



Tribal Art in India: A Rich Diversity

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ABSTRACT: The Indian tribal art with its magnificent cultural, historical and artistic significance is an expression of human spirit. With 92 percent of India's tribal population residing in forests, their artistry has long remained concealed which is being discovered by anthropologists. This article examines numerous tribal art forms, including Pichwai and Kalamkari traditions as well as the details of Madhubani and Warli paintings. It provides information about the Gond tribe, whose artwork has been attracting attention at global scale. Their art is enriched with storytelling, precise lines, organic hues, and a strong bond with the natural world. Tribal art is not only a reflection of cultural and religious beliefs but also a means of preserving traditional skills and techniques. It is a unique blend of creativity offering a glimpse into the balance between human imagination and sense of symmetry. Beyond paintings, tribal art is also expressed as masks, body adornments, and wall paintings. The paper explores the potential for preserving and promoting tribal art. Cultural exchanges, exhibitions, documentation, and commercialization are essential in conserving this valuable heritage. This article is, thus, an overview of Indian tribal art with its emphasis on historical significance, diversity and devising ways to protect this invaluable cultural treasure.

Keywords: Tribal art, Diversity, India, Culture, Paintings, Traditions, etc.

INTRODUCTION

Today, more than ever before, the need to assess the importance of tribal art in terms of the current global situation has become paramount. This is because; tribal art is a unique phenomenon in human history (Choate, 2014; Giedion, 1962). Unlike other forms of art seen today, it does not end conclusively, with just the object that is produced. For in the production of the item, there is more to it than just catering to man's physical needs. In a craft-oriented society such as ours, the place of tribal items produced by these indigenous people is an integral and cohesive human relationship with one's surroundings, one's culture, one's thought process and even the ability to adapt to the surroundings (Gordon, 1958; Clottes, 1997). This aspect of human existence, that manifests most clearly through tribal art and culture is not just a phenomenon in India alone, but is found in the ancient cultures of other Asian tribes, the tribes of Central America, and the tribes of Africa as well (Weitzmann, 1957). Going by the above finding we can assert that tribal craft is an expression of the human spirit (Clottes, 1997). The only difference is that while other spiritual practices are imbedded in ritual and even superstitions, tribal arts and crafts are spiritual expressions that are seen in their materiality, through the objects that are produced by these communities. They are specimens that stand witness to the humanism among these practitioners and are therefore way beyond the physical objects crafted by tribal hands (Giedion, 1962; Wikipedia, 2023).

Hence, in the world of tribal crafts though, unlike modern day art productions, there is no demarcation made between the utility of the object produced and its aesthetic aspect. Therefore, no object is produced in a linear sense. Every item wrought by tribal hands, has both serviceability and aesthetic sensitivity. A good craftsman pursues both these goals when he is making the object (Chattopadhyay, 1975). The painting on the wall for instance, is both useful, as it pertains to ritual observances and the maker's observance of the same, as also it is an eye-ful, due to its rich colour palette, its striking forms and many other reasons. Also noticeable among tribal art makers, is their abundance of knowledge of what is eye catching and what has permanency (Vajpeyi and Jangarh Kalam 2017). This

is because they are fully aware of how to use the art form they utilise, and the various art elements needed to produce the same. They do not hanker after incorporating the latest trends, or chase global preferences, or even hanker after market share for their art. When the tribal craftsman produces the object, he knows the art elements needed to make the object, as the basic design has been moulded over centuries, through organic principles of design and craft making (Government of India, 2023; Choate, 2014).

One of the first materials that seems to have catered to the artistic urges of the tribal people, according to Kamladevi Chattopadhyay, which is mentioned in her volume: 'Handicrafts of India,' is the making of clay objects. This development was partly due to the fact that clay was a material that was universally available, highly malleable and ideal for expressing the traditions, of the tribal folk. According to Kamladevi, 'Clay craft is probably the earliest of man's creations and marks his coming of age. It is as though as man faced nature he was stirred by its challenge. Moulded out of the earth himself, he wanted to extend the boundaries of his material existence to give expression to his creative spirit (Gillow & Barnard, 2008). The proof of man's ingenuity with clay can be seen in the excavations that were made at Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro where huge collections of domestic utensils were unearthed, among other clay artefacts, showing how man's degree of skilfulness had discovered that the beauty of form could be expressed most suitably, through the humble clay (Gordon, 1958; Chattopadhyay, 1975).

On another level we must not forget, that tribal art productions are closely linked to the evolution of human societies from being mere food gatherers and hunters to people who had mellowed into a sort of early humanism. They realised their distinctness from animal life, albeit their lives were lived in the same jungles and rivers and mountainsides, etc. But in them there was an urge to go beyond the necessary, such as food gathering and hunting, to celebrate the changes in the seasons, to contemplate on the power of nature, and to think of both the fury and the fortitude of the natural phenomenon. In short, they were striving to break away from a gross animal-like existence into a life that would find expression through the creation of their hands, which we have named 'tribal arts' (Jain, 1984).

The earliest evidence of this development, moving from the mundanely aspect of existence to something that was worshipful, or perhaps beautiful in the eyes of the beholder, surfaced in the form of items that could be worn, or painted or crafted for making their bodies catch peoples' attention. Thus, came about the tradition of making adornments in the form of tribal jewellery (Weitzmann, 1957). Naturally, with gradual refinement and constant layering of ideas and workmanship, these adornments took the form of jewellery, for both men and women. Then as the craft was advanced, the elaborateness of the jewellery became so fanciful, that clothing was discarded or kept minimal and adornments served the purpose of body covering, among many groups.

