

**Details of Project on restoration and strengthening of tribal culture – drawing on wall and floor**

**Introduction :**

As per the definition of the Intangible cultural heritage by UNESCO, we have chosen to concentrate on the Tribal paintings (drawing on wall and floor) of the Santals, which is transmitted from generation to generation, and is constantly recreated by communities and groups, in response to their environment, their interaction with nature, and their history. It provides people with a sense of identity and continuity, and promotes respect for cultural diversity and human creativity. It's a living cultural heritage in the Santals group. It is a conservation and development program to preserve the tribal paintings (heritage culture). This is a project to protect, manage and preserve the culture as well as eco system and transferring to the next generation.

The Santals, a proto-Austroloid racial group, is the largest tribe in West Bengal accounting for more than 50% of the state's tribal population. They are the third largest tribe in India. Although they reside in several districts of West Bengal, Purulia district is the one of the major, where Santals are found after Paschim Medinipur district. Their primary occupation today is daily agricultural and manual labour, though there is an increasing move among the youth towards better and self sustenance.

Santals have a rich cultural heritage and Santal dance, music and visual art traditionally revolved around Santal religious celebration. For their cultural art and performance they are quite famous and eventually known to the society among all the tribes. They have been able to preserve this, in the most part over the centuries. Santals had no written form of the language until Christian Missionaries introduced the Roman script during the late 19th century. As a consequence, many Santali works are written in a Roman script. Many Santals are bilingual, speaking the predominant regional language as well as their mother tongue and using the regional script for writing purposes. A script called 'Olchiki' was introduced in 1920.

Santal religion worships Marang Buru or Bonga as the supreme deity. Their rituals and festivals through the year are related to the agriculture cycle, the life cycle and marriages and involve offerings, sacrifices, dance and song in honor of Marang Buru and other divine spirits or Bongas. Some of the major festivals they celebrate are Sohrai, Sakrat, Karam, Baha and Dassain. They also celebrate a hunting festival called Disum Sendra on Buddha Purnima. However, after the ban in hunting by the Govt. of India, the Santals do not always get chance to practice their archery skill but village level archery competitions during festive seasons have given a chance to nurture this unique legacy.

**The Project – Restoration and strengthening tribal cultural heritage : Deoal Chitra and Alpana (Drawing on Wall and Floor) :**

• **Deoal Chitra (Drawing on Wall) :**

The project will focus on Deoal Chitra specifically by the Santals and of the Santal. It's a part of the visual folk art and basically tribal paintings filled with simplicity, honesty and a quiet vigor. The art symbolically represented the hopes, aspirations and artistic creativity of the rural folk – be it in their Alpanas or the painted walls of mud homes of Santals. Their immediate social environment, agricultural activities and the cycle of sex seasons were reflected in their work. They also used traditional motifs across the different forms of their art. For example, the lotus, the sun, the tree-of-life, flowery creepers etc. are seen in paintings, embroidery, weaving, carving and engraving. Some other popular motifs are the fish, elephant, horse, peacock, swastika, circle etc. Most of these motifs have symbolic meanings. The Santals are the magic painters.

Deoal Chitra is Fresco, relief or ornamentation on the clay walls of rural hutments have been a long prevailing practice in rural India. In Bengal, this is known as Deoal Chitra. Although predominantly found on the walls of the dwellings of the Santal communities across Birbhum, Paschim Medinipur, Bankura, Bardhaman and Purulia districts in West Bengal, though we will concentrate on Purulia district only.

As is true of many forms of folk art, it is the rural women folk who are the creators of this ornamentation. The subjects depicted in the wall paintings are representation of the strong bond between the rural woman and her immediate environment. The Deoal Chitra in the Santal household is executed on the two main portions of the hut - the Pinda or the Plinth and the Kanth or wall above the plinth.

It is the Kanth part of the wall that is the real canvas for rural ornamentation either as frescoes or as reliefs. Reliefs are created on walls of newly constructed houses while frescoes are painted each year during religious festivals like Sohrai, which is the Santal harvest festival or auspicious occasions in the households like marriages or births.

In festive time Santals decorate their walls with ritualistic Sohrai art. The origin of these paintings can be traced back to pre-historic rock art.

Since the wall is the canvas, elaborate layering and preparation is undertaken to give it the proper finish that will bring out the best result of the painting done on it. The women of the community devoutly undertake the entire labour of collecting raw materials and preparing the canvas throughout the year. A coating of lime is first applied on the wall over which designs are painted. The motifs are usually regular arches, birds, animals, vegetation and various geometric patterns. The colors, mainly white, black, saffron and blue, are natural pigments gathered locally. The design is drawn out with the finger tips and then filled out using fingers, small rags or brushes made from jute fiber.

