

**GONDI TRIBAL PAINTING: A UNIVERSAL CREATIVE ART WITH ITS THEMATIC
CONTENTS AND STYLE**

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Abstract

The present paper endeavours to talk about the universality of Gondi painting and its relevance to the contemporary world. Today art is all in its dimensions whether it is tribal painting, tribal folk song, dance, narrative, ballads, etc., but the present paper is focused to explore the features of Gondi painting and its universality with its thematic analysis and style. Gondi painting is an exploration of tribal life and culture. It is necessary to study in detail the cultural heritage of the indigenous society. Gondi painting is one of the important and unique tribal art of India, especially in Madhya Pradesh, because of its style and signature pattern. Pardhan tribal artists using original colors from leaves and soils (black, red and white). The white colour is from pidor maati (soil). But with the changes now they are also using modern acrylic colours. Each Pardhan artist has his own unique identity and style. Some artist makes dots in their paintings and some draw the line or some other pattern and each Gondi painting is completely different from the other. Gondi painting is entirely based on tribal myths, legends and deities like Bada dev, Thakur dev and Mahrelin Dai etc. Bana (musical instrument) and Saja Tree also is a main elements of Gondi painting. Saja tree is also an important element of Gondi painting because they immensely believe that the nature is mother and savior of their life and they also believe that God "Bada dev" is residing on Saja tree. Textual analysis, journals, magazine and painting analysis will incorporate the present study.

Key Words: Tribal painting, myths, Legends, tribal Deities, Thematic Contents, Style and Universality of Gondi painting, etc.

GONDI TRIBAL PAINTING: A UNIVERSAL CREATIVE ART WITH ITS THEMATIC

CONTENTS AND STYLE

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“Come over O Bada Dev, sit in the dense shade of Saja tree, come, create the world, create it once again” (Udayan Vajpeyi’s *Jangarh Kalam: Narrative of a tradition – Gond Painting*)

It is not anything new for the inhabitants of Patangarh village to present their artistic skills in every corner of the world. It would not be an exaggeration to say that this village is well known recognized throughout the world because of its rich cultural heritage, especially for Gond painting. Gond painting is a famous folk art of the Pardhan tribes of the village Patangarh. Gond painting is initiated by Late Mr. Jangarh Singh Shyam. He was born in Pardhan community of Patangarh village. Gond painting originated from ‘Dhigna’ because initially the villagers used to make dhignas for decorating their mud houses with soil colours and cow dung and gradually it took the shape of the painting. Gond painting is an Indian art that is practiced by both Pardhans and Gond. The Gond tribe is one of the largest communities in India. The word “Gond” is derived from the Dravidian word “Kond” which means mountain. Among Gonds, prominently the Pradhan’s are renowned for their artistic skills, be it painting or music”. They are very excellent in visual art, commonly categorized as Gond Art or Gond Paintings. Their paintings are not only intended for decorations but also for spiritual and devoted beliefs as well. Paintings of tribal people are very basic and are sketched on walls to please their deities or to ward off evil and diseases. And now they have fabricated those sketches on canvas papers.



Tracing history of Gond Art: from walls to canvas

<http://google.com/search?q=images+of+gond+painting>

The tribal arts have a notable attitude of indulgence towards their medium. When a tribal storyteller narrates an episode, he often stops at a word or phrase and plays upon its tonal qualities, exploiting its phonetic potential to the maximum. Tribal craftsmen and painters seem almost to show off their love for the colours they use. Tribals have an intense sense of shapes and geometry, and acute feel for the texture of the materials they use to make things. In whatever they built or make, they reveal and highlight the shapes, tones and textures they handle. It's as though the message of the medium is more important than the message framed in the artist's conceptual understanding. Hence, every tribal artist conceals his individual identity by foregrounding the medium itself. In their exuberant love for the materials used, tribal creations seem almost like prayerful offerings to the elements that make this world such a mysteriously beautiful place. (G.N. Devi's *Painted Words*, p. XIV).

