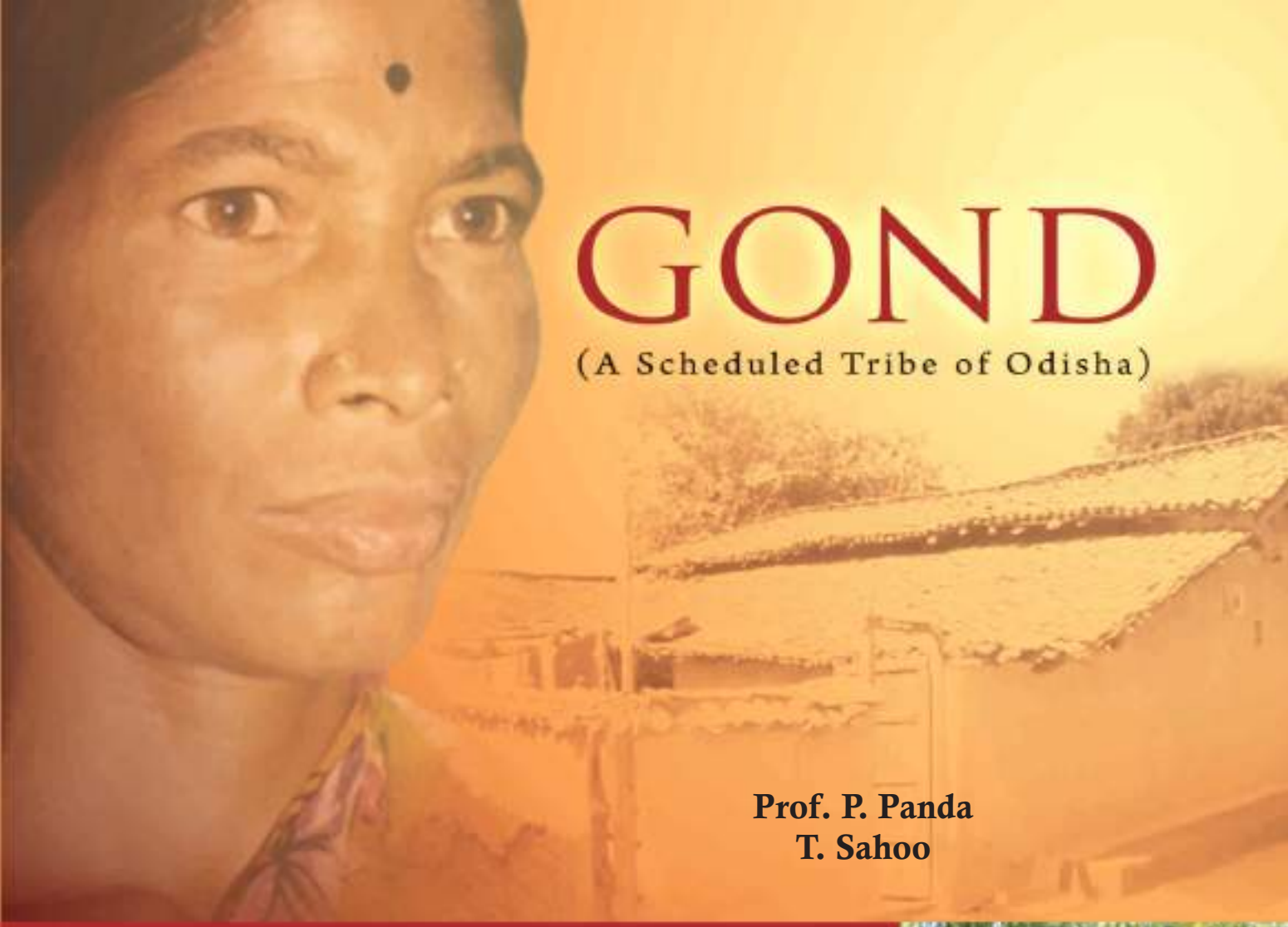


GOND

(A Scheduled Tribe of Odisha)

