural, tea, hill, river has a living spirit. This belief system is visually expressed through repetitive patterns such as dots, lines, dashes, fish scales and seed motifs and wave-like forms, symbolizing the interconnectedness of life. (Shyam, Finding My Way, Tara Books).

### 1.3 Common subjects include:

- Mythical beings and deities such as Thakur Dev, Bara Deo, and other clan gods.
- Animals such as tigers, deer, birds, peacocks, snakes, representing strength, fertility, and protection.
- Nature—trees, hills, rivers—seen as guardians and life-givers.
- Folk tales and oral storytelling, where each painting becomes a narrative rather than a static image.

This painting acted as a visual documentation of Gond oral history, as the community did not have a written script in this way, Gond art served as a cultural archive, carrying stories across generations. (Elwin, The Tribal Art of India, Oxford University Press).

### 1.4 Transition into Contemporary Adaptations

From the 1990s onward, Gond artists began exploring new mediums like canvas, commercial pigments, and printmaking, murals, textiles, animation, and children's books, and graphic designs. The contemporary adaptation did not dilute the tradition, but instead, it reimagined it for modern context while preserving the core aesthetic and symbolism.

Today, Gond art appears in:

- Global museums such as the Musée du Quai Branly and the British Museum
- Public murals in Mumbai, Bhopal, and international art festivals
- Fashion and textile collaborations, including hand-painted sarees and digital prints
- Book illustrations (e.g., Tara Books' award-winning Gond series)
- Digital storytelling, animation films, and NFT artworks
- Sustainable lifestyle products, from home décor to packaging

This blending of tradition and innovation has created new economic opportunities for tribal artists while strengthening the visibility of indigenous Indian art on the global stage (Jain, Indian Folk Arts and Crafts, Niyogi Books).

## 2. Literature Review

The visual tradition of Gond art has increasingly attracted scholarly attention over the last four decades, especially after its transition from natural world painting to contemporary global art forms. The literature on Gond art can be grouped into four major thematic areas, (1) ethnographic and historical documentation, (2), stylistic and symbolic analysis, (3), artistic centric studies on Jangarh Singh Shyam and the Jangarh Kalam movement, and (4), contemporary transformation and debates on commercializing, authenticity and cultural identity. First up, this session reveals the major academic contributions within these domains.

### 2.1 Ethnographic and Historical Documentation of Gond Culture

Early scholarly work on the Gond focused primarily on anthropology, oral tradition, and their socio-cultural system. Verrier Elwin's seminal text, *The Tribal Art of Middle India*, (Oxford University Press 1951), provides the foundation documentation of Gond's spiritual belief, rituals, and visual symbolism. Elwin explains how mural painting functions as cultural memory, emphasizing motifs linked to fertility, protection, and nature spirit.

<https://global.oup.com>

Similarly, Christoph von Fürer Haimen Dorf's anthropological studies (*The Gonds of Andhra Pradesh*, Macmillan, 1948) examine the lifestyle and cosmological worldview of the Gond community. While not focused exclusively on art, these works highlight the animistic philosophy that forms the conceptual backbone of Gond painting traditions.

The Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts (IGNCA) holds significant archival documentation of regional tribal arts, including Gond mural practices and traditional pigments (Singh, *Tribal Art of Central India*, IGNCA). <http://ignca.gov.in>

This ethnographic collectively established gond art as a visual extension of indigenous knowledge systems, not merely an aesthetic practice.

## 2.2 Symbolism, Motifs, and Aesthetic Analysis

A Sustainable Body of Literature examines the stylistic characteristics and symbolic structures of Gond art. Bhajju Shyam, Durga Bai, and Ram Singh Urveti's illustrated works published by Tara Books- particularly *The Night Life of Trees* (2011) and *Finding My Way* (2015), are frequently referenced in academic studies for their documentation of traditional motifs and patterns.

<https://tarabooks.com>

Kayastha 29014), in *Gond Painting: Tradition and Change*, Tradition and Change, analyses the requiring symbolic patterns such as dots, cross-hatchings, wave-lines, and seed-like patterns, textures, interpreting them Visual Metaphors for Movement's Life force and Interdependence.

