

BRIEF INTRODUCTION OF THE ELEMENT

GOND ADIVASI CHITRAKALA OF PATANGARH



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Gond Adivasi Chitrakala of Patangarh is significant for their uncanny depiction of the beautiful nature & culture through abstract art forms, use of bright colours, intricate details and captivating expressions. The Gond paintings illustrate the relationship between nature and culture through their rich themes and subjects signifying community's rich material and cultural heritage. Having the art in the blood, the Gonds are very good at expressing their imaginations on diverse mediums and expressions. However, the late Gond artist Jangarh Singh Shyam is considered the pioneer who brought the art recognition at global level. He was also pivotal in inspiring, encouraging and supporting other young artists back then to join his path of engaging with the art for larger social and cultural milieu. Bhajju Shyam, who is a national winner first ever Gond artist, also had started his training in childhood with late Jangarh Singh Shyam.

In order to understand the significance and uniqueness associated with the Gond Adivasi Paintings, one first needs to understand the culture and cultural values associated with the indigenous tribe. The forms, expressions and symbolic representations of Gond paintings are the reflection of the way of life of the Pradhan Gond community residing in Patangarh. Being forest dwellers the community is deeply connected with the Mother Nature which is the primary source of inspiration for the creation of work of art. The significance of the flora and fauna observed in their surroundings are manifested in the cultural forms and traditions of the community which have been passed down from one generation to the next.

The Mother Nature as a source of inspiration for the paintings can be seen through the representation of symbols, motifs and elements from their immediate natural surroundings, such as local trees such as auspicious tree of Saja, dumar tree, Bamul tree; domestic animals such as cows, goats, squirrels; wild animals such as, tiger, bear, elephant; birds such as peacock, hen, *tipdo*, *tithi*, *fulchuki*, fishes, sun, moon, etc. It is most important to understand that the forest dwellers consider all elements of the nature sacred and hence the respect and the importance is symbolised in the representations of the cultural forms.

Originally, the members of the Pradhan Gond communities were storytellers, who have been the most important individuals, in transmitting the oral histories through the mythological tales and historical events associated with their culture. The tradition involved inviting the storytellers to the each household during significant occasions, where they used to come with their musical string instrument and start narrating the histories and stories to the current generations. This source of information has been the most essential aspect for the Gond artisans. Artisans believe that these stories have been one of the many tenets for the creation and imagination across the various creative works of art which can be seen manifested in various cultural forms, including in one of the popular subjects of their paintings.

Another significant theme around which the paintings are created is of the way of life of the Gonds. The indigenous community has rich cultural heritage which can be seen through their various aspects associated with the culture specific way of life. The religious component signifies the distinguished aspects in the belief system of the local Gods and Goddesses. Unlike the Hindu Gods and Goddesses these local deities are not defined with any specific form, rather they are worship by establishing them underneath a tree with a painted stone giving freedom of expression through imagination and representation. These deities are related to the elements from nature such as, the tree, snake, and tortoise. There are many birds and animals which are considered sacred and each of them signifies the deeply rooted values.

Most of the inhabitants are farmer and hence farming is the main occupation for them. The paintings illustrate their lands, crops, associated processes, tools, equipments along with the local habitat. The paintings depict the texture of the land, man, women and domestic animals working in the fields, families bringing lunch to the farm, families enjoying meal while resting underneath the tree, etc. These works of art carefully narrates the daily life of inhabitants signifying their clothing, hairstyles, tattoos, jewelleryes and accessories.

Another such significant subject of the painting has been observed of women carrying water. The region has faced water scarcity since years. Over the period of time the difficulties have reduced, however fetching water either from the river, or well or latest tap has been a crucial part of daily life of women. Further, these activities are beyond functional aspects involving socio cultural parameters as the task permits women to interact and share their happiness and sorrows with each other. Many times women do go in a group by singing their tribal songs as well.

Paintings depicting way of life of the indigenous communities are enriched with the traditional architectural spaces, artefacts and activities giving detailed insights about how the culture has been reflected through created built environments which are unique to the Pradhan Gond communities. The subjects are carefully depicted with the details such as the granary, the courtyard, women cleaning grains, traditional cooking methods, children playing, family sitting, etc. The subjects are wonderfully composed while creating the cultural context as the background where one can see the wall arts, ornate wooden doors windows, niches, typical roofs, facade articulations with indigenous motifs, musical instruments, domestic animals, etc.

The music, dance and festivals are also the significant aspect of the indigenous culture. Man and women celebrating rituals, customs and traditions with the indigenous musical instruments, clothing and environment are also the fascinating aspects of many of the Gond painting themes.

The tradition of painting on canvas has its roots to the communities' deeply rooted art of decorating surfaces which is carried out by female of the family

since generations. The spaces are decorated with indigenous motifs on floor as well as on walls. Decorating the entrance and other parts of the traditional house with these symbolic motifs holds deeper religious and sacred significance. It is believed that the gesture brings good luck and deity shall bless the family. The courtyards are plastered with mud and cow dung mix, further ornate with patterns created using different colours of the muds and lime.

Originally, the colours were made using extracts from plants, flowers, leaves and roots. They also used to incorporate types of soil in making colours. However, now days the organic colours are not widely being used as the commercially available synthetic colours are easily available. Even though, the practice of the art has not loosened its essence. The inspiration of the images which emerged from cultural roots, and has travelled from floor paintings, wall murals and finally to the canvas and papers depicting the stories, histories and a world of imagination and aspirations. Further, the Gond paintings are also in demand in textile industry, where the artisans get orders directly from the cloth merchants, where they are commissioned to paint sari, dupattas, stalls as well as curtains. Depending on the size of the painting and details and intricacy involved the completion of creation of the work of art may take 2 days to even 2 months. Many times, the bigger art works are also worked upon in a group.

Many artisans have travelled and migrated to Bhopal, the capital of the state Madhya Pradesh, while few of them have decided to continue the painting while staying back in the village Patangarh in order to also take care of farming simultaneously which is also their ancestral source of economy generation. However, the revolution in communication technology has indeed helped the artisans to expand their wings and continue following their dreams even while sitting in the remote native village of theirs.

The style, strokes and detailing techniques of the artisans are more or less inspired from their cultural context; however each artist also has his or her own unique and distinguished approach and method which becomes their identity signifying their individual strengths, aspirations and creativity.

The significance of the craft has reached to the national and international platforms. The paintings, artefacts and products incorporating painted surfaces in Gond style are quite appreciated and in demand. There have been several illustrations as part of the book design, children story book or wall paintings where Gond art has been depicted selecting it as a theme to demonstrate the message or idea associated with the allied cultural form. Over the period of time, artisans have also started incorporating subjects of current affairs, contemporary cultural aspects, and modern lifestyle through their paintings. This is an interesting example which demonstrates the transmission of culture and process of cultural amalgamation.

During the recent pandemic the artisans had suffered the loss of source of income generations and financial crisis. However, the collaborations with

vendors, NGOs, government emporiums, art exhibition organisers, the artisans have found their way to enter the national as well as the international audience and art lovers.

Change is an inevitable aspect of any given cultural traditions and hence the same can be observed in the case of the Gond tribes. The experiences, context and time have drastically changed in last few years. The use of Gondi language has decreased and urbanisation has entered in the lives of the community. These paintings are going to be great treasure cherishing the origin and evolution of the rich cultural heritage in form of paintings, narrating the unique aspects, and giving message to the world to be rooted with traditions even while moving forward towards the future.