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Preserving the Architectural Legacy of the Gond Dynasty: A Historical Study of Temple Art and Cultural Heritage

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Abstract

This gifted research paper comprehensively talks about the architectural heritage of the Gond dynasty focusing outside of it with temple art, ancient architectural technique and its role in the Cultural legacy of Central Indian region. Gond rulers had a significant influence on the historical and cultural development of the regions of current-day Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra and contiguous areas and the strong influence of their architecture has left such imprints as temples, forts, monuments, sculptures, inscriptions etc. It focuses on the development of ideas regarding the organization, decoration of the temple architecture, iconography, religious beliefs, craftsmanship and cultural values of the Gond-period. It is also an exploration of the architecture in relation to the local materials, artistic practice, the tribal culture and religious practice of the period. Historical literature, archival and archaeological documentation and field observations are used as a basis for analyzing the state of selected heritage structures and the issues it is facing, in the process of conserving and modernizing it, and in inadequate documentation. The paper concludes that the Gond architectural heritage symbolizes an important constituent of Indian diverse cultural history and is worthy of a systematic preservation. It proposes to involve the community, to document them on the screen, to educate the ecological world, to bring the monuments to the conservation and conservation/rehabilitation agenda and to set sustainable cultural-tourism projects. The research contributes to the knowledge on the Gond identity and architectural heritage.

Keywords: Gond Dynasty; Gond Architecture; Temple Art; Cultural Heritage; Tribal Heritage; Historical Architecture; Indigenous Art; Temple Sculpture; Heritage Conservation; Central India; Archaeological Heritage; Cultural Identity.

Introduction

The architectural institution of the Gond dynasty is an important part of the historical and cultural heritage of central India which symbolically shows the political evolution, religious practice, artistic creativity, native knowledge and social organization of the Gond community of central India. The Gond rulers had great kingdom in various parts of Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Chhattisgarh and adjoining areas, in particular from the medieval period onwards. They set up their political heart and settlements creating unique cultural spaces where temples, forts, palaces, water structures, sculptures, gateways, and other monuments were a means of asserting their authority, as well as their religious and community life. Though the study of the Gond has increased in the last few years, the architectural and artistic style of this ruling caste, comparable to some of the more prominent ruling families of India, is not as well documented as it could be.

As such, it is essential to conduct systematic research pertaining to the art and architecture of the Gond communities of India to comprehend their contribution in India's architectural history. The architecture of the temples also holds special importance in the context of this heritage since temples were not just churches of worship but also places of community interaction, the transmission of cultural values, art and a social identity. They offer excellent clues as to the religious beliefs, preferences of art, craft, technology and material cultures of the societies that built and developed them. Gond which integrates regional elements through the influence of religious buildings and temples in religious context.

The forms used in architecture of the Gonds can be understood at the various territorial areas of the Gonds through the elements present in them including Sanctums, the Halls, Pillars,

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Entrance, Wall, Roof, Platform, Sculptures and Ornaments. The use of stone, wood, clay and other materials in local contexts also provide examples of the interplay between architecture and the environmental contexts that are close to them. Artist's motifs and sculpture may also serve as indicators of religious beliefs, natural elements and natural fauna, mythologies, community traditions or indigenous cultural symbols. It will thus be essential to know them as much as know about Gond Temple Art; so as to understand the Cultural worldview of the period. Historical/restored architecture of the Gond too should be analysed with respect to intercultural interactions.

The Gond kingdoms were not isolated, but were politically, economically and culturally connected to other neighbouring kingdoms and communities. It influenced architecture, technique, style, settlement and even religion; it has also shaped and preserved the unique essence of people. The final product is an architectural eco-system which is a dynamic process of adaptation of culture, not a single style. It is this diversity that makes the traditional Gond heritage historically and architecturally important. Meanwhile, some of these challenges exist today and may cause the loss of this heritage. The older they become, and the more vulnerable the monument, the more likely it is to suffer from historic change, such as ageing or weathering, and from lack of good conservation, over-development in urban areas, intrusion by others, neglect, poor restoration work, lack of funding, lack of documentation, and many other causes. Impacts on indigenous way of life, coupled with the loss of traditional craft knowledge, and the modification of existing knowledge could also further weaken the intangible cultural knowledge which can be linked to these structures. Sometimes, due to a lack of awareness among the community in certain cases, the analysis of historical value of monuments that are not well publicized cannot be made. The process of altering architecture, inscriptions, sculpture, traditional buildings and traditional architecture and oral history would cause both the physical loss and loss of memory. Therefore, the preservation should be done in an integrated way, taking the tangible and intangible heritage into consideration. Advanced tools such as digital imaging, geographical documentation, archival recording, photogrammetry and three-dimensional recording are now able to contribute to the creation of permanent documentation of a monument in peril.