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PREFACE

Unity in cultural diversity among the tribal communities of Odisha has been a distinct feature. Almost all Scheduled Tribes of the state have been housed mostly in hill and forest tracts. Of the 62 scheduled tribes, the Gonds are a significant community. Their cultural life is enriched with traditions, values, performing arts, rites and rituals. The unique and vibrant culture of the Gond community is in transition. It is fast transforming due to the impact of modernization. With the influence of neighboring areas there is perceptible change in their culture of consumption. Across generations a steady trend of decline in cultural practices has been observed especially among the Gond youths. The pace of cultural assimilation under the influence of modern society is likely to give them a new identity in due course of time. Thus, steps are being taken by Govt. in ST&SC Development Department for documentation of some tribal cultural fabrics deep in their life and living. Fourteen photo Hand Books on Tribes and PTGs like Bonda, Birhor, Didayi, Dongaria Kondh, Gadaba, Juang, Hill Kharia, Kutia Kandha, Lanjia Saora, Mankirdia, Saora, etc. have already been published during the last half a decade.

This Photo Hand Book is a visual portrayal of the Gonds. During British India the Gonds were known as a well-known warrior community. At present they earn a living through peasantry. Although they are animist, there is a perceptible change observed among them due to Govt. development initiatives. Modernization has paved the way towards their integration.

A few snaps in this photo handbook are carefully chosen from villages of Sunabahali and Rajapati of Raighar Block of Nabarangapur district, Odisha.

The efforts of Prof. P. Panda, Director and Sri T. Sahoo, Research Officer, SCSTRTI have brought out this publication. The authors deserve thanks. Hope, this piece of work will be appreciated by the learned readers.

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GOND





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INTRODUCTION

Dissemination of research findings is primarily done through publication of reports, books and journals. Photo hand-book is one such form of publication to carter to the needs of the public interest. Often the contents in photo hand-book are contextualized to help readers to have a cursory glance on the cultural diversity of tribal communities. These documents are on the cultural resources, social institutions, indigenous knowledge, assets and habitat of the people at the grassroots.





The 'Gond' or 'Gondi', a scheduled tribe of Odisha, is a tribal peasant community. During the British India, the Gonds had challenged the British rulers in several battle fields sporadically. The history records them as a 'warrior community'. The Gonds are found spreading over the hill tracts of central and south India. They are one of the numerically dominant tribal groups in India. The name, *Gond* is derived from the Telugu word *Konda* meaning the - hills. Most of the Gond people speak Gondi dialect, closely related to the Dravidians. A few of them use Indo-Aryan dialect including Hindi and Odia. In Odisha, their dialect is getting assimilated with the dominant neighbouring Odia language as they often speak *Odia*.



CULTURAL ECOLOGY



Gond habitat may be referred to as a habitat for humanity. Their settlement extends mostly over the hill tracts of central India known as 'Gondwana' land. Important sub-divisions of the large Gond tribe are Maria Gond of Madhya Pradesh, Raj Gonds and Burve Gond of Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh and Gonds of Odisha. They are found dwelling near the hills and forest areas of Madhya Pradesh, eastern Maharashtra (Vidarbha), Chhattisgarh, northern Andhra Pradesh, and Odisha. The recent demographic history treats them as immigrants to Odisha. As a petty business community, their nativity is traced to Madhya Pradesh. In course of time, they have come over to Odisha through forest routes. They are concentrated in the state of Odisha in districts like Nabarangpur, Sundargarh, Sambalpur, Bolangir and part of Kalahandi.



HOUSING

It is process of sheltering and using a culturally defined space for intimate interaction among members of the family and lineage for cohesion, sharing and caring for one another .The heritage of Gond House-craft reflects their persistence to socio-cultural tradition.