Thereafter, the trend towards adornment went ahead with all the stops pulled out. It was the turn of their belongings, essentially their implements and hunting gear that needed to be prettified in keeping with their rising ambitions. The hunting stick was no longer a raw branch or sliced wood piece. It now had a handle with figurines or other motifs. The hair pins, the tobacco pouch, the household pots and pans, the various boxes and the baskets for carrying produce were given a makeover in accordance with this instinctive urge for tribal art making on their surface, or even in their design execution (Gillow & Barnard, 2008). Thus, the new element that seeped into tribal lifestyles was that of making the common into the cherished and switching roles from being just a designer of embellishments into a proactive consumer of the aesthetic element within everydayness.

With the growing need for fulfilling these creative realisations, tribal minds became focused on innovativeness instead of remaining imprisoned in just subjugation to what was considered to be elemental. There came about a sustained urgency for freshness of ideas, for better execution and for fulfilment of aesthetic sensibilities, not among a chosen few who termed themselves as craft creators, but among every member of the tribe, and no tribe treated their output as the legacy of a secluded section among them, unlike the modern-day art maker. Thus, the space for exclusivity was non-existent and art making was institutionalised among the tribe. More discoveries were in the offing, for as the craftspeople became more resourceful in the use of their hands and minds in making tribal works and an element of the ceremonial crept in. Thus, came about the creations of votive objects, of the mother goddess, of the many demons and spirits both good and bad, alongside them and who were portrayed by them in accordance with their laid down principles of art production in tribal term (Smith, 1989).

The rich cultural world of tribal arts is a legacy that can never go out of the radar of Indian aesthetics, on account of its close links with the mosaic of being truly Indian as also, what is termed as 'Indian art'. While contemporary artists may have taken the language of art to newer discoveries, the range and significance of tribal art remains the core source of our cultural heritage (Prakash, 2004; Gillow & Barnard, 2008).

DATA AND METHODOLOGY

For understating any art form including paintings requires skills, astute perception, pre-existing knowledge of art forms and other related cultural traits, etc. Ethnography method is used to study any cultural form including paintings. Ethnography is a qualitative research method (Denzin & Lincoln 1998) that allows for an exploration into a social situation to gain an understanding of the impact of environment, such as during art education activities to

enhance creativity. In particular, ethnography engages people as they act in and experience the world (Spradley, 1980). Ethnography ties fieldwork, people's sense of their work and actions, and arts which makes it particularly useful in an art class. Ethnographic involves participant observation and interviews, whereby the ethnographer comes to know the culture. At the same time, the collection of artefacts provides a way to understand how a culture is portrayed, or made real, by people in a particular setting. This work is a result of intensive and extensive literature review of ethnographical works on tribal arts in India.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Orientation of Tribal Art and Major Findings

Another item that was plentiful in the surroundings of tribal people in several regions of the country was the presence of trees and forests. He took shelter under it during harsh weather, made his first home's doors and windows with it, and even used it for utility items in the homes. The roofs of homes made of wood were a next generative step, with the beams and arches carved out of the stout branches and trunks, thereby protecting the space in an aesthetic fashion. But much before these long term projects were undertaken, there was the fashioning of implement handles using wood. And while wood was the primary source for cooking and protection against inclement weather conditions and also protection from wild animals, it was also the tool that fired his imagination to create works of aesthetic value to express his individuality.

The wooden images of Gods and Goddesses, tutelary spirits as also the carvings of mythical creatures, were part of ritual practices among communities residing in parts of central India, while the north east region of the country embraced wood carving and implement making as their most honoured craft. As an example for this study, it is worthwhile to examine the woodcrafts of the Karbi community, residing in this region. These people are the principal tribal community in the Karbi Anglong district and West Karbi Anglong district of the State districts, as also the Karbi-inhabited areas of Dima Hasao, Kamrup Metropolitan, Hojai, Morigaon, Nagaon, Golaghat, Karimganj, Lakhimpur, Sonitpur and Biswanath Chariali districts of Assam; Balijan circle of Papumpare district in Arunachal Pradesh; Jaintia Hills, RiBhoi, East Khasi Hills and West Khasi Hills districts in Meghalaya; Dimapur District in Nagaland, Mizoram, and Sylhet district of Bangladesh.

Their most honoured woodcraft is the unique making of wooden craft known as Jambili Athon, which comes into view at the celebration of the Chomkan festival of the community. According to Chomkan, "On this occasion, an expert weaver called, Lunsepi with her divinity invites the souls of the deceased to the earth and enables the living members of the family to pay their respect. Effigies of the deceased members are made and people offer her alank (rice beer) and sacrifice fowls, pigs and goats in their honour". On this occasion, Klensarpo rotates the Jambili Athon according to the traditional beats of drums, while his deputy, Klengdun rotates the apongkroi. The woodcraft is exhibited from morning till evening, which coincides with the last day of the festival, called Kanpi. People perform the traditional song Chingnang (the Shield dance) according to the beats of drums. Young boys and girls make merry and perform the traditional Chomkan dance, Nimso Kerung in the rhythms of folk songs.

At the base of Jambili Athon, expert singer, the Lunsepi, sing the folk