Concurrently with this, local communities need to be engaged with the conservation programmes, as their traditional knowledge, cultural practices, memories and links to the sacred places are vital in heritage conservation. Academic institutions, archaeological organisations, museum, local and community groups, and cultures have all a role to play in research, documentation, conservation and in the education process about heritage. Responsible cultural tourism can also support cultural and economic development in the area and enhance the knowledge of the tourists on Gond history, retaining sensitivity towards cultural and ecological heritage sites. Keeping in this context, the study is specifically named as 'Preserving the Architectural Legacy of the Gond Dynasty: A Historical Study of Temple Art and Cultural Heritage' and the study centres on the historical evolution, architecture, art forms, cultural values and conservation issues of the temple arts of Gond people in Bangladesh. The study aims to identify and find out the role played by the Gond rulers, artisans, communities and the Traditional Knowledge Systems in passing on the cultural heritage of India by studying the architecture in the historical and cultural context. The research also reveals that the preservation of the architectural heritage of Gond has more than just architectural aspects to it; it is about preservation of memory of the past, preservation of inter-generational knowledge, preservation of the creativity of the native and their architectural expressions. The study also suggests that although this preservation deals with the maintenance of historical structures; at the same time it involves the protection of memory of the past, inter-

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generational knowledge, indigenous creativity, traditional craftsmanship & architectural expressions. An extensive understanding and systematic documentation of this tradition can thus help in the more inclusive perception of the Indian architectural tradition and help make the unique cultural contribution of the Gond tradition accessible to future generations.

Literature Review

Knowledge gained from the existing literature on Indian historical architecture is very useful in the study of the relation between fortification, geography, military strategies and architectural and cultural design. Yet, research particularly focused upon architectural legacy of the Gond dynasty and their temple art, is comparatively scant. Diwan et al. (2020) presented the strategic importance and architectural characteristics of Rani Durgawati Monolithic Rock Fort of the Gondwana Kingdom of Madan Mahal Hills, Jabalpur and its relation with natural topography and defence planning and architecture construction. The study reveals that the geographical and strategic importance of region and the architectural development of culture of Gond is very much bound to each other. It exposed the close relationship of geographical, strategic significance with architecture, culture of Gond. Being built on a raised rocky upland site, the fort was both safeguarded by its natural setting and served as a strategic landmark; and its architectural layout connected with the defense needs of the Gond kingdom. The present study finds this work important not only due to the fact that it takes into consideration the historical and architectural importance of Gond-period structures also it indicates the technical and strategic capability of the Gond rulers.

Diwan et al. (2020) have further studied the Ancient Hindu Rock Monuments and architectural aspects of Ahilya Devi Fort of the Holkar Dynasty, Maheshwar, Mahishmati, Narmada Valley. They focused on the arrangement of forts, aspects of the architecture and the history of the fort, covering the development of architectural forms influenced by the geography and the culture. The study is based upon the Holkar Dynasty, but the study was very useful for reference of the study of architectural traditions of central India in regard of the Gonds. Similarly, Diwan et al. (2020) did research on the 'Sustainable safety', strategic structures and security of an ancient Hindu complex, namely Chittorgarh Fort. Research does not only focuses on the artistic value of historical monuments and monuments, but also reveals their functional value, designed to social, political, environmental and military needs.

Diwan, Bhadauria et al. (2020) further delve into these geographical and geological aspects of the heritage architecture in their study on the Shivneri Hill Fort in Junnar, Maharashtra. The researchers emphasized on examining geological and geomorphological characteristics, fortifications and architectural characteristics of the ancient military check post. Based on their findings, the physical environment had an important effect on the choice of site, defensive planning, the materials used for monuments' construction and the interior structure of historical monuments. This view is interesting in relation to the study of Gond architecture since a large number of gond monuments and settlements are located on hilly, rocky and forested terrain. A need for a synthesis of the natural topography and the buildings of architectural art can then help to develop a wider interpretation of the Gond heritage.