They plan and design as per the cultural necessity. In past, the Gond people used to consult their foreteller before they construct a house. Their house building materials are made up of locally available resources like loamy soil, bricks, wood, and bamboo shafts, etc befitting their cultural needs and designs. In planning of a house, they strictly observe the socio-cultural taboos handed down to them as a part of tradition. The lineage wise house arrangement and construction of houses in linear pattern is an ethnic marker. With the increasing population and expansion of additional families, the sparse distribution of big house becomes essential. With the passage of time they started downgrading the linear type of house arrangement with kitchen garden, cattle shed and front court yard. Now they appreciate sparsely distributed houses in the village.







LIVELIHOOD

Generally, the Gonds as peasant community work hard to get their livelihood. Their inadequate peasant economy is supplemented by forest produce, fishing, hunting, and other primary sector activities. A few forge metal goods in cottage industries add to their earning. They use bullock-ploughs for tilling the soil. Before they till the land, some grains, fowls and pigs are sacrificed as a token of deference to the presiding deity and ancestral spirits. Blood of the sacrificed animals is smeared and sprinkled onto the seeds which are distributed among the villagers. They sow these propitiated and venerated seeds in their ritually purified fields for bumper crops. They mainly produce rice. Besides rice cultivation, they grow potatoes, tomatoes, brinjal , beans, leafy vegetables, wheat, maize, small millets, ragi, mustard, black mung, horse gram, etc. All crops including cereals and pulses are cultivated in rain fed fields. They consume vegetables as well as sale them for cash to meet other household essentials. They are multi-crop growers.







For maintaining their economic life, they go for organized fishing. They catch fish individually and in group by help of bamboo nets and traps and also sell them for maintaining the family. Hunting adds to their subsistence. They prepare their own bows and arrows as hunting implements. These implements safeguard them and their cattle wealth from wild animals. Their traditional communal hunting has gone into rituals due to paucity of games and wildlife conservation laws.





Grooving soil for cultivation is done by iron ploughshare. A few of them are experts in preparing agricultural implements like wooden ploughs, leveling bars, threshing poles, de-husking platform and balancing bar for lifting and transportation. They purchase sickle, crowbar, pike and spade and also seeds from local market. The village cattle herds are grazed and kept in field during lean season









strategically to increase the fertility of land due to organic manure. A few well-to-do families use fertilizers, pesticides bought from local weekly market for better productivity. The brooms and mats are mostly crafts of the womenfolk. Some such crafts are sold in local market.

They have their own traditional inventory and pattern of preserving grains for future use, for seed as well as for consumption. After harvesting different crops, they process and bask them in sunshine for a few days and then they prepare grain bins with hay rope to be kept on a raised bamboo platform to preserve paddy, maize and other cereals and minor millets harvested.

They have bovines. They domesticate cows, goats and buffalos for milk and meat. They keep draught animals and duck, fowls, etc. for food and during exigencies they sale in local market.

















FOOD AND DRINK

The dietary habit of the Gonds is simple. Rice is their staple food. The Gond women de-husk paddy by hand with help pastel and mortar to get rice and then clean and cook them. They get dal by pounding pulses with the help of hand driven stone grinders.



The general food habit of the Gonds comprises of watered rice, mix-vegetable curry, dal, pickles and at times fish or dry fish. During festive occasions their menu is added with chicken and mutton curry. Animal sacrificed at ceremonies are eagerly consumed by them. The meat of game animals supplements their diet. The clan members restrict them from consuming the meat of their totems.











They take locally brewed liquor, like rice bear, rasi, mahuli, etc. as important cultural items. Usually, their immediate neighbor the Mundas, prepare these drinks and the Gonds purchase from them for consumption, mostly during rituals and festivities. They smoke country cigarette (*bidi*) prepared by hand with locally available tobacco rolled by tender sal leaf.











ORNAMENTS AND ADORNMENTS

Going back to the traditional costume of the Gond community, it was very easy to notice the attires of boys and girls revealing equal status. Both grow their hair long, fix combs on buns and use jewelleries, and adorned themselves with decorations. The boys often outshine the girls in decoration. They wear beads, tusks of boars, feathers and anything colourful that was available. They decorate them with dressed hair, in which they fix combs, mirrors, balloons, and even paper fans.

In past, the Gonds were using different types of ornaments to decorate them. Since recently they are acquainted with modernity. That's how traditional ornaments are declining. They wear ornaments made from gold, silver and brass. During festivities they wear a brass neck band 'locally known as *Paduka*.









They even wear the coin-necklace made up of 10, 25, 50 paise coins. They wear bangles 'Pahula' in their hands made of brass and *katria* and *bandria* made of silver.

The *Pahula* is hallow whereas the other two bangles are solid. Foot ring is called 'Jhuntia'. At the time of marriage they wear ear ring named as *madhujhara*, and plain rings on the helix and lobes of the ear. They wear nose-ring called 'guna' and *Jharadandi* in the middle lower part of nasal septum and *mullu* in foot. But now-a-days they are wearing anklet. Traditionally they used to wear *holi* a silver bracelet, silver chain and pendant in necklace.





Besides, they typically mark tattoos as permanent decoration on their body surface. Tattooing is done before puberty else it is viewed as inauspicious.

Being influenced by the neighboring Hindus, now-a-days they are wearing chain *kendi mala* and *mangalasutra*. Due to the modernity boys are also wearing ear-rings. The Gonds are modern in dress and ornaments. A few decades back Gonds were using cotton and terrikot. At the time of marriage during the mangan they are wearing yellow Saris. In mandap they are wearing red colored and varieties of sarees. The traditional wears like *dhoti, lungi* (a wrapper), and towel have been replaced by modern dress materials. Thus, the youths preferred to wear jeans, T-shirt and Trousers.

INSTITUTIONALISING SELF AND OTHER KIN



Normally, the social life of Gond community goes through four stages such as infancy, childhood, adulthood and old age. During these stages they observe four important life cycle rituals: birth, puberty, marriage, and death.

Their birth ritual starts from special rite to acknowledge the joy of pregnancy. The expectant is considered as bestowed with strength of ancestral spirits. After delivery the first ceremony, called *Narta*, is performed on the 9th day of the birth of child. On this day, all the polluted clothes of mother and other family members are washed and all the members are sprinkled with water mixed with cow-dung for purification. On the 21th day, they perform the ritual named as *Ekoishia*. On this day, the clothes of the lineage members are rituality purified. So also the house is smeared and purified. The mother and the new born take full bath.







The mother observes touch taboo. She is restricted to touch the utensils and to enter into the cattle shed and kitchen. They refrain the mother from rituals till baby reaches third month of his/her age.

The initiation ceremony takes place when a girl attains her puberty. She is escorted to the river to take bath, smear with turmeric oil or soap. She has to undergo a movement taboo. The girl is kept on one corner of the house and she is not allowed to touch anything. The pollution continued for a period of 7 days.

Among the Gonds, clan/sub clan exogamy is regarded as the basic principle of marriage. The tribe has exogamous totemic clan divisions. The principle extends to clan-cluster exogamy. Cross-cousin marriage and marriage by negotiation are common. Marriage by service is socially permitted. Marriage is celebrated with many pumps and ceremonies .The dancing, singing and drinking add to the joy of marriage. Marriages are preferred within the close relations mostly according to Hindu rites and customs. Sometimes mock elopements are also arranged. They prefer arranged marriage. The other forms of marriage are love marriage, widow remarriage, sorrorate and levirate. Polygamy is practiced seldom. Divorce, remarriage, widow marriage, is common. Dowry system has been a recent phenomenon among them. However, the groom has to pay bride-price to







the father of the girl as a token of respect to woman.

To up keep the social prestige and status, most of the Gonds try to follow their marriage traditions and customs and observe the rituals in detail as far as possible. When a boy or a girl attains marriage age, the parents look around for a suitable mate. On a fixed date with the help of a mediator the boy's parents and the maternal uncle go to see the girl at her home. There, if they select the girl, the messenger fixes a stick in the girl's home; this is called as *Badidara*. Then the boy's father with the female relatives goes back with the marriage gifts to fix the marriage date locally known as *Pidhani*. Then, on the day of marriage some rituals such as *Dian Mangala,Pathatola, Baradhara* etc., are performed by the a group of seven women of the village. While the groom comes to alter, always younger sister of the bride bargains him for his entry to the altar. After *Kanyadana* the marriage knot is tied by the groom's younger daughter-in-law in a pandemonium. The bride groom then using right hand thumb applies vermilion on the bride's forehead. Thereafter, the bride and groom must sit and eat together which is known as *Vidala*. The bride is taken to her in-laws house along with the groom. Jokes on pregnancy and child birth are chided to both by a few aged joke related kin.

The aged Gond is considered as inventory of knowledge and protector of traditions, customs, and

practices. The existence of extended families indicates the cooperation of family members and value of parental cares in the old age among the Gonds. The Gond family bond symbolizes their obligation and duty towards caring the old parents till their death and aftermath by observing mortuary rites and rituals associated with the ancestral worship.





After the death of a person, the message is sent to kin. The relatives are immediately called upon. The entire kith and kin like daughter and sons-in-law came over to console the bereaved family. After a while, the dead body is keept outside of the house. Only the male members of the family and close kin arrange the articles for funeral at the cremation ground. Till the tenth day they observe food taboo, movement taboo and dress taboo. On the tenth day the ritual is performed at the *ghat* of te village pond. All the relatives assemble at one place and male members cut their nail and hair and shave their bread like the Hindus. However, unlike Hindu barber who serves the bereaved family, they serve themselves. After that they come back home and their priest performs puja to liberate the soul of the dead. On the 11th day, the ceremony to purify the kin takes place. On the 12th day, food and rice beer, some cloths and rupees are offered by the son-in-law of the dead son and elder son to the priest. In some cases the rich Gonds employ Brahmins to do the entire ritual.



SOCIAL TRANSACTIONS



In Gond society the family is mostly of nuclear type. It comprises of father, mother and unmarried children. The extended families are also found among them. Gond families are patriarchal and patrilineal. After marriage the bride is taken to her husband's residence. The head of household is usually a male. Authority is transmitted from the father to the son following the principle of primogeniture. In case of death of husband, the wife becomes head of the household. The son after becoming major is given recognition as the head of the family to manage all the matters related to family resources. Daughter after marriage ceases her right over paternal property. At family, clan and community level, there is a clear-cut division of labor among the members based on age, sex and status. The family members help each other during the time of need. Thus, the members of family always have certain reciprocal rights and obligations towards each other. The gifts reciprocated within the family are asymmetrical and it is symmetrical when it comes to interfamily exchange.

The Gond consanquneal kin groups include family, lineage, and clan. Their kinship indicates relationship through blood and marriage. It plays important role in the regulation of behavior and formation of the social groups. It prescribes avoidance and joking relationship to regulate sex behaviour between kin members. Kinship ensures solidarity, develops mutuality, and avoids conflict among the members. The kin groups maintain their socio-cultural boundaries on the basis of totem and performance of difficult activities as per village norms derived from their original habitat. Lineage members co-operate and reciprocate each other at the time of crisis, life cycle rituals and different religious festivals.



DECISION MAKING PROCESS AND SOCIAL CONTROL



The Gonds of Odisha have no formal kin based hierarchical political organization, to treat the disagreements; however, they are not without leaders. Their solidarity does not extend beyond the subsection. The Gond village community forms the basic political unit through its village council.

This village level democratic organization is headed by 'Majhi' (headman). The other members of the village council are chosen by the villagers. Its officials are the village chief, priest, and watchman, four or five co-opted elderly members representing the lineages inhabiting the village. All sorts of disputes are discussed and resolved by the village council. Each Gond village has its own service giving "caste groups" such as the *Ahir* (cowherd), Agria (blacksmith), Dhulia (Drummers) and Pradhan (Bards and Singers). In the current political situation the Gond community, despite its numerical strength, is less vocal and less powerful at the decision making process. This is attributed to their disunity and educational and economic backwardness. Their traditional political structure has been weakening due to modern Panchayatiraj system. The social esteem of the traditional leaders is loosing grounds. They are being marginalized at the rise of the politically affiliated members representing the Panchayati system.





MYTHS AND SUPERNATURAL POWER



According to Gond Myth, Mahadeo created earth after the deluge. Next he created nature, birds, animals and finally man. The Gonds are the first son of Mahadeo and Parvati. In past, they were gatherers and hunters. It is believed that Gonds are heavy eaters and remain empty stomach hence *Mahadeo* could not provide them with sufficient food. So *Parvati* advised Siva to instruct Gonds to start cultivating of paddy. They arranged bulls, made a plough, plough-share and sent *Bhima* to *Kuvera* (the god of wealth) for a demonstration for paddy cultivation. From *Madadeo*, the Gonds learnt the technique of farming. The Gonds believe that the forest and trees interact with men during day time and spirits during night. They honor trees for they provide shade, shelter and nourishment to all. When the night falls and the day time visitors left forest, the spirits of the trees converse themselves. They believe that trees have ability to communicate their pains and pleasure like that of men and ancestral spirits.

They are animist. They believe that the hills, rivers, lakes and trees are the abodes of their ancestors. Sacrifice is the most important event of their religious activities. The Gonds of Odisha are Hinduised to a considerable extent. To a Gond, the mother Goddess (*Devi*) is a very crucial deity. The supreme deity is the *Jangha*. They believe that in the fight for owning the God, Hindus could







take the upper portion and they got the lower portion from naval down to the feet of Lord Jagannath to which they worship as *Jangha*. The clan god and village deities are given equal importance. They worship all supernatural entities in all occasions to get rid of the diseases and pestilence, natural calamities and also to get blessings for good harvest and ample forest produce. Each Gond clan has its guardian spirit known as Persapen. This guards clan membersfrom external injury and evil spirits. . The Persapen is essentially benevolent spirit but can be also be dangerous and violent if disturbed, dishonored and shown no suitable reverence in festive occasions. The clan priest (*Katora*) manages and maintains the shrines and ritual objects of the Persapen. He is the custodian of the sacred spear point , often ritual tridents, and organizes annual festival. He is the connecting link between kin and ancestors and helps the community to pass on the desire of the spirits and vice versa. At the outskirt of every village there are wooden carved pillars stuck into the ground as memorials of their departed souls of past chieftains. The carvings reveal interesting life events of the ancestors and chiefs The Kotara is empowered to explain the meaning symbolically engraved on such wooden poles. The Gonds believe that when a Pradhan (bard) plays his fiddle, the deity's fierce powers can be controlled. The style he eulogizes the brevity of deities is typical. They worship their village mother Goddess in all festivities who is propitiated as the village protector. They also worship their tutelary deity and guardian deity who protects cattle and cattle wealth on important social occasions. Deities, like *Shitala Mata* (the God of Smallpox), if venerated properly, help ward off the ailments. Certain deities, mostly the female, demand raw blood of chickens, goats and at times he-buffalos. In an interval of nine or twelve years, the Gonds offer a pig to the God-Narayan Deo in a ceremony known as *Laru Kas* meaning pig's wedding. They perform rituals as a source of healing against ailment.





FAIRS AND FESTIVALS



Usually, the Gond Festivals relate to important agricultural activities and seasonal events and human life cycle events from birth to death and aftermath. The Gonds observe two major festivals, such as *Keslapur Jathra* and *Madai*. While the celebration of 'Keslapur Jathra' is marked with worshiping the Snake deity - *Nagaba*, the *Madai* festival is celebrated to mark the occasion of meeting relatives settled in other part of the country. The Chaitra festival held in month of March is very common for fruit eating ceremony and as well as sowing new crops. Their festive life is always filled with animal sacrifices made by ritual head of the village *Dehari*. During the festivities the Gond women wear colour glass bangles and necklaces made of small black beads and coins and silver.





Gusadi - the dance performed by men with costumes decorated with peacock feathers on head along with cotton clothes around their waist and smeared ash body. It is a distinctive feature of Gonds. They enjoy the festivities with sharing drinks and playing and dancing with the rhythm of drum beats and blowing music throughout the night. During dance performance they use musical instruments double humdrums/ drums, harmonium, wooden bells bitten by sticks, etc.



Like all the Hindus, the Gonds celebrate the grand festival of Mother Goddess *Durga* during Dusshera with glee and gaiety. Silver jewellery and decorative turbans form an essential part of the costume of the Gond dancers.

CULTURE CHANGE AND PERSISTANCE



The Gonds of plain areas are Hinduized due to acculturation. Most of them have adopted Hindu ways of life and a few began to live in closed Hindu multi caste villages. Yet, they maintained the identity of their own. Most of the Gonds living in the rural part of Odisha are dichotomized into the traditional group and the acculturated Hinduised groups. The Hinduised Gonds get the services of Brahmin priest, barber and washer man. The traditional section is being served by its own tribal priest. One observes the syncretism among the Gonds of plain. The Hinduised section observes death pollution for 10 days. They erect menhirs to commemorate the dead. They are polytheists. The Hinduised Gonds abstain from eating beef and drinking liquor.



DEVELOPMENT INNITIATIVE

The establishment of schools by the ST&SC Development Department and Department of Education, Govt. of Odisha has been a noble intervention for desired transformation of the Gonds in social sector.





Similarly, extending infrastructure facilities through dvelopemnt agencies and units like Anganwadi Center and, PDS centers, etc. at villages level, the Govt. of Odisha tries to create a sustaininable socioeconomic support system ranging from food security and safe drinking water measures, mobile health units, and empowering the Gond community.





Towards ensuring the livelihood enhancement and women empowerment, the Gond women have been roped into SHGs through extending financial assistance by the ITDAs and DRDAs. Individual assistance to women entrepreneur for running grocery shop petty business at villages has opened up new areas of the economic opportunity for individual family and community development.



Providing services and rendering help to the needy are not enough. It is comparable to provide cushion to a limping being. Genesis of internal strength empowers the people. Commitment, perseverance and continuous zeal to dare to learn and learn to dare will definitely pave the way of better tomorrow



CONSERVATION OF CULTURE

The ST and SC Development Department, Government of Odisha under the aegis of Ministry of Tribal Affairs, Government of India has established a Tribal Museum in the premises of the SC and ST Research and Training Institute, CRPF Square, Bhubaneswar for preservation and conservation of the material culture of different tribes. The following ornaments, personal belongings, hunting weapons, fishing implements and musical instruments of Gond tribe have been displayed in the different showcases in the tribal Museum. Besides, the live performance of Gond dance in the Annual Adivasi Exhibition and display of the replica of Gond house in the ITDA stall in the Exhibition ground are aimed at conservation of cultural material of the Gond and acquaint the visitors about their dwelling and living.

Gond Ornaments



Kataria (Bangle)



Bandaria (Bangle)



Bahata (Bangle)



(Armlet)



Chimni (Lamp)



Cattle bell Kutudaka (Wooden)

Gond Household Articles



Gourd pot



Tobacco Container



Wooden Comb

Musical instruments



Cymbal

Hunting weapons & Fishing Implements



Sword



Chadua (Fishing trap)



Rabbit trap



Wooden Gun

In the passage of time due to modernisation some of the cultural items are vanishing. The preservation of cultural items indicate the ecological adaptationof the community. Any Gond social groups have to be analysed from the interaction between ecology, population, echnology and organisation of the community .

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