

Clan Exogamy and Ritual Dynamics in Gond Marriage System

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Abstract

The Gond Tribe is one of the biggest indigenous tribes in India. These people are mostly found in Central India's forest regions of Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, and Maharashtra. Strong social cohesion and kinship ideals are fostered by the Gonds' highly complex ritualistic and clan-based marriage system. The purpose of this paper is to examine the performative rituals that influence Gond marriages as well as the customs of clan exogamy (Gotra or Sagas).

The Gond culture forbids marriage within the same clan in order to maintain diversity within the tribe and create connections between sagas, which are patrilineal totemic groups that represent ancestor spirits. Marriages between cross-cousins, especially the daughters of the maternal uncles, are favoured in Gond marriages in order to strengthen relationships between the communities and encourage reciprocal exchanges as well as politics. Pre-marriage rituals begin with the exchange of tilak (betrothal mark) and akshat (holy grains), which represent parental acceptance and the beginning of an alliance. The devdevi or pharsagun, which combines the barter practice of bride payment (tili or gonth) and animism via bride capture/negotiated pairing with worship of clan gods, Persa Pen, and Bada Dev, is the most significant ceremony in Gond marriages.

The ritual acts make the gender roles very evident: women sing songs, while males compete in archery competitions and sacrifice animals to demonstrate their masculinity. Despite the modernization trend brought forth by urbanization, education, and regulation, exogamy continues to exist as a kind of cultural resistance.

Keywords: Bada Dev, Bride capture, Clan exogamy, Cross-cousin marriages, Gond tribe, Marriage rituals.

Introduction

Colonial officials, anthropologists, and historians have studied the Gond, who call themselves Koitur, one of India's most populous tribes. Researchers from both the past and the present have examined their religion, kinship, and kingdom structures, especially their worship of clan deities like Persa Pen. The Gonds of Andhra Pradesh: Tradition and Change in an Indian Tribe by Furer-Haimendorf and Elizabeth Šer-Haimendorf and the Gonds of the Central Indian Highlands by Verrier Elwin are two significant ethnographic books on the Gond. According to this academic tradition, marriage is a key institution that the Gond people use to assign ritual obligations, replicate their kinship structure, and manage their relationships with their ancestors and gods.

While some aspects of Gond marriage are similar to those of other tribal communities in central India, such as the bride price, the propensity for cross-cousin marriages in many regions, and the permitting of remarriage, other aspects are distinct, particularly in the way that clan exogamy and rituals are intertwined. Clan exogamy serves as a foundation for identity formation, ceremonial involvement, and enduring affinal ties in addition to being a regulation that forbids marriage within clans. On the other hand, singing, offering, applying turmeric, pouring water, and introducing the bride to her husband's clan deity are all part of the marital ceremonies.

Three related questions are covered in the paper. First, how did clan exogamy become culturally and philosophically acceptable among the Gonds? Second, what social connotations associated with clans, phratries, and affinal relationships are symbolically represented and perpetuated through marriage ceremonies? Third, how are these traditions changing in the face of Hinduization, legislation, education, and economic change? The study examines the body of research on the Gonds in order to address these issues, paying particular attention to studies carried out in Andhra Pradesh, Odisha, Maharashtra, Chhattisgarh, and Telangana.

Gond Social Structure and Clan Organization: Phratries, Clans, and Lineages

Corporate kin groups, which establish social identity and religious ritual involvement, define kinship among Gonds. In general, Gond groups, which include a number of exogamous clans known as pari, are categorized into phratries known as saga among the Gonds. Furer-Haimendorf asserts that phratries, with a focus on their significance as regulating institutions for marriage and ritual collaboration, were the primary pillars of social organization among the Gonds of Andhra Pradesh (Furer-Haimendorf & Furer-Haimendorf, 1979, pp. 135–160). He then subdivided each clan into agnatic lineages, or kita.

Clan names, such as Tekam, Uikey, Markam, Dhurwe, and Atram, typically have a totemic meaning based on plants, animals, or other natural objects. Elwin illustrates the totemic significance of the clan names in his book *The Gonds of the Central Indian Highlands*, explaining that the names suggest a bond between the clan members due to their shared origins, shared substance, and shared responsibilities to one another (Elwin, 1984, pp. 395-410).

