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Unique Paintings related to the folk life of Bastar: A Special study

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Art is an authentic source of historical knowledge, whether it's architecture, sculpture, or painting. Art embodies history, and the social patterns, folk traditions, and ideologies of those times can also be explored through art. The Bastar region is renowned for its tribal handicrafts and arts. Bastar tribal culture is characterized by a unique tradition and technique.

A unique characteristic of Chhattisgarh is that its older, more stagnant cultures have given way to more dynamic cultures through a process of disintegration or extinction, and these have found refuge in uninhabited areas. In this process, these cultures have influenced one another. ... The tribes of Chhattisgarh are the bearers of artistic tradition and have made significant contributions to the development of Chhattisgarh's culture. Their art forms are of a high quality, demonstrating the heights that ordinary people can reach when given the opportunity. (1)

Bastar district is surrounded by four cultures, the borders of Andhra Pradesh, Orissa and Maharashtra are situated around the district. Despite being surrounded by border cultures, Bastar region gives a distinct identity of its forest culture. (2) Bastar division was established by the Madhya Pradesh government in 1981, its headquarters was made in Jagdalpur, currently it is a division of Chhattisgarh which has seven districts. Verrier Elwin did an in-depth study of the Ghotul tradition of the Muria tribe of Bastar. Kedarnath Thakur wrote a book named 'Bastar Bhushan' in 1908. (3) Lala Jagdalpuri's work 'Bastar History and Culture' It is an important source for comprehensive information about Bastar. Foreign officials and travellers such as Blunt, Ward, Glassford, MacGeorge, Fraser, MacPherson, Charles Elliot, Agnew, Richard Jenkins, Bunt, Chapman, Gayer, and Grickson took an interest in or wrote accounts of Bastar's culture.

In its traditional form, tribal art is the art work performed by a tribal community of a particular region, which is done to fulfill the rituals and needs associated with a particular occasion. If we leave aside the special ceremonial art forms of Bastar, most tribal art forms, despite being community-based, appear to be regional or local. Also, due to the increasing proximity with the Hindu community, many such motifs, which were created in rural art forms, have now become popular in some tribal communities as well. This collection of motifs. It is difficult to say exactly what form this exchange took. (4) Created by both tribal and non-tribal communities and influenced by mutual culture, a mixed regional character has emerged in the various art of Bastar. However, Bastar art itself creates a distinct influence.

The tribal communities of Bastar have had a medium of self-expression since the Stone Age. These can be called either chitralipi or rock paintings. In fact, the cave paintings found in Bastar depict scenes from daily life on the walls and ceilings of caves. These paintings depict scenes related to hunting, honey gathering, dance, animal fights, fire worship, and vegetation. A painted cave atop the approximately 4,000-foot-high Naipalli hill in South Bastar features a deer figure. The depictions of animals, birds, and human palms on the banks of the Indrawati River near Matnar village suggest the worship of a supernatural power. (5) These ancient rock paintings not only preserve the tribal identity of Bastar but also highlight a unique spiritual, folk connection and community bond.

Harihar Vaishnav, himself a folk artist from Bastar and author of various books, in his book 'Bastar's Tribal and Folk Handicraft Tradition', has divided the folk paintings of Bastar into different sections based on their nature (6)-

1. Mural painting: It includes painting done on a wall or any object.

The subcategories are-

Hata or Hatha - Palm Print Pictures
Pictures of lines drawn on the wall.

2. Land painting- In this, painting is done on the ground, its sub-classes are-
Bana, Badha or Chowk - marking of figures on the ground with flour or turmeric

Printing - printing markings on the deceased's place

3. Body painting: In this, pictures are drawn on the body, its sub-categories are-

Tattooing – marking of images on the human body by means of a needle.

Chapa – Printing on animal wealth.

4. Pillar Paintings are paintings done on wooden or stone pillars.
such as- Madia Khama, Gayat Pakhna, Gaata Pakhna etc.

5. Rock paintings: Paintings made on rock shelters which indicate the Stone Age civilization, rock paintings at Nimdarha, Bavani Mati, Tata Mati places are examples of this.