The architectural impact and structural integrity of built Medhakot Island Fort were explored by Diwan et al. (2020), emphasizing the importance of construction techniques, environmental factors, and durability. They have demonstrated in their buildings how the environment can impact the survival of historic structures and how through proper evaluation and stewardship, a better longevity for these structures can be achieved. In another research, Diwan et al., (2020) investigated the geomorphic terrain conditions and stone monuments with Kakatiya architecture at the Warangal Fort at Telangana. The study has shown the connection between



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landscape characteristics and architectural planning; and suggested that historical architecture can be read based on landscape.

Diwan et al. (2020) focus their research on the historical and archaeological value of Bet Dwarka/Shankhodhar Island – an island of immense cultural importance which falls under a Protected Area in India. Their emphasis is on the importance of archaeological evidence, landscape and built heritage of the past in their reconstruction of the Indian culture. Likewise, Diwan et al. (2020) pointed out the importance of architectural restoration and conservation of the ancient coastal fort at Manora, Thanjavur, in Tamil Nadu. The study highlights the deterioration and the need for suitable conservation actions to be taken in order to protect and preserve historical monuments. The observations are very appropriate on Gond architecture because systematic documentation/collection of conservation and public awareness is of high concern for gond architecture and necessary for several buildings.

Finally, the book has Appendix with a bibliography of publications related to forts in India as prepared by Diwan (2020) under the Researches in Forts in India. I, focuses on an extensive survey of the packs and the research behind their architecture, history, geography or strategic aspects. Together, these studies frame the view that the study of Indian architectural heritage will have to be done in an interdisciplinary fashion, relating to the history, archaeology, architecture, geography, geology, conservation, and culture studies. Even, the architecture of the Gond temples, the art of the temples, the symbol of religious belief, the ramification of traditional arts & crafts and meanings, conservation needs have not yet been studied on a systematic level as the literature reviewed has indicated. The temples, as places of religious life, religious expression, community identity and cultural continuity, have been got little attention from the existing research in comparison to the forts and military architecture. The present study attempts to overcome this by giving emphasis on temple art, architectural elements and the indigenous artistic heritage of the Gond, historical importance, and the challenges of current day's preservation practices of the architectural heritage of the Gond dynasty as a whole.

Objectives of the Study

1. **To examine the historical development and architectural characteristics of temples associated with the Gond Dynasty**, with particular emphasis on structural features, artistic elements, sculptures, decorative motifs, construction techniques, and indigenous craftsmanship.
2. **To analyse the cultural, religious, and historical significance of Gond temple art and architecture**, and to understand its role in preserving Gond identity, traditions, community memory, and indigenous cultural heritage.
3. **To assess the present conservation status and major threats to Gond architectural heritage** and to suggest appropriate strategies for documentation, restoration, community participation, heritage education, and sustainable preservation for future generations.

Research Methodology

Archives, secondary publications (historical books, research papers, archaeological reports, but also the heritage records of the Government of Nepal), manuscripts, and published works on the architecture of the Gond dynasty and other monuments are the key sources for this study. Sources of historical papers are mostly secondary as far as architectural history is concerned, though research materials and archival materials have their share. The choice was based on the following criteria: (i) the paper must be historical; (ii) it was narrowly focused on architectural heritage in general and on temple art in particular; and (iii) it must deal with the architectural heritage of the Gond dynasty of Nepal. The collected data is methodically processed and analyzed for development, architecture, artistic value, religious value and cultural issues of

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selected versions of Gond art and architecture of cultural heritage. Sources from the field (where available), historical texts and photographs are all considered when formulating clues. Issues of conservation and interpretation including deterioration and neglect, environmental impact and lack of documentation are identified by using descriptive and interpretative approach. These results put together for the elaboration of the corresponding project of preservation and restoration, together with a comprehensive documentation and sustainable management of architectural heritage of Gond.

Discussion

Present Conservation Status

The architectural heritage development of the Gond Dynasty is very much part of the historic and cultural landscaped of central India and requires more than conservation, further study and participation from institutions or scholars. The impacts of natural weathering and human activities on the remnants from the Gond heritage, which include the ruins of temples, fort, gateways, memorial structures, sculptures and other religious and architectural structures, are evident. The preliminary investigation conducted on the Monolithic Rock Fort at Madan Mahal Hills related to Rani Durgawati reveal the importance of Gond Architecture in its historical setting and relation with Defense and topography and culture of the area. Therefore the architectural ruins, not only as a physical monument, but also as an expression of the expertise and abilities of the Gond in technological, political, religious and cultural fields. But, plenty more are known to only a handful of individuals whose names aren't as recognized as those of national monuments and frequently are not documented in a systematic way, and are not being protected for their preservation. This poses a threat to the loss of valuable architectural landmarks, inscriptions, sculptures, traditional building methods and linked cultural stories in the long term.