The saga or phratry represents an additional degree of kinship. People who share the same phratry but are from different clans see one another as elder and younger brothers (dadal and tamur). This idea coordinates people's ritualistic behavior and interactions. In most places, the exogamy principle also applies to phratry, which means that if a woman marries outside of her phratry, she cannot marry her brother again. Yorke characterizes the Raj Gonds' "descent group system" as a pattern of marriageable vs non-marriageable groups (York, 1979, pp. 85–90).

Clan Deities and Ritual Offices

The worship of Persa Pen, who is regarded as the clan god and whose shrines are essential to the ritual and moral conduct of the clans, is the ideology that underpins the Gond community's organizational structure. In his discussion of the Raj Gonds of Adilabad, Furer-Haimendorf claims that because these shrines hold stones and other artifacts associated with different clan divisions and their ancestors, they are essential to preserving the identity of the kinship groups (Furer-Haimendorf, *The Raj Gonds of Adilabad*).

Since clan membership is ceremonial in the Persa Pen religion, it is neither primarily nor completely based on kinship. Shortly after the wedding, the bride is ceremoniously introduced (be:ti) into the worship of the clan god, at which point the bride's spirit (sanal) becomes eligible for incorporation into the group of clan spirits. According to Furer-Haimendorf, this process is crucial for understanding the concept of personhood and lineage within Raj Gond beliefs. The girl's relationship with the god up to this moment is that of a

daughter, and her parents worry that if she passes away unmarried, her spirit would be troubled (Yorke, 1979, pp. 88–90).

Additionally, each clan and lineage has offices and ritual specialists who supervise group rituals and serve as a bridge between humans and the gods. If the customs are violated, some members of a particular kita may be accused of performing marriages, negotiating the bride price, and performing cleansing rites. In some specific lineages, offices of this type are typically passed down from generation to generation, according to Furer-Haimendorf (Furer-Haimendorf & Furer-Haimendorf, 1979, pp. 320-340). To put it another way, ritual offices are associated with clan and lineage organization.

Principles of Clan Exogamy: Exogamous Rules and Marriageable Categories

Marriage between members of the same clan, who are thought to have shared a same ancestor and hence belong to the same family, is severely prohibited in all Gond villages. The Gond in Odisha had an exogamous system of totemic clans, according to ethnographic records, and brother clans were not permitted to marry. Haimendorf's findings on the Gond of Andhra Pradesh, where social taboos and rites are followed and marriage within the clan is viewed as incest, further support this (Furer-Haimendorf & Furer-Haimendorf, 1979, pp. 211-225).

Gonds distinguishes between groups that are eligible for marriage and those that are not. While everyone from one's own saga or clans who share the Persa Pen is prohibited from entering into a relationship and is referred to as rotalir, groups of sagas among which the individuals are to get married are known as soira. The existence of an exogamous system emerges as a result of the distinction between rotalir and soir alir (groups permitted for marriage), which dictates both terminology and negotiations regarding marriage (Yorke, 1979, pp. 85–90).

Additionally, exogamy is not limited to the first marriage. According to Haimendorf (1948, pp. 245–280), a woman who marries someone from a different clan maintains some ties to her family and is not permitted to remarry from the same family after becoming a widow or divorced. Regardless of the distance between relatives, it is forbidden for men to marry women from clans that are considered rotalir.

While exogamy within clans and even phratries characterizes Gond marriage, several Gond tribes have a clear tendency to favour cross-cousin marriage, which is a common kinship characteristic among the Dravidians of central India. According to research on western Odisha, several Gond groups frequently get married to their mother's brother's daughter or father's sister's daughter. Elwin documents cross-cousin marriages among the Gonds of the Central Indian Highlands, which also serve to fortify preexisting clan relationships (Elwin, 1984, pp. 307–314).

Cross-cousin marriage takes into consideration the limitations given by clan exogamy by ensuring that, despite their genetic proximity, the eligible cousins do not belong to the same clan. Cross-cousin marriages among Andhra Gonds help preserve the ties between specific saga and pari, creating opportunities for bride exchange over multiple generations, as noted by Haimendorf (Furer-Haimendorf and Furer-Haimendorf, 1979, pp. 260–275).