Sohrai wall paintings are often monochromatic but can be extremely colorful as well. Thick coats of clay are applied on the walls. While the clay is still wet; designs are etched using the finger tips. Once dry, these gain prominence and the wall reverberates with life and creative excellence. Attractive relief designs of clay on walls created during the construction of new hutments also constitute Deoal Chitra. A layer of clay is first smoothed on the wall and a border is made. Inside the smoothed square or rectangular space within the border, a preliminary draft of the theme is visualized and additional layer of clay is added on that basis. Then with bare fingers or using a bamboo slit, the subject is retrieved in its full grandeur. In some places a hybrid technique of fresco and relief work is used to enhance the overall effect. For example, the body of the peacock is one in relief while the detailed work of its tail is done in fresco.

- **Alpana (Drawing on Floor) :**

The project will also focus on Alpana. Alpana is the domestic ritual art of the women of rural Bengal specially connected with religious sites. Since ancient times, womenfolk, both from animistic tribes and ritual communities, have been performing specific rites to their gods, in order to obtain divine blessings that would safeguard them and their near and dear ones from misfortune. Vows would be undertaken to satisfy the gods, with a view to achieving fulfillment of one's wishes.

Though Alpana is a design, which is followed by different caste of the eastern India, yet in our project we will only focus on the Tribal Alpana, created by Santals. Alpana has always been drawn by the womenfolk (preferably by married women) and the motifs used would depend the rituals related with spiritual theme. Many believe that the word 'Alpana' originated from the Sanskrit word 'Alimpan' – which means to spread over. This art has been handed down through generations, varying in minor detail from region to region. By the simple act of dipping a finger in a rice powder paste, they created wonderful replicas of their desired objects, in rhythmic, fluid lines – to decorate floors, walls and door posts. The artist begins her work from the centre and works outwards. Each Alpana has a set of ritual

forms, which may then be ornamented according to the individual's creative flair. It's important thing in religious and social ceremonies for Santals.

In each festival to draw Alpana in the hut (outside and inside both) is compulsory element to the Tribals, which is very significant. It's an arena of creativity.

- **Justification for selecting tribal cultural heritage : Deoal Chitra and Alpana (Drawing on Wall and Floor) :**

Though Deoal Chitra and Alpana is an identity of the Tribals (especially Santals) yet for the waves of migrations, invasions by the rulers in different times, urbanization these significant literary rich culture has been affected. Deoal Chitra manifest of the Santal life. Because the simplicity with which these wall painters bring out their philosophy makes their creations singular representations of folk art. But it's unfortunate that a little or nothing has been done to recognize this. With this, increase in urbanization, there are only a handful of villages left where people still paint their homes. So it's a crucial time to restore and preserve the folk art with a project.

Ritual Alpanas, the arena of creativity are gradually being forgotten. A strange phenomenon has been noticed in recent times. Tribal women, have less time on their hands, either because they are working as daily labour (rural tribal men prefer to spend time with their local brews) or, because cable TV has reached tribal villages. Globalization, all in one concept also reason to make these tribal cultures as intangible. As a result, many of these beautiful, quaint rituals and traditions are being given a miss – excepting for very special occasions. In homes, where the grand mother is still around, the new generations, perforce have to adhere to these rituals – perhaps reluctantly.

In a face of these disappearing customs we want to initiate to restore, strengthen and safeguard these traditional cultures.

#### **Objective of the Project :**

In an attempt to highlight the rich tradition of performing arts and cultural heritage of the Santals, our center of attention is to preserve the Tribal Paintings of Santals i.e. 'Deoal Chitra' and 'Alpana' (heritage culture), to do support for restoration, strengthening and continuing the cultural heritage from generation to generation, to enhance the artistic and aesthetic sense and beauty to our society, to do publicity of their ritualistic value, and all above to safeguard the ethnicity. Also to develop the confidence to take upon them the core culture including their own development.

#### **The Operational Area :**

The project area will be a specific periphery, Ajodhya Hills and adjacent areas of Purulia district, West Bengal. The project will focus on 30 villages of the project district surrounding the Ajodhya Hills.

- **Justification for selecting the Operational Area :**

Purulia is a district, where a significant number of Santal tribals live as per 2001 census report. Not only that, there is a greater incidence of tribal homes in Purulia with painted walls and Alpanas than other districts like Birbhum, Medinipur, Bankura etc.