Nandita Raman's work, (2017), further explores the narrative quality of Gond paintings, noting how artists fuse mythological tales with ecological observations. Her research shows that Gond art is distinguished by its ability to transform everybody, event, into mythical storytelling, reflecting the tribe's oral culture.

This scholarly study emphasizes the Gond art's distinctiveness lies in its fusion of visual, rhythm, native depth, and spiritual philosophy.

## 2.3 Artist-Centric Studies: The Jangarh Kalam Movement

A major turning point in the literature occurs with the emergence of Jangarh Singh Shyam, whose work transformed Gond paintings from domestic murals into global contemporary art, a pivot scholarly resource in Jyotindra Jain's biography, *Jangarh Singh Shyam, a Conjuror's Archives* 2016, which documents Jangarh's evolutions from a Patanjali artist to an international figure as represented at the Mithila Museum in Japan.

<https://www.mithila-museum.com>

David Szanton (2011) argues that Jangarh's work established a new genre—Jangarh Kalam—characterised by hybrid forms, acrylic pigments, and reinterpretations of traditional deities. Szanton notes that the shift from natural pigments to commercial colours marked an important moment of cultural negotiation, where Gond identity met global art markets.

Claudia Hoskyns-Abrahall and the Asia Society Museum have also published analytical essays on Jangarh's iconography, exploring how his bold lines, divine figures, and hybrid animals bridge Indigenous spirituality and contemporary imagination.

<https://asia.si.edu>

These studies collectively highlight Jangarh as the architect of modern Gond art, shaping how the world understands tribal creativity.

## 2.4 Contemporary Adaption & Global transformation

Modern scholarship increasingly focuses on the contemporary renovations of gond art and digital media, textiles, urban murals, interior décor, and commercial design. Jill Baird's research (2020) on indigenous visibility in global markets emphasizes that gond art has entered a new phase of visibility through collaborations in publishing, fashion, and international art fairs. It highlights how gond art navigates the balance between traditional and innovations while adapting motifs for modern design industries.

"Bhaanti: Modern Tribal Expressions", Niyogi Books, documents the works of younger artists like Venkat Raman Singh Shyam and Roshni Vyam, demonstrating how they merge ancestral stories with modern socio-political themes such as migration, identity, and environmental degradation.

<https://www.niyogibooksindia.com>

Tara Books' global publications, especially *The London Jungle Book* (Bhajju Shyam, 2004), are frequently cited as examples of Gond art's narrative potential in international storytelling, blending travel experiences with traditional patterning.

Digital humanities research by Poojitha B. (2019) explores Gond art in animation and digital illustration, examining how digitisation can preserve indigenous styles while risking cultural dilution.

### 2.5 Cultural Appropriation, Ethical Concerns & Copyright

A critical stream of literature examines issues of authenticity, misappropriation, and fair compensation.

In *The Politics of Tribal Art*, Susan Bean (Peabody Essex Museum, 2012) argues that tribal arts entering global markets often face challenges of:

- lack of copyright protection,
- misuse of motifs by commercial brands,
- erasure of the artist's cultural authority.

Galla (2016) adds that Indigenous art must be supported by ethical guidelines, ensuring that adaptations involve community participation and contextual respect.

Some studies highlight positive examples:

Collaborations such as the Madhya Pradesh Tribal Museum and Government-supported Artisan Collectives show how institutional frameworks help preserve artist identity and safeguard community rights.

### 2.6 Gaps Identified in Existing Literature

Although the literature on Gond art is growing, several gaps remain:

1. Few studies deeply analyse how modern design industries reinterpret Gond motifs.
2. Limited scholarship connects Gond art to fashion, textiles, and product design, despite their increasing popularity.
3. There is minimal academic discussion on how digital media (NFTs, animation, apps) are reshaping Gond art's cultural transmission.
4. More research is needed on artist livelihoods, economic sustainability, and market ethics.
5. There is a lack of quantitative research measuring consumer perception of Gond-inspired contemporary products.

These gaps justify the need for further research on Gond art's contemporary adaptation, cultural negotiation and socio-economic implication.