Early humans used clay to add color to these Stone Age paintings after drawing. Ochre clay provided a long-lasting color. Later, natural colors such as green from leaves, red from

flowers, blue, purple, yellow, and black were obtained from dried cow dung. (7) Folk tales can be used as an important source for understanding the origins of Bastar folk painting. Among the songs and folk tales sung in the Halbi language, the first story is found in an episode of "Lakshmi Jagar" by Gurumayi Raimati. It tells the story of Mahalakhi and Hansai Bibi, who paints portraits of princes on the ground. Harihar Vaishnav believes that the paintings made by Hansai Bibi gave birth to Dharti Chitra or Thal Chitra. (8) Different paintings have different stories behind them, which are sung as folk songs or folk tales.

The themes of Bastar's folk paintings can be seen mainly in three ways - first, mythology and religion, second, nature and wildlife and third, tribal folk life. The early paintings of Bastar included gods and goddesses, humans, animals and birds, tree dances, musical instruments, toys, weapons, sun, moon and various expressions of love, war etc. Today's Bastar paintings are very fine, refined, simple and have a global recognition. Bastar paintings have masterfully depicted folk songs and folk tales and their characters as well as the contemporary lifestyle and landscape.

Folk paintings of Bastar are visible in every home, whether in the form of rangoli, on the wall, or in the form of tattoo paintings on the skin. There is a tradition of drawing paintings in a specific style on various occasions like birth, marriage, death, religious rituals, Ghotul, Madai, various festivals and celebrations. Harihar Vaishnav has mentioned three styles of folk paintings of Bastar in his book 'Tribal and Folk Handicraft Tradition of Bastar' - (9)

1. Threshing style
2. Ghotul style
3. Jagar style

In the Mandia branch of the God tribe of Bastar, paintings are made on the 'pillar of the funeral' which is called 'Madia Khema', a type of painting called 'Gata Pakana' which depicts the life of the deceased, along with animals, birds, dance, singing and hunting, which symbolizes that the soul leaves the body and flies away. Unlike the Madia style, the subject of paintings of the 'Ghotul style' is worldly. This is done by the youth in the Ghotul Gudi of the Mudia branch.

It is painted by the youth. It incorporates social life and the rules of domestic life. Jagar style paintings are popular among all tribes in Bastar. These paintings are created during events called Lakshmi Jagar, Dhankul Jagar, Bareilly Jagar, and Aathe Jagar, as well as on occasions such as birth, death, marriage, festivals, and celebrations.

Hiralal Shukla believes that the youth house (Ghotul) is adorned with a variety of carvings and wall paintings. It is a major catalyst for artistic creation. The walls and pillars of the 'Yuagrah' depict scenes of elephant hunting and dance, which evoke a sense of beauty. (10)

The tradition of the Ghotul is slowly changing, but like other arts such as folk dance, folk theatre, folk tales, painting has also taken on new forms.

Verrier Elwin has written that there is a refreshing quality in tribal art, which is created for aesthetic purposes. Gond and Pardhan wall decorations were done on thick and sticky mud or clay prepared with straw and water. This is a difficult tradition and medium, and women were quite adept at this art. The patterns and figures of the Gond art are captivating (11). Elsewhere on Bastar art, Verrier Elwin has written about door art that the objects depicted were usually plastered within frames or panels. The lines were slightly larger than the outer ones. Gond and Baiga wall decorations follow the general pattern (12). Thus, there is variation in the style, colour and material of wall painting.

Regarding the paintings on the walls, there is mention of 'Gad'. Harihar Vaishnav of Bastar believes that these Gads of Bastar are not just the crooked lines drawn on the walls, they contain the people of Bastar. Philosophy of life, culture and tradition are all reflected in their totality. 'Gad' means 'figure'. During the Folk Festival, Gads were written on the walls of the venue, containing various images and metaphors. (13)

'Hatha' refers to the impression of the palm. During auspicious occasions, people mark walls, pots, spoons, pitchers, plates, and other objects with their hands. 'Badha' or 'Bana' is marked on the ground with rice flour and turmeric. According to popular belief, where a 'Badha' or 'Bana' is applied, it prevents the entry of evil spirits. Sometimes, priests also mark it. There are also references to Marni Badha being marked in some places. (14) In this way, the Tribals of Bastar paint various types of paintings at various places, such as Lakshmi Jagar, Teej Jagar, Madia Jagar, Khada, Madai Chitra, Jatra Chitra, Gad, Marni Badha, Math Badha, Pat Chitra, Chowk, Hatha Bhati, Devgarhli, Dussehra, Aama Jogni, Ghotul, Dhankul, Dhan Kodni, Chhodoto, Dantesari Mai Danda, Baj Seva, Koharma, etc., for various rituals and festivals.