Cross-Cousin Marriage and Preferred Alliances

The practice of marrying a certain type of cross-cousin appears to be widespread among the Gonds, similar to other Dravidians in central India, despite the fact that marriages within the Gond tribe follow an exogamous pattern with regard to the clans and phratries. According to research done by academics in western Orissa, cross-cousin marriages such as those between a person's maternal uncle's daughter or paternal aunt's daughter were popular among a number of Gond tribes.

By ensuring that the prospective spouses are from different clans, even if they are near related by blood, cross-cousin marriage operates within the constraints of clan exogamy. The Andhra Gonds' alliance of cross-cousins fortifies the bonds between certain saga and pari groups, creating reliable channels for the interchange of brides (Fürer-Haimendorf and Fürer-Haimendorf, 1979, pp. 260–275). As a result, a long-term bond is formed and ritual duties are distributed widely.

Although not all Gond clans value cross-cousin marriage as much, there appears to be evidence that these preferences are waning for a variety of reasons, including personal preference, education, and labor migration to cities. Nonetheless, it is undeniable that the Gonds' definition of marriageability heavily relies on the notion of being married outside of one's clan and kindred through affinity.

Ritual Dynamics of Gond Marriage: Pre-Marriage Rituals and Betrothal

Gonds typically begin their premarital customs well in advance of the wedding ceremony and involve a wide range of family members and friends. Following the decision to form an alliance, the couple participates in a lavish ceremonial betrothal during which they exchange presents and beverages and receive blessings from prominent members of the community. In addition to concluding the alliance, this ritual sets the stage for the wedding.

The haldi (turmeric) ceremony, which usually occurs on the day before or the morning of the marriage, is one of the most important premarital rites. In Gondi, wedding songs are sung while the bride is covered in turmeric paste. Both the bride and the groom wear white clothing to symbolize purity, and the groom is frequently also anointed with turmeric paste at his home. Despite the others becoming "more Hinduized," recent reports of weddings among Gonds in Odisha and Chhattisgarh demonstrate the persistence of these customs.

The construction of the mandap, which is constructed from forest materials like bamboo, wood, and flowers from the palash tree, is another aspect of getting ready for marriage. Because they think it's crucial to preserve the forest's sacredness, the elders teach the younger members how to collect fallen wood from the ground without damaging the tree. Gond marriages are closely associated with nature, as evidenced by the salai tree, which is sometimes revered and decorated inside the setup.

Core Wedding Ceremonies

The primary marriage ceremonies transform the couple from single people into married people with ritual roles and social acceptance. In addition to highlighting their transitional state, the pair among Raj Gonds is seen to symbolize supernatural entities such as

Mahadeo and Girja Parbati, suggesting that marriage itself is a holy institution (Furer-Haimendorf, 1948; Yorke, 1979, pp. 88–90).

Pouring water over the bride or groom while they are seated on a bamboo mat is one of the most popular customs. According to local customs, each member of the bride's or groom's family pours water in turn, beginning with the bride's or groom's parents. The ceremony is accompanied by the singing of Gondi wedding songs.

Other significant rites in this context include circling a fire or a sacred object, applying vermilion to the bride's forehead, and tying the marital thread or necklace. Although these rites are performed within the framework of distinctively Gond songs, dances, and incantations, they are also associated with universal Hindu symbolism of marriage. While the Hinduized Gonds request Brahmans to participate in Sanskritized rites alongside their native ones, the common Gonds perform their rituals with the assistance of a Doshi or Baiga.

Introduction to the Clan Deity and Post-Marriage Rites

Presenting the bride to Persa Pen, the clan deity, is one of the rituals that take place just after the main wedding. Both visit the clan's shrine, where the bride is offered offerings for the health and fertility of the ancestors and the deity. According to Furer-Haimendorf, the bride joins her husband's clan during this rite, both socially and spiritually, as she will subsequently join the corporate souls of her clan members in death.

Following the marriage, the bride is introduced to the husband's home and various household tasks including cooking and grinding grain are carried out. Her transformation from a single girl to someone else's wife is demonstrated by these actions. In addition to serving as a reminder that this ritual is a social occurrence; villagers typically plan a communal feast and offer their presents and well wishes. In order to return to earth as a pair, couples are sometimes said to go to a dung heap or another liminal location (Furer-Haimendorf, 1948; Yorke, 1979, pp. 88–90).