It is absolutely difficult to understand the tribal traditions, models, and living patterns that are divided into various temporals. The art may be viewed within certain universal, creative and general artistic traditions of humankind as such. For example, it is not possible to understand and visualize 'tribal' art within wider possibilities, in the sense of a cosmogenic and universal creative act whereby this

common cultural heritage provides a link for the contemporary dilemma which faces us today. There are multiple stories and riddles in tribal communities and paintings are based on these stories and riddles. And the stories of Saja tree and the musical instrument Bana are very famous. Udayan Vajpeyi mentioned in his book *Jangarh Kalam* that “The Bana is a kind of Baja (musical instrument), of the Pardhans, is BadaDev, why? It is Bada Dev because unless it produces its sound Bada Dev does not come down the Saja tree. It is inherent in the name Bana that it is in a way the body of Bada Dev, is the garment of Bada Dev. Bada Dev comes down the Saja tree only when it is played. After coming down the Saja tree he possesses one of those present there. If the Bana is not played, Bada Dev will not awake, will not come down on Saja tree and will not possess anyone present there. Bada Dev is just because the Bana is. The Gond patron cannot even touch the Bana. The Pardhan keeps it to himself. he alone can touch it. (Udayan Vajpeyi’s *Jangarh Kalam: Narrative of a Tradition- Gond Painting*, p. 47).

Thing Caliban this island’s
 mine, By Sycorax my
 mother,
 Which thou wouldst
 give me, tak’st from me.
 When thou camest
 Thou strok’st me, and mad’st much of me;
 Water with berries in’t; and teach me how to
 name the bigger light, and how the less That
 burn by day and night: and then I loved thee,
 and shew’d thee all the qualities o’ the isle,
 The fresh springs, brine pits, barren place, and
 fertile; Cursed be I that did so! All the charms
 Of Sycorax, toads, beetles, bats, light
 on you! For I am all the subjects that
 you have,
 Which erst was mine own king; and her you
 style me In this hard rock, while you do keep

from me,

The rest of the Island. (Udayan Vajpeyi's *Jangarh Kalam*, P. 16)

These lines are taken from Udayan Vajpeyi's *Jangarh Kalam*, but these lines are originally from Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, where there is a conversation going on between Prospero and Caliban. In these lines, Prospero is the master who is taking care of his Island and he is the son of Sycorax (mother). In the same way the tribal community is protecting nature (mother) and only tribal people can explain that, in the forest which tree is more useful, and which is less, which River's water is sweeter than other? They can feel the emotions of birds, animals and other creatures of the earth because they are spending time with them. All these firsthand experiences are depicted on canvas.



Painting: Deepika Dhurwey, village - Patangarh, District-Dindori, MP.

Gond paintings and images are combinations of plants, animals, birds, nature and folklore, along with filling motifs of dashes, dots, curves, etc. Colors are used in this art traditionally prepared by are naturally, around their surroundings, black from the soil, yellow from the river banks and white from rock calcium. Charcoal and lime are worked as mediums, especially when the walls of the house are painted. The art begins with the outline being made and black colors filling it up, once dried, patterns are created in the

art. Legendary art themes rotate around the Tree of Life. Many times, themes are showing the connection together between the Tree of Life and animals and other motifs. The themes are more frequently connected with a story, like the famous story of the peacock with ugly feet. “The story tells us about how, though the peacock has beautiful feathers, it is only complete with its small disproportionate feet. By the tradition of the Adivasi community Gond painting is used to decorate the walls of homes. Gondi painting Represents Folk Art, Tradition and Culture: In the Gond Literature illustrates, the art passed from one generation to another. It includes many stories and riddles about tribal saga or mythos. and some myths such as the popular story of tota(Parrot)-maina(birds), folk tales of tribal devi- devta(God- Goddess) such as Bada Dev, Thakur, Dev, Mahrelin Dai etc., folk tales on nature like river, trees and flora and fauna. Folktales of Gondwana (stories of Gond Kings), Pandwani (Pandava Katha) etc. Gond Paintings are painted with freehand. Gondi paintings reflect the observation of the life of Gond and Pardhan tribes, their beliefs and thinking and their way to living. Pardhan artists are very popular in the Gondwana region and now gain name and fame internationally for their artistic articulation. The tribes of village Patangarh Gonds and Pardhans expresses themselves through different forms of song and dance mostly saila and Karma which are performed during festivals.