In Bastar, skin painting, known as "Godna," is a form of painting. "Godna" means pricking or repeatedly piercing a surface. Black or blue patterns are etched into the body with a needle. This is an ancient art practiced among the Gond community. There are many forms of tattooing, including a therapeutic one, which is performed in accordance with the rituals in women's lives. It also holds widespread significance for rituals and witchcraft. (15) According to Lala Jagdalpuri, tattooing is a highly recognized ornamentation, especially among tribal families. In tribes like Abujhmadia, Dandami Mandia, Ghotul Moria Dorla, Parja, Dhurva, and Gadaba in the Bastar region, tattooing is most prevalent among women. In folk life, tattooing is an ornament that accompanies the body. Examples of tattooing include vertical and horizontal lines in black and blue dots and various motifs such as leaves, flowers, and vines. It is a laborious ornamentation. (16) But needlework requires remarkable balance and patience.

Verrier Elwin believes that hunting scenes are not commonly depicted among the tribes of Central India. Elwin includes only two paintings from Bastar in his book that depict hunting, one depicting a Riya painting depicting the hunting of a bison horn and a deer. Elwin believes that the purpose of these carvings and drawings was to promote hunting success through the principles of sympathetic magic. But drawing birds and animals would make them easier to find in the forest. He further writes that I have been unable to confirm this fact in the field. On the whole I think the paintings are merely decorative, although there may be a clear idea that they bring bad luck. (17) To support this fact, Elwin gives importance to witchcraft and superstition, yet the hunting paintings are the main examples of Bastar art.

Verrier Elwin writes that anthropomorphic images of the tribal deities of Central India are rare. The Gonds make no image of Boroden; the Mudias, who visualize his personality so vividly, never attempt to depict Lingopen, though they make an Anga type of symbol for him. (18) In Bastar, symbolic images are found in greater numbers, but the forms of the deities are clearly visible.

In the last few years, the tribal art scene has undergone unprecedented changes. The process of increasing urbanization and commercialization is disintegrating the traditional socio-economic structure. A huge market for tribal arts has emerged in domestic and foreign cities. Numerous intermediaries, traders, and artists have emerged, leading to ever-increasing market pressure and external interference on these arts. Individual talent is becoming socially recognized within a collective consciousness. The current Bastar painting scene is the result of this process. (19) This can be seen both positively and negatively.

The tribal people of Bastar have no tradition of ceremonial painting. There are references to paintings in the Muria Ghotuls, but the Ghotul system has now virtually disappeared. Ritual folk paintings were once practiced by non-tribals, but are now on the decline. Meanwhile, around 1970, a new initiative began to paint on Mandia memorial pillars. It is significant that the ceremonial memorial pillars created by the Madia tribe are now painted by blacksmiths, carpenters, and members of various other non-tribal communities. Furthermore, the Muria youth have attempted to develop the Bastar style of painting, drawing on their individual talents and traditional aesthetics. (20) This is enhancing the recognition and importance of Bastar's folk arts. Maintaining its original essence even in its new form, it maintains its distinct historical and cultural identity.

According to Dr. Ramkumar Behar Another characteristic of the tribal people of Bastar is their love for art. Their leisure time is dedicated to handicrafts. This region has a very ancient tradition of handicrafts. Despite many ups and downs, the uneducated and uncivilized tribal people have been able to preserve their identity. Urban people should learn from these tribal people how to keep cultural values and life values alive. Life is more precious than life itself (21).