When taken as a whole, these rituals alter the kinship bond: While the kinship of the groom's clan becomes responsible for protecting the bride and carrying out rituals for her sake, the kinship of the bride's family becomes that of affines (givers of bride), and in turn, the family is obligated to support the other and take part in the ceremonies.

Clan Exogamy as Ritual Ideology: Marriage, Personhood, and Descent

According to anthropological research on the Raj Gonds, primary marriage seems to be more about a girl's placement within a certain clan and descent group than it is about choosing a partner on a personal level. According to Yorke's theory, which is based on Haimendorf's research, main marriage establishes a woman's soul's final destination in the descending group and clan cult (Yorke, 1948, pp. 88–90). A woman who has only one primary marriage becomes a member of a particular clan, in contrast to men who may have multiple marriages, each of which is regarded as primary. After that, her soul is included into the specific descending group.

According to the aforementioned, exogamy helps clans maintain their continuity by incorporating women from various descent groups, in addition to limiting inbreeding within descent groups and clans. The integration of the bride from another clan into the groom's clan is always emphasized in rituals and marriage songs; as she transforms from a daughter of

others into a wife, her soul becomes fully integrated into the descent group (Fürer-Haimendorf & Fürer-Haimendorf, 1979, pp. 320-340; Yorke, 1979, pp. 88-90).

One key idea underlying the particular gendered understanding of personhood in the clan is exogamy. This idea describes women as those who migrate from their own clan to another, albeit retaining some ties to the former, whereas men are considered as the eternal tentacles of the clan plant, which link generations of women to the clan deity.

Ritualizing Difference and Alliance

Exogamy ideology is perpetuated through affinal exchanges and weddings. For instance, clan support is used in bride-price negotiations between individuals from various sagas who regard one another as *soir alir* rather than brothers (Fürer-Haimendorf & Fürer-Haimendorf, 1979, pp. 245–275). Village councils may impose fines or perform ceremonial acts as a form of punishment if the protocols are not followed.

The links of exogamous groups are highlighted in wedding performances through seating arrangements where different people are present based on whether they are relatives of the brides or grooms, roles assigned to specific clans for singing and blessings, and particular gift-giving customs. The transformation from outsider to insider among clans is symbolically marked by actions such as the bride's departure from her paternal household, her passage through thresholds, and her reception into the groom's compound. In a same vein, lavish gifts and performances also develop to highlight new partnerships when Elwin recounts Muria marriage based on Ghotul institution (Elwin, 1947, pp. 233–270).

Long-term ritual cooperation is also facilitated by clan exogamy. Affines ask members of their extended families to take part in rituals related to life cycle events or clan rites; their attendance shows how strong the relationship is still; their absence could be interpreted as a sign that it is failing. Because of their moral standing as outsiders to the clan through marriage, the affines may intervene as mediators in disputes at the communal level.

Data from field survey in the Balaghat District of Madhya Pradesh

Marriage Rituals

Proposals among the Gonds are initiated by the boy's father. Sometimes one or two visits are arranged before everything is finalized. The second visit is concerned with the difficulties associated with marital life, feasts, and so forth.

The Engagement

If both parties believe that their children should get married because it is wise or possible, then a formal engagement date is set. This type of event is called *Sagai*. Although it can happen at any time of the week, this event is typically held in February (*Magh*). The boy's father sends a few villagers to see his daughter-in-law's parents on the day of the ceremony. They attach five *suparis* (areca nuts), pan leaves, and *laungs* (cloves) to a corner of their *dhotis*.

Once there, they remove the nuts from the *dhoti* and use a *saruta* (nut cutter) to shatter one nut. Along with some cloves and lime, they wrap this chopped nut in a pan leaves. Once it is ready, they push it into the girl's father's mouth. They then give her father a brass plate with the remaining *suparis*. After receiving the *suparis*, he chops one and gets a pan ready with cloves to shove into the boy's father's mouth.

The Lagun

The lagun is the next divination technique. The dosi, who serves as the wedding's master of ceremonies, is responsible for carrying out this procedure. If it is feasible, this individual should ideally be the village priest (dewar) who is a member of the Bhumia tribe. If not, the master of ceremonies is a member of the bridegroom's or bride's family.