## 3. Problem Statement

Gond art, originally a sacred and community-rooted visual traditional art, which is undergoing rapid transformation as it enters contemporary industries such as fashion, digital design, publishing, UI, UX, commercial decor. While these adaptations have increased the visibility of the art form, they have also created challenges related to cultural misrepresentation, loss of traditional meaning, and limited recognition and compensation of Gond artists.

Traditional gond motifs carries deep spiritual, ecological, and narrative significations. However, their widespread use in commercial products often occurs without understanding or acknowledging these meanings, leading to risk of cultural appropriation and delusions of symbolic values. At the same time, despite the rising popularity of Gond-inspired designs, many original tribal artists continue to face economical inequity, weak intellectual property protection, and insufficient platform to accept authorship over their cultural heritage.

Furthermore, as market trends influences artistic choices and there is growing concern that traditional knowledge, techniques, and oral storytelling may not pass down to younger generations, threatening the community of the art form. Scholarly documentation on these contemporary challenges remains limited.

Therefore, this research addresses the central problem. How can Gond art be ethically adapted in modern creative contexts while ensuring cultural integrity and respectful representation and equitable economic benefits for Gond artists and their communities?

## 4. RESEARCH GAP

Although, Bond Art has gained significant national and international attention over the past few decades. A critical review of existing literature reveals several important gaps that remain unaddressed.

### 1. **Limited Academic Study on Contemporary Adaptations:**

Most existing research focuses on the historical, cultural, or stylistic aspects of traditional Gond art. However, there is very limited scholarly work examining how Gond motifs are being adapted in modern industries such as fashion, product design, digital illustration, animation, advertising, and global craft markets.

### 2. **Insufficient Documentation of Artist Perspectives:**

While many publications describe Gond art visually, very few studies include the voices, experiences, and concerns of Gond artists themselves—especially regarding commercialization, fair compensation, copyright, and cultural ownership.

### 3. **Lack of Research on Ethical Use and Cultural Appropriation:**

There is a major gap in examining how Gond motifs are being reused or reinterpreted by designers outside the community. Issues of cultural misrepresentation, motif misuse, and appropriation are often overlooked in existing literature.

### 4. **Minimal Study of Economic Impact on Gond Communities:**

Despite the rising popularity of Gond-inspired products, there is limited research investigating whether Gond artists actually benefit financially, and how commercialization affects their livelihoods, bargaining power, and long-term sustainability.

### 5. **Scarce Analysis of Changing Symbolism and Traditional Knowledge:**

There is very little documentation on how contemporary market trends are influencing Gond art's symbolic meanings, traditional techniques, and intergenerational knowledge transfer. The impact of modernization on cultural continuity remains understudied.

### 6. **Lack of Quantitative or Consumer-Based Research:**

Most existing studies are descriptive or narrative. There is **almost no quantitative research** analysing consumer perception, market demand, or the acceptance of Gond-inspired contemporary designs.

### 7. **Limited Exploration of Digital Transformation:**

Although Gond art is increasingly visible on digital platforms, social media, NFT markets, and digital publishing, academic research on digital adaptation, digital rights, and online representation is almost non-existent.

## 3. Research Methodology

This study utilizes a qualitative methodology to search the development of traditional Gond art and its modern adaptations in various artistic, cultural, and commercial context. A qualitative method is most appropriate for this study since Gond art is intricately linked to culture, symbolism, personal experiences, and community stories, necessitating interpretative, descriptive, and context-focused approaches instead of numerical analysis.

### 5.1 Research Design

This study employs a descriptive and interpretive qualitative research design, combining methods from cultural anthropology, art analysis, and design research. The goal is to understand:

- How traditional Gond art is practiced and perceived within the community
- How meanings and motifs transform in contemporary applications
- What challenges and opportunities arise in modern adaptations
- How artists and stakeholders describe their experiences, concerns, and perspectives

The design allows an in-depth exploration of cultural values, visual symbolism, and the subjective meaning attached to gold art by practitioners and consumers.