Numerical dominance over other tribal groups supplemented by their age-long close association with the forest and forest fringe-areas, Santal culture and life is Nature-dominated. Their life activities centers round the forest and consequently their art and culture is not free from it. The houses are well decorated with natural colors in various designs is a common feature of the Santals of Ajodhya Hills and its adjacent area covering 64 villages. Their close association with the nature and their idea of visual art and painting may aptly be used in multidirectional ways like conservation of Bio-diversity, Mass awareness regarding Forest development and conversation, Development of Health and

hygienic habits and overall Revival of their own age-old traditional culture. Attempts have been undertaken in the late 2005, in this area by one professional group of Artists sponsored by RKMLSP, Narendrapur to promote the tribal art and painting utilizing the tribal artists in their own way of thinking for creating mass awareness regarding forest conversation and development through wall paintings by promising tribal artists under the supervision of the said professional group. This had created a tremendous enthusiasm among the tribal of the area which could not be followed up as it was a purely pilot and experimental one. However this area should be explored and it needs further steady attention. Like this way, RKMLSP had also tried to promote the capacity of the tribals and to popularize their practices of Alpanas (drawings on ground on a specific area for religious purposes) through competitions among different tribal groups of the area in different time periods which also deserves specific attention for revival, maintenance and popularization.

The other reason for selecting such a remote and almost isolated area for this programme is the ground network what RKMLSP has developed since 1995 in this area due to its close association with these tribal groups through implementation of various programmes like Joint Forest Management funded by Ford Foundation of USA, Income Alternative for the Forest Fringe Dwellers sponsored by German Agro Action of Germany; Promotion of Lac Cultivation Supported by Department of Biotechnology, Government of West Bengal; Vocational Education and Training supported by Welthungerhilfe of Germany, Women Empowerment through Group Mobilization supported by ASTI of USA and other several programmes of RKMLSP. In order to carry out such continuous and time-long programmes, RKMLSP has developed a basic infrastructure at Ajodhya Hill with modest staff accommodation and other facilities and this centre (Aranyak) is very much popular among these tribal communities as a village resource centre. In order to avoid the transport and logistics problems that is inevitable to work in such an area and to access the strong network of RKMLSP with these people, the programme is proposed to be implemented, monitored and supervised very easily and effectively from this centre.

#### **Beneficiaries of the Project :**

The Project will put emphasis on women folk of the tribal communities focusing the Santals. Younger generation of tribal communities will be focused.

#### **Project Duration :**

One year from the date of commencement of the project activities. The project activities will be commenced after sanction of the project.

#### **Activities :**

The project will emphasis and implement the following programmes / activities in 30 villages of Purulia district surrounding the Ajodhya Hills for restoration and strengthening the traditional tribal cultural heritage focusing the Deoal Chitra and Alpana (drawing on wall and floor).

- **Participatory Rural Appraisal :**

The project will conduct Participatory Rural Appraisal involving the focused groups / beneficiaries, local experts, resource groups, community leaders, leaders of local self government and others for dissemination of the objectives of the project and identification of potential artisans and different stakeholders. 30 such Participatory Rural Appraisals will be conducted in 30 target villages.

- **Awareness Generation on Indian Traditional Cultural Heritage :**

Awareness Generation camp will be organised in each target villages for disseminating the messages on Indian Cultural Heritage. The project will conduct 30 Awareness camps in 30 target villages covering around 6,000 villagers.

### Hands on Training of Potential Artisans on Deoal Chitra and Alpana (Drawing on Wall and Floor) :

Deoal Chitra and Alpana are the traditional art culture of the tribal communities particularly the Santal community. The women folks are very interested on that and they decorate their dwelling house with Deoal Chitra and Alpana in different modes. The elder generation is still there in the tribal community those who are continuing the art culture but the younger generation is not coming forward to continue the culture and naturally the culture is not transmitted properly to the younger generation.

The project has planned to conduct hands on training on the Deoal Chitra and Alpana for transmitting the traditional art culture to the younger generation for restoration, strengthening and also sustaining the traditional art cultural heritage. The project will conduct 30 such hands on training in 30 target villages covering 600 participants (20 participants per training).

- Demonstration of Deoal Chitra and Alpana at villages :

After completion of the hands on training the project will emphasis on demonstration of the art culture at villages to put impact of beautiful decoration of the dwelling houses with traditional Deoal Chitra and Alpana. The project will demonstrate the Deoal Chitra and Alpana in 30 target villages (20 household in village) creating visually healthy environment.

- Workshop for sharing the Tribal Traditional Cultural Heritage with other Communities :

5 workshops will be organised in Purulia district for sharing the traditional tribal cultural heritage like Deoal Chitra and Alpana covering around 500 students, research scholars, artisans groups, etc.

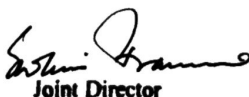
- Exhibition cum Promotional Programme :

The project will organize an exhibition cum promotional programme at Narendrapur, Kolkata displaying different art culture on traditional tribal Deoal Chitra and Alpana for social promotion which will help to the livelihood of tribal artisans.

- Documentation and Publication :

The project will put emphasis on proper documentation of the project. Still and video photography will be included as a important part of the documentation. The project will publish a brochure covering the project implementation in details including learning, challenges, etc.

ॐ००३



Joint Director

Ramakrishna Mission

Lokasiksha Parishad

Narendrapur, Kolkata-700 103