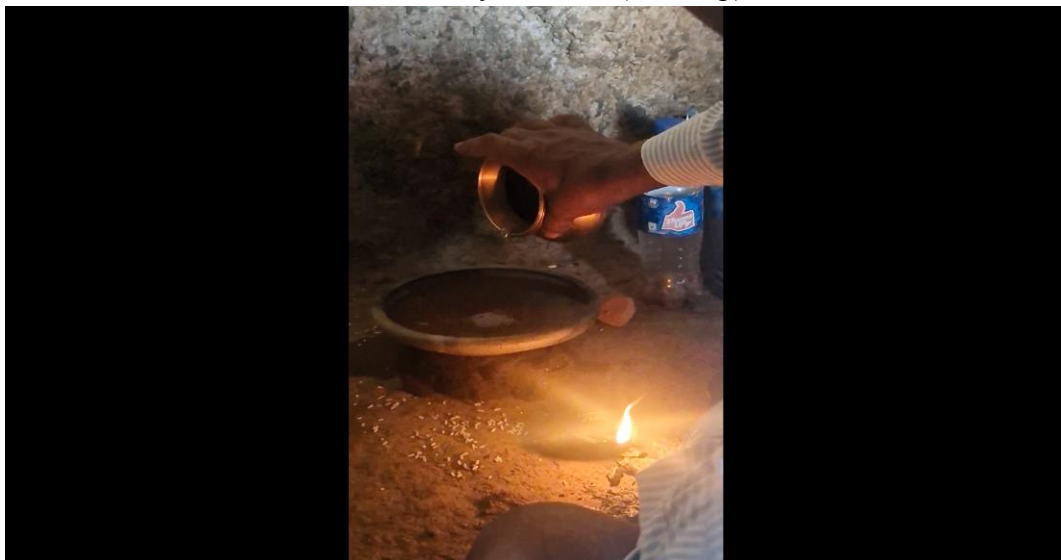
The lagun ceremony is performed in Sar, the cow shed. A long wooden bench known as a pirha, which typically consists of a square-shaped piece of wood, is located on the ground. On the seat's surface, a swastika, a cross encircled by a circle, or chauk is drawn using ochre (geru matti). Dosi places a betel nut and a turmeric stick where the circle and cross lines meet. Next, he positions a paisa at the midway spot where the cross lines intersect.

The dosi now holds a grain of rice between his thumb and middle finger in both palms. He places his palms at the top rim of the metal pot (lota) and tosses the grains into the water from opposing positions. Everyone is watching intently to see if the two grains in the water come into contact. If they do, the gods have approved of the union. If the grains don't get along, this indicates that the marriage won't last. In such a situation, the marriage should most definitely not occur.

However, the dosi attempts to lessen the humiliation by performing numerous divinations until the two grains finally come together in the water. When the two grains touch, the dosi puts them against the lota's bottom to see if they will be content with two more grains. If this occurs on the first try, they are all thrilled. If they are not successful in this divination, they appear unconcerned and proceed with their marital preparations without hesitation.

Figure 1

Choose Suasa and Suassain and tree for Manda(Mandap)



Photograph taken by author

The Magar Matti Ceremony

The village priest, known as dosi, will lead the husband outside right after the lagun oracle to a pit close to the house where the women typically gather the clay that they use to

plaster the floor and food containers. The bride and groom will be accompanied by four women. The musar, a pestle used to pound corn, must always be carried by the dosi. If the dosi has not brought the pestle or cannot find it because they have concealed it from him, he must bribe each lady with a paisa.

The dosi on the ground close to the pit's edge draws a chauk (swastika). The chauk is drawn using the standard kind of kodai powder. The dosi places paisa within the chauk and then offers two godala kodai offerings. If he is a Bhumia, he burns hom to honor Bara deo; if he is a Gond, he burns hom to honor Thakur deo and says, "Thakur den (O Thakur deo, accept this)."