G. N. Devi opines in his text that “Tribal oral traditions are based on the gift of memory, yet the sheer length of the tribal past makes it impossible to distinguish between the historical past and the mythical past. Moreover, the tribals’ primary occupation – agriculture – makes the interweaving of the natural and the supernatural an inevitable core of their oral tradition. Therefore, myth governs the tribal memory and existence more organically than it does the imagination of caste-bound non-tribal India”. (G.N. Devi’s *Painted Words: An Anthology of Tribal Literature*, p.9). Gondi painting is unique in style. Pardhan and Gond artists depicted tree, river, Madar, Timki, Gudum Baja, Nagada, Jhaduu, Khareta, Tiger, Lion, Beast, Manjira, Men, Women, Home, Dog, Cat, Rat, Snake, Crocodile, and their God and Goddess and so on. And each painting has its own story that is narrated by their ancestors. It means tribal painting does not show urban life but rather it tries to show the everyday routine of a tribal community. “Folk Songs and Dances such as Karma, Dadaria, Saila, Rina, Dadra, Birha, and Karma can be performed any time of

the year. When a guest arrives, the family gathers to do the Karma dance together. Usually, these songs are accompanied by instruments like gudum, timki, nagada. Manjira etc. and these folk songs can also be seen in their paintings.

Tribal festivals are the most important part of the Gondi paintings. Tribal festivals like Hariyali tyoar, Nava khana tyohaar are the most auspicious festivals of Pardhan and Gond tribes. It also includes pottery making, basket making, body tattooing and floor paintings which imitate a culture. Painting Process previously to painting the wall and floor, they are carefully cleaned first after that the wall and floor are ready for the art. Colors used for painting are made from different kinds of soils and other organic things which are available in the village, wood Coal and black soil are used for black color, chui soil is used for white, red color comes from a red colored soil called geru, dark red or maroon color comes from the sap of the plant, yellow is from ramraj soil, dark green is obtained from sem leaves and for light green, Gonds use cow dung. A paste made up of straw, cow dung and soil is used on the walls or floors which are to be painted after that paste dries, a unique type of soil known as pidor and is made wet and applied on the whole painting surface. Pidor soil is white and provides a nice and smooth white colored background for painting. Pidor is naturally and widely available in the Gond regions. The paintings were created on the outer walls of the house. Soul of Indian Heritage: In India, there are many forms of traditional art that helps to enrich our heritage with various art forms. Folk art and tribal art is showing their historical and mythological narratives, and beliefs, with different aspects of art forms. Gond paintings capture the essence of celebrations, rituals and man's relationship with nature. This is very pure and lovely which binds a relationship with culture through art.



Painting: Deepika Dhurwey,
village - Patangarh,
District-Dindori, MP.

Thematic contents of the Gond Painting

Gond and Pardhan community believe that every element of nature viz tree, animal, bird sky, moon, and so on is inhabited by a spirit. The Gond paintings serve as an example of the Gond and Pardhan tribe's close and direct association to the spirit of nature. "Gond Painting takes inspiration from the myths and legends of India. They also depict scenes from the contemporary life of the people. A detailed narrative portrays abstract concepts encompassing emotions, dreams, and imaginative constructs". (<http://www.caleidoscope.in>gond-art-madhya-pradesh>). Pardhan people are accomplished musicians and they can play various musical instruments such as Bana, Maandar, Nagadda, Timki, Dholak, Tabla, Bansuri, etc. so their paintings often reflect the stories of their skill. There are some important themes of the Gond

Painting-

- Gond paintings portray their assimilations with nature.
- Gond artists create a sphere of tribal world in paper and canvas.
- They immensely focus on lively themes with vivid pictures of animals, birds, trees, and drivers.