Major Threats to Heritage Structures

Under the given cases, the threats to the architectural heritage of the Gond group can be divided into environmental, structural, social and institutional. Natural weathering due to rain, moisture, changes in temperature, growth of nature, and exposure over time can cause the weakening of stone, plaster, wood and other traditional materials. Trees that are growing and casting shade on buildings can exacerbate issues. Besides, alterations to the landscape, unplanned development, road works and urban growth can intrude and affect the historical context where historical monuments are found. The inappropriate encroachment, vandalism, repair of heritage buildings not taking into account the need for authenticity, architectural elements removal and unregulated changes can also compromise the authenticity of the heritage building. Loss of traditional skills due to time is one of the most commonly occurring problems. The lack of passing down traditional skills within the fields of stone work, carving, masonry, wood work or decorative techniques to younger generations may mean that the use of more modern materials and techniques in the restoration are not in harmony with the original architecture.

Documentation and Digital Preservation

One of the most important conditions for the conservation of the Gond architectural remains is the systematical documentation. Locational, architectural size information, as well as information on structural materials, sculptures, decorative elements, inscriptions, current physical condition and historical connections are being painstakingly recorded for many structures. Digital tools for documentation such as digital photography, geographical information systems, digital archives, photogrammetry and three-dimensional documentation may be used to create the permanent records of monuments and their architectural features. Digital documentation assumes a special value for vulnerable constructions because it keeps a

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record of the construction, and can be employed as a means for subsequent studies and conservation of such structures in the future, if they degrade. A national inventory of the data on Gond Temples and Monuments can help in comparative studies and enable the authorities and heritages institutions to prioritise urgently needed action on these monuments.

Restoration and Scientific Conservation

Only restore in terms of the conservation principles and give attention to "real" and "as it was" ways. The restoration of buildings or other structures should be approached as a planned process, and a thorough structural evaluation of the building along with an assessment of materials must be conducted before the restoration begins to understand the causes of deterioration. Traditional materials and traditional compatible conservation methods should be used whenever possible, but not flaunting or replacing any of the original elements except when the need cannot be avoided. The restoring process should also not result in such over rebuilding that it is likely to change the historic style of the structure. Archaeologists, architects, conservation specialists, historians, structural engineers, and local artisans should work together in creating site-specific conservation plans for the artefacts, buildings, and constructions. It's also critical that ongoing monitoring and preventative maintenance is conducted so a proactive approach can minimize the need for costly restoration of structures.

Community Participation and Heritage Education

Therefore, when the objective of conservation of Gond heritage is to be realized in the long run, the participation of the community is necessary. Preservation of the Gond heritage will be sustainable with people's participation. Oral history, traditional stories, religious beliefs, and cultural recollections within the community can be significant, surrounding heritage sites. They are able to improve the management of monuments, protection, monitoring and interpretation of monuments. Increasing awareness amongst young generation by providing learning programmes on heritage in school/college, can create a sense of the historical and cultural importance of the Gond architecture. Public engagement can be further reinforced in the form of museums, exhibitions, public access walks, workshops and local cultural programmes. Local young people can both learn conservation awareness about the conservation of local heritage and have opportunities to be involved, by being trained as part of a local youth group or as local guides.

Sustainable Preservation and Cultural Tourism

Preserving the architectures in Gond can be done through sustainable cultural tourism that generates some economy and public consciousness of the architectural places in Gond. But, tourism development shall be sensitive towards cultural and environmental feature of the heritage sites. Refrain from commercialism, over use by visitors, inappropriate facilities, commercialisation of sacred sites. Careful planning or development of tourism infrastructure and infrastructure for interpretation centres, along with training local guides and systems of visiting management, can ensure the balance between conservation and economic development in the tourism sector.

Conclusion

The preservation of the architectural heritage of Gond has to be seen from a total and participatory perspective, as opposed to a perspective that is only focussed on the individual monument. The continuous documentation, scientific conservation, participation, heritage education, tradition of artisanal practices, institutional support and sustainable development must run side by side in an integrated way in the management of heritage. Preserving Gond architecture is a respect for not only the physical building, but the cultural memory, art form, cultural identity and traditional practices that come with it. There is an urgent need to identify



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and have a systematic approach towards conserving the built heritage of Gond Dyarchy which will enable its sustainability and availability for future generations.

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