## 5.2 Data Collection Methods

### A. Secondary Data Collection

Since Gond art is geographically rooted and literature-rich, secondary sources form a major part of the data. These include:

1. Academic Books and Articles on tribal art, indigenous knowledge, and contemporary crafts
  2. Museum archives and digital collections (e.g., IGNCA, Tribal Museum Bhopal, Asia Society archives)
  3. Published interviews and documentaries featuring Gond artists
  4. Art catalogues and exhibition guides
  5. Research papers, journals, theses, and design case studies
  6. Contemporary design industry resources, including fashion collections, product catalogues, and commercial adaptations
  7. Government and NGO reports on tribal livelihoods, craft development, and cultural preservation
- These sources help trace the historical evolution, stylistic patterns, and cultural significance of Gond art.

### B. Visual and Content Analysis

A systematic visual analysis is conducted on:

- Traditional Gond murals and paintings
- Contemporary Gond artworks on canvas and paper
- Gond-inspired commercial designs such as textiles, digital illustrations, packaging, and décor
- International and national museum collections
- Questionnaire

The visual analysis focuses on:

- Motifs and patterns
- Transformation of colors and materials
- Symbolism and narrative changes
- Differences between traditional and modern forms

This helps understand how Gond art visually evolves when translated into new contexts.

(Questionnaire question for google form)

1. Have you heard of Gond Art before?

क्या आपने पहले गोंड कला के बारे में सुना है?

2. Where did you first learn about Gond Art?

आपने गोंड कला के बारे में सबसे पहले कहाँ सीखा?

3. How would you describe your knowledge of Gond Art?

गोंड कला के बारे में आपका ज्ञान कैसा है?

4. What attracts you the most in Gond Art?

गोंड कला में आपको सबसे ज्यादा क्या आकर्षित करता है?

5. Do you think Gond Art should be used in modern products (fashion, home décor, stationery)?

क्या आप सोचते हैं कि गोंड कला को आधुनिक उत्पादों (फैशन, होम डेकोर, स्टेशनरी) में इस्तेमाल करना चाहिए?

6. How do you feel about brands using Gond Art in commercial products?

ब्रांड अगर गोंड कला को अपने उत्पादों में इस्तेमाल करें तो आपको कैसा लगता है?

7. Should brands take permission from original Gond artists before using their motifs?

गोंड कलाकारों की कला का उपयोग करने से पहले ब्रांड को उनकी अनुमति लेनी चाहिए?

8. What type of Gond-inspired products do you prefer?

आप किस प्रकार के गोंड कला-प्रेरित उत्पाद पसंद करते हैं?

9. Do you believe contemporary adaptations reduce the cultural meaning of traditional Gond Art?

क्या आधुनिक प्रयोग गोंड कला के पारंपरिक अर्थ को कम कर देते हैं?

10. Would you buy a Gond-inspired product if it supports the original artists financially?

अगर उत्पाद गोंड कलाकारों को आर्थिक रूप से सहयोग करे तो क्या आप इसे खरीदेंगे?

11. How important is it to preserve the traditional techniques of Gond Art?

गोंड कला की पारंपरिक तकनीकों को सुरक्षित रखना कितना जरूरी है?

12. In your opinion, what is the best way to promote Gond Art?

आपके अनुसार गोंड कला को बढ़ावा देने का सबसे अच्छा तरीका क्या है?

### C. Artist-Centric Qualitative Input

(Optional but beneficial – depending on access.)

This may include informal or published interviews with Gond artists such as:

- Bhajju Shyam
- Venkat Raman Singh Shyam
- Roshni Vyam
- Durga Bai Vyam
- Others associated with Patangarh art clusters

These qualitative inputs offer community perspectives on cultural ownership, challenges, market pressures, and adaptation.

### 5.3 Sampling Strategy

This research uses a purposive sampling approach, selecting only those artworks, publications, and adaptations that:

- represent traditional Gond techniques
- showcase significant contemporary transformations
- are created by recognised Gond artists or documented sources
- appear in museum collections, design markets, or academic publications

This ensures that the sample reflects authentic traditions and noteworthy contemporary examples.