- Tribal deities like Bada Dev, Thakur Dev, Mahrelin Dai, and tribal myths and legends are the dominant part of the Gondi paintings.
- Tribal festivals depicted in these art works are Hariyali Tyohar, Nava Khana Tyohaar (festival of new seeds), Teej Tyohaar, etc.

The Gondi artwork shows a glimpse of the traditional life of the Pardhan and Gond tribes. Their painting is filled with myths and legends with their emotions for natural elements. Gondi painting is occupied by animals, insects and mythological beasts. The Gondi painting was started by Dhigna and Bhitthichitra (wall painting). To make Dhigna and Bhitthichitra they used cow dung, black, white and red soil. The mythological beasts of tribal tradition and the intricating detailing of flora and fauna are the dominant themes of Gondi Painting.

Signature Style or Pattern of the Gondi Painting

Nevertheless, Gond art has its own striking features. The Gondi Art uses more vibrant and lively colors to give a mesmerizing look to their paintings. Colors like white, orange, yellow, red, and blue give an attractive look to the paintings and are created with articulately drawn lines and dots as the method to bring it to life. They are using natural colors and these natural colors are obtained from various sources like flowers, soil, leaves, cow dung etc. Dots, fine lines, curved lines, dashes, seeds shape, triangle, rectangle shapes and geometrical shapes are the signature pattern or the style of Gondi paintings.

Nowadays, Gond painting is getting worldwide recognition. Gond and Pardhan artists are not painting walls and floors but rather use paper and canvas. Gondi painting is a reflection of a unique life style that is pursued by the tribal community, it is not about the urbanity or modern life of the city rather this painting is the voice of the pastoral life of the countryside. Gondi painting is how it reflects the culture, beliefs, and traditions of the Pardhan and Gond communities. From stories of nature and mythology to depictions of daily life and ritual, every Gond artwork has a unique story to tell.

Gond painting is not merely a visual language rather it is a reflection of the rich cultural existence of tribal life. Previously they have only oral form to narrate their literature, life and culture but the Gond artwork emerged as a milestone for tribal literature and cultural heritage. The literary and cultural significance of the Gond painting extends far beyond the village of Patangarh. Gondi painting is one of

the important and unique tribal art of India, because of its style and beautiful pattern, especially in Madhya Pradesh. Tribal artists use original colors of leaves and soils with modern acrylic colors. Each artist have his style. Some artists use dots, some are using lines and some are using triangles to make their artwork different from others. Gondi painting is generally based on tribal myths, legends, and tribal deities like Bada Dev, Thakur Dev, Mahrelin Dai, etc. Saja tree is one of the important elements of Gondi painting because according to Pardhans the creator and savior of them Bada Dev is residing on Saja Tree.

Now a day's folk art and tribal occupied our fashion world. It is a way to explore heritage art among the people. Now these tribal heritage and artworks are promoted by Many designers in their costumes which reflects the beauty of art and craft as well as it is helpful to enhance the Indian market in the world. Tribal art is emanating the legacy of the nation. It is one of the ancient arts which beautifying the present. To preserve Gond painting, the government of India is making efforts through various schemes under different cultural institutions. The Central Universities and the State Universities organizing various conferences and seminars on tribal literature and culture. At present the Gond painting occupies an important position in the world and recently it got GI Tag (Geographical Indication). The artist like Bhajju Shyam and Durga Bai Vyam got the most prestigious award in India, the Padmashree Award for visual art and this is a great contribution to the nation. Though the Late Mr. Jangarh Singh Shyam is not with us but Gondi painting will always be known by the name of the most prolific tribal artist Jangarh Singh Shyam.

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