Like other folk arts of Bastar region, painting also gives an introduction to history and culture. A lot of research has been done on this subject, yet most of it has not been written. It could not be given a poetic form. There are vast possibilities of research in the folk painting of Bastar on the basis of observation and oral tradition and interviews. In the study of history, this type of art needs to be seen from a broader perspective of research.

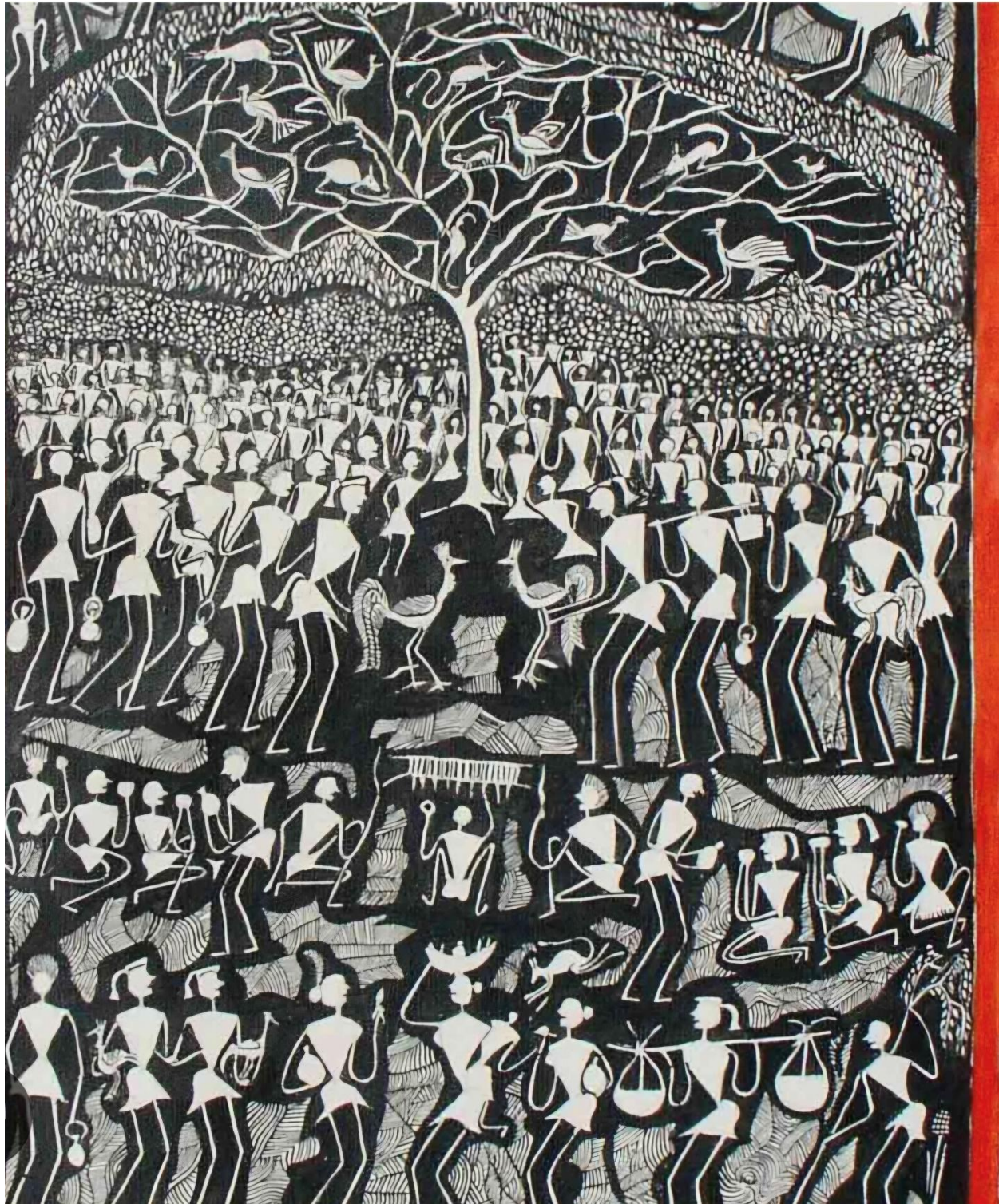
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PHOTOS OF BASTAR PAINTAINGS -











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