### 5.4 Data Analysis Methods

#### A. Thematic Analysis

All collected data is analysed using thematic analysis, where information is coded into themes like:

- Traditional symbolism and visual language
- Cultural identity and spiritual meaning
- Modern reinterpretation in design industries
- Artist experiences and challenges
- Issues of cultural appropriation or misrepresentation
- Economic and livelihood impacts
- Digital transformation and global trends

Themes are identified, compared, and interpreted to draw meaningful insights.



## B. Comparative Analysis

A comparison is conducted between:

- Traditional Gond artworks and
- Contemporary adaptations (fashion, product design, murals, digital media)

The comparison focuses on:

- visual differences
- material changes
- narrative reinterpretation
- cultural shifts
- commercial influences

This helps assess how authenticity is maintained or altered.

## C. Interpretive Analysis (Qualitative Cultural Analysis)

Interpretive analysis helps understand:

- the meaning behind motifs
- cultural significance of symbols
- the worldview embedded in Gond artworks
- how modern contexts reshape cultural identity

This method respects the cultural depth of Gond traditions.

## 5.5 Validity and Reliability Measures

To ensure credibility:

- Data triangulation is used by comparing multiple sources (books, archives, online collections, documentaries).
- Only authentic, recognized Gond artworks and publications are included.
- Interpretations are grounded in documented cultural narratives, not assumptions.
- All secondary data sources are cited to maintain academic integrity.

## 5.6 Ethical Considerations

- Cultural sensitivity is maintained when interpreting sacred symbols.
- Artist narratives and traditional knowledge are represented respectfully.
- Issues of cultural appropriation and ethical use are addressed with caution and fairness.
- No personal data of individuals is collected without consent.

## 6. DATA ANALYSIS

This data is collected via, the survey was analysed using a combination of quantitative and qualitative approaches, to understand what public thoughts, what public assumes and public awareness and perceptions of traditional co-and-art, and it is contemporary adoptions. The multiple-choice responses were combined in Google form, where frequencies and percentage was calculated to identify overall trend in awareness, preferences and attitudes. The result shows that a majority of respondents were familiar with the co-and-art, with many indicating a positive view towards its use in modern products such as fashion accessories, home décor and the interior work. Descriptive statistics highlight strong support of contemporary adoptions, particularly when artists were created, and fairly compensated cross-observation also indicated that respondents with prior awareness of co-and-art that showed greater acceptance of their use in commercial and creative industries.

In the adaption to numerical data, qualitative comments were reviewed through basic thematic analysis. Requiring ideas were grouped into themes, which revealed concerns about cultural relations and strong emphasis on preserving traditional techniques, like whispered agreement on the need for ethical collaboration between brands and artists. Many respondents expressed that modern adoptions are acceptable only when they respect cultural meaning and directly benefit traditional artists. It is accused that what manners modern conversation going and how we are respecting our culture though

modification. Integrating both quantities, patterns, and qualitative insights provide a deeper understanding of consumer expectations, challenges, and opportunities surrounding the modern use of Gond art. The combined analysis showed that while people appreciating innovation, they value authenticity and ethical representation in these possible commercial practices, indicating the need for balanced artistic evolution.

## 7. CONCLUSION

Gond art is a significant part of India's cultural heritage that valued for its motifs and narratives or spiritual symbolism. While traditionally rooted in rituals or oral storytelling, it has successfully adapted to contemporary design fields such as fashion industry, home décor, and digital media, and interior designing.

The study shows that public awareness is high and modern adoptions are generally appreciated, especially when artists receive recognition and fair compensation. However, commercializing and modernization can risk diluting traditional meaning and disconnecting younger generations from ancestral techniques.

Overall, gaunt art's contemporary evolution presents opportunities for creating innovations and global visibilities, but its sustainability depends on ethical practices and cultural representations and support for artists.

Inconclusion GONDART's contemporary adoptions offer significant opportunities for global recognitions and creative innovations, but success lies in balancing modernization with cultural preservations and equitable artists' empowerment, future research and policy interventions should focus on ethical commercialization's, digital adoptions, and intergenerational knowledge transfer to secure the legacy of Gond Art for future generations.

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