Figure 2

Take soil from near village area for making Manda(Mandap)



Photograph taken by author

Figure 3

Going to Magar Mati Ceremony



Photograph taken by author

The Erection of the Wedding Booth

All of the hamlet's caste members accompany the dosi as they venture into the forest to gather poles for the Marwa wedding booth. The dosi has two oil-baked godala kodai cakes, cotton threads that have never been used before (kori sut), and everything needed to produce a homemade offering. They pause beneath a tree known as a Salhen (also known as Salai and

Boswellia serrata Roxb.). In the customary manner, the conductor uses kodai flour to build a chauk, which he places two paisa on at the foot of the tree.

After applying a few drops of gum resin and clarified butter (ghee) to a shiny dung cake, the conductor makes an offering. After that, the conductor tosses the white cotton strands around the tree after dipping them in turmeric water. He scatters the two kodai cakes on the ground next to the tree after breaking them into crumbs. He also douses the tree with rice flour and spirits. He shares the remainder of the alcohol with his friends.

Following the sacrifice, the dosi or another individual ascends the tree and chops off a branch that is as big as a person's leg. He then cuts a piece that, when placed on the ground, is roughly three cubits long. After that, it is formed into a square post with a rounded and pointed top. All four of the post's surfaces have crisscrossed markings. Some people believe that the post needs to look like a man with his eyes, nose, ears, mouth, hands, and legs. However, most of the time a man's figure cannot be clearly identified.

Figure 4

Erection of Manda(Mandap)



Photograph taken by author

Figure 5

Deities Rituals before erection of Manda(Mandap)



Photograph taken by author

The Anointing with Turmeric

That same day, in the evening, the bridegroom has dinner. Since he might not be able to use his hands, some of the residents of the residence should feed him. In his wife's home, some women feed her in a similar manner. Soharis (wheat cakes) or oil-fried kodai godalas are among the foods brought to the groom; the final cake is given by Suasa. The bridegroom gives one paisa to each of his entourage.

After this lunch, the bridegroom is given haldi, or turmeric paste. Chiksa (anointing) is the name of this ritual. Initially, the boy is made to sit on his mother's or another close relative's lap. Two mango leaves soaked in sesame oil (til) are placed within a brass container (lota) by the suasa and suasin, two personal attendants. They then use their cross hands to apply the leaves to the bridegroom's head, feet, and leg joints. The bride's home is also the site of this ceremony. Another name for it is tel charauat, or offering of oil.

Figure 6

Haldi Ceremony



Photograph taken by author

Figure 7

Prayer of Deities



Photograph taken by author

The Wedding Day Ceremony

The wedding occurs the day after the first anointment. The bride's hometown is where the wedding is held. However, as he pays for the entire wedding, the father of the bridegroom may perform all the ceremonies in his home if the bride's father is too impoverished. On the day of the wedding, the guests from the neighbouring villages arrive either the day before or as early as possible in the morning. They spent the entire evening eating and drinking at the bridegroom's father's expense while dancing and singing.

Figure 8

Meeting of Panda(Pujari) enter in Bride Village



Photograph taken by author

Figure 9

Bhanwar(Phera) Ceremony



Photograph taken by author

Conclusion

Gond marriage is a complex custom in which ritual performance is closely linked to the practice of exogamy within clans. Exogamy serves as a constructive force for establishing social networks, upholding ancestry, and integrating people into the greater moral and spiritual body of the clan community. It is not just about avoiding endogamy. Gond people are created as gendered creatures that belong to a descending lineage and are tied to ancestor spirits, heavenly figures, and forests through the conduct of marriage ceremonies, which include bathing, pouring water, and introducing the bride to Persa Pen. Through ideas of personhood, descent, and landscapes, works by Furer-Haimendorf and Elwin provide important insights on how such rituals identify Gond persons.

Although there is a continuing process of Hinduisation, legal interference, and socio-economic developments, exogamous organisation based on Gond clans proves to be enduring, while the rituals of marriage continue to act as an intermediary between tradition and innovation. Although the ratio between bride-price and dowry, the involvement of Brahmanical priests, and the frequency of various marriages can vary, the ideological importance of marrying out of the clan and adopting new individuals via rituals retains its significance. Future studies might focus on the practices of younger generations of Gonds in cities, overseas, and online spaces, as well as on the role of political activism related to indigenous rights and religion in the portrayal of Gond rituals of marriage, following in the footsteps of Elwin, Furer-Haimendorf, Yorke, and others.

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