



Original Article

# Socio-Economic Resiliency and Cultural Preservation of Gond Tribal Women in the Era of Digitalization

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## Abstract

India is a country defined by vast cultural variation. Within this diversity, tribal communities have successfully maintained their unique cultural identities. India's demographic blend includes populations living in urban, rural, and tribal areas. Many Adivasi (tribal) groups are found across India, each possessing distinct lifestyles and occupations. These tribes, often seen as symbols of self-assertion, comprise approximately 8.2% of the national population. The primary objectives of this study are to evaluate the level of knowledge tribal women have regarding their Gond community, trace their cultural awareness, and analyze their understanding of traditional festivals. For this research, 111 samples were selected from Arattondi village in the Kurkheda district. Language, traditional costumes, festivals, and rituals play a vital role in the lives of Gond women. The status of tribal women is largely judged by the roles they fulfill in society. This paper also presents empirical data on the nature of tribal populations in the village, noting that nuclear families formed through monogamy are the most common family structure in these Indian tribal communities.

**Keywords:** Tribal women, language, traditional dress, festivals.

## Introduction

India is renowned for its rich traditional heritage of tribal arts and culture. Since ancient times, the diversified art and cultural forms generated by the tribal and rural peoples of India have continued to display creative magnificence. Tribals, or *Adivasis*, represent about 8.2% of the national population and stand as a symbol of cultural self-assertion. Currently, this 8.2% of the population is officially classified as "Scheduled Tribes" for the purpose of receiving political, economic, and educational benefits. However, there are several ethnic groups in India who, while not officially listed, retain a cultural background analogous to these tribes. Beyond their aesthetic brilliance, tribal and folk cultures have been instrumental in reinforcing national integrity, crystallizing social solidarity, and promoting humanism. Despite this, for centuries, many tribes have been pushed to remote locations, existing as a separate part of the nation. This marginalization began during colonization when non-tribal groups first accessed their traditional spaces.

In contemporary times, globalization has further marginalized these groups. While India gained independence, the social status of many tribes remained unchanged. Ethnicity and cultural identity have emerged as significant social issues in modern India. With the passage of time and the advent of a "synthetic homogeneous macro-culture," the diversified, heterogeneous tribal cultures of our country are suffering from attrition and erosion. Consequently, the unique socio-cultural exclusivity of various communities across the country is becoming endangered. The Gond tribes are often called the "face of Indian tribes" due to their significant population strength. These warrior tribes possess a distinct identity in terms of culture, language, and costume. Historically, they are known for their heroics against British colonialists; notably, they gained control of Malwa after the decline of the Mughals and the subsequent rise of the Marathas in 1690. The unique ideologies and religious thoughts of the Gond tribe set them apart from others in India. However, tribal women in India still frequently find themselves with virtually no role to play in the broader social and political spheres.

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**Literature Review:**

**The Risk of Attrition**

Previous research emphasizes that tribal culture is suffering from "attrition and erosion" due to macro-cultural influences.

- **The Linguistic Barrier:** Gondi dialects are often oral. Without digital documentation, the language risks becoming a "silent heritage."
- **Aesthetic Brilliance:** The "costume of traditional dress" is a hallmark of Gond identity. However, mass-produced fast fashion threatens the artisanal value of tribal weaving.
- **Social Isolation:** Historically, tribal women played vital roles within the domestic ritual sphere but remained invisible in national economic data.

**Objectives of the Study**

1. To evaluate the impact of smartphone penetration on the traditional knowledge sharing of Gond women.

2. To assess the economic viability of tribal handicrafts (Gond art and textiles) through e-commerce platforms.
3. To determine if digital connectivity increases the "self-assertion" and political awareness of tribal women.

**Research Methodology:**

The present study was conducted among the Gond people residing in Arattondi village, Kurkheda district. A sample of **111 valid** respondents was drawn using the Random Sampling method from the total population of the target area. The data obtained is considered reliable, as the process allowed respondents to provide detailed information regarding their living patterns and cultural practices.

**Results and Discussion:**

**Language**

Language serves as the primary vessel for cultural identity, emotional expression, and communal communication. For the Gond people, the Gondi language is a critical link to their ancestral heritage. The study surveyed 111 women to determine their level of literacy and oral proficiency in their native tongue.

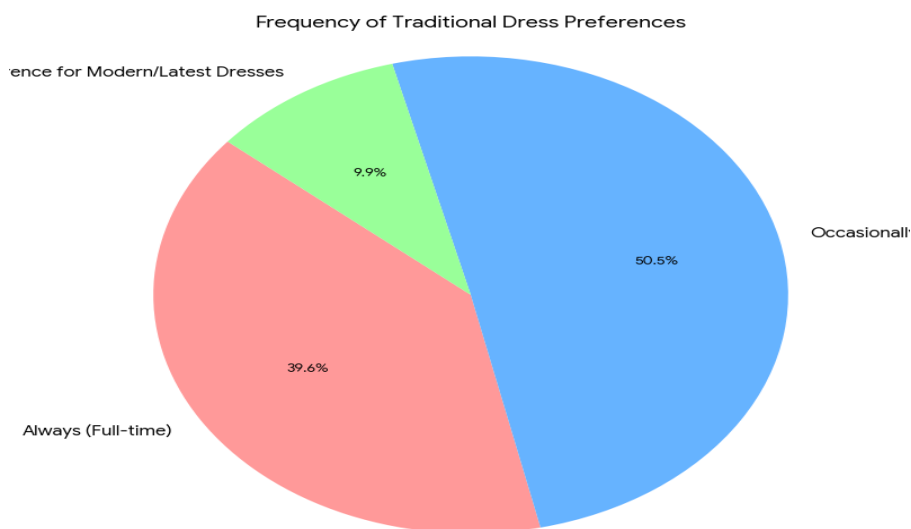
**Table no. 1.1 Linguistic Proficiency of the women on their Gondi language**

| Proficiency Level                   | No. of Respondents | Percentage    |
|-------------------------------------|--------------------|---------------|
| Can Read Only                       | 23                 | 20.72%        |
| Can Speak Only                      | 37                 | 33.35%        |
| Can Read, Write, & Speak            | 18                 | 16.21%        |
| Illiterate (Neither Read nor Write) | 33                 | 29.72%        |
| <b>Total</b>                        | <b>111</b>         | <b>100.0%</b> |

The primary linguistic data indicates that oral proficiency is the most prevalent form of language engagement among the respondents. Specifically, **33.35% (n=37)** of the participants reported that they can speak only, representing the largest cohort in the study. This is closely followed by those categorized as illiterate (neither read nor

write), who constitute **29.72% (n=33)** of the sample population. A smaller segment of the group, approximately **20.72% (n=23)**, possesses the ability to read only, while the most limited group consists of those with comprehensive literacy—**16.21% (n=18)** of respondents are capable of reading, writing, and speaking the Gondi language.

**Graph 1.1: Preferences for Traditional Attire**



The traditional costume remains a powerful cultural symbol, with **39.6%** of respondents wearing it either daily or during significant cultural events. However, the fact that **50.5%** now reserve traditional dress primarily for festivals suggests a gradual shift toward modern clothing for daily labor or social interactions. Only **9.9%** of the younger or more modern-leaning demographic expressed a total preference for contemporary fashion.

### Knowledge of Festivals and Rituals

The Gond community possesses a vibrant festive calendar deeply rooted in agrarian cycles and mythology. Major celebrations include Keslapur Jathra and Madai, which serve as significant cultural markers. While the Gonds participate in pan-Indian festivals like Dusshera and Baisakhi, they maintain unique local traditions, such as celebrating Makar-Sankranti as "Budki."

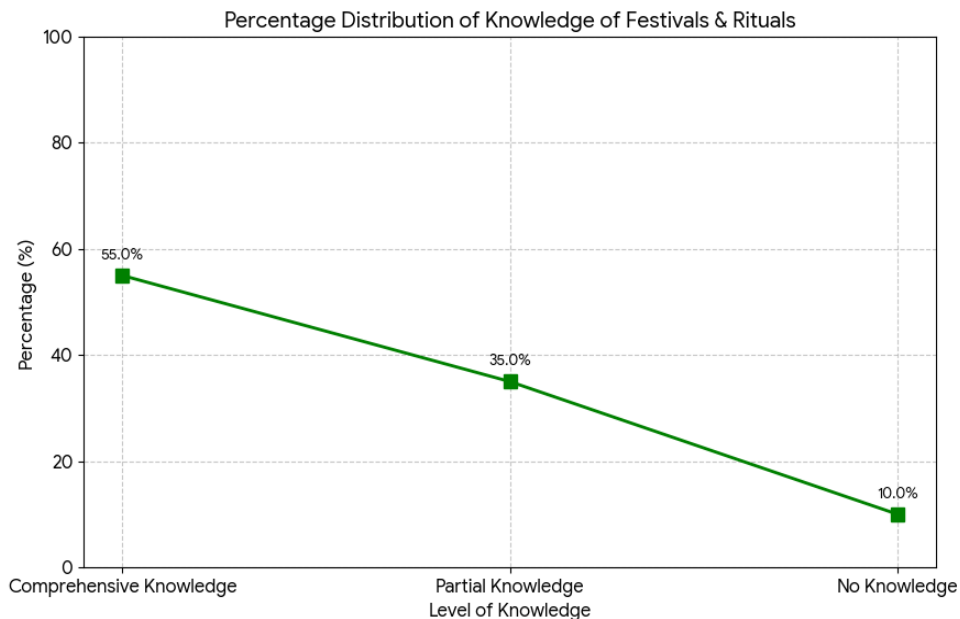
Central themes of these celebrations include the veneration of "Mother Goddesses" and prayers for "Agricultural Productivity." Each village honors a specific Village Guardian and Village Mother. These events are characterized by:

- **Aesthetics:** Women adorn themselves with colored glass bangles, necklaces of small black beads, and traditional **tattoos**, which are considered a major cultural charm.
- **Activities:** Rituals are often accompanied by mythology, folk songs, traditional dances, and cockfighting.

### Data Analysis: Knowledge Levels

To assess the transmission of these traditions, the study measured the level of awareness regarding festivals and rituals among 111 women.

Graph 1.2: Knowledge of Festivals & Rituals among Gond Women



Comprehensive Knowledge to the respondent (55.0%) more than half of the Gond women surveyed possess full knowledge of their festivals and rituals, indicating a dominant preservation of cultural heritage. Partial Knowledge (35.0%) - Over one-third of the respondents have a moderate understanding, suggesting a middle ground where some cultural details might be fading or are less practiced. No Knowledge (10.0%) - A small segment of the population (1 in 10 women) is disconnected from these specific traditional practices.

By plotting this on a 100% scale, it becomes evident that the trend is a significant decline from high knowledge to low knowledge, with the majority still firmly rooted in their traditional rituals.

### Conclusion:

The findings of this study reaffirm that tribal women in India's interior regions are not merely passive

members of their households; they are central economic drivers. Their roles in managing resources, contributing to agricultural labor, and maintaining the domestic economy place them in a position of significant social importance. Within the Gond community, the woman acts as the primary custodian of both the hearth and the heritage, ensuring that the household remains functional while the culture remains intact. A defining pillar of Gond identity is the **Gondi language**. As the primary mother tongue, it serves as more than just a medium of communication; it is a repository of oral history, folklore, and traditional wisdom. This study highlights that the preservation of the Gondi language is intrinsically linked to the survival of the tribe's unique worldview. However, as the community interacts more frequently with the "outside" world, the language faces the challenge of staying relevant to the younger generation who are increasingly exposed to regional or national languages. Traditionally, the Gondi people are recognized by a distinct style of dress that symbolizes their



tribal affiliation and social status. This research underscores a significant transition in clothing patterns:

- While a core group continues to wear traditional attire full-time, there is a clear trend toward **contextual traditionalism**.
- Traditional dress is increasingly being reserved for "ceremonial" or "festival" use, while modern attire is adopted for daily functional tasks.
- This shift represents a pragmatic adaptation to globalization, where the Gondi people balance their ethnic visibility with the practicalities of a modernizing society.

The forces of globalization have introduced a "new socio-modern culture" into the interior pockets of India. This evolution is most visible in the celebration of festivals and rituals. While 55% of the respondents still maintain comprehensive knowledge of their traditions, the emergence of a "partial knowledge" group indicates that the nuances of these rituals are beginning to fade. The adoption of modern technology, education, and media has created a hybrid lifestyle where traditional Gondi values coexist with contemporary global trends.

In summary, the Gond community is currently in a state of cultural flux. They are successfully maintaining an economically significant position and a strong sense of ethnic pride, yet they are not immune to the sweeping changes of the 21st century. To ensure that the "Fundamentals of Home Science" and extension education remain effective for such communities, it is crucial to recognize this dual identity. Future interventions must support the preservation of the Gondi language and rituals while providing the tools necessary for the community to thrive within the modern economic landscape.

#### Recommendations:

- **Empowerment:** Focus on the economic role of Gond women as a lever for community development.
- **Documentation:** Encourage the documentation of festivals and rituals to prevent the "knowledge gap" from widening.
- **Cultural Sensitivity:** Ensure that modern educational models respect and integrate traditional Gondi identity rather than replacing it.

#### Acknowledgment

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#### Conflicts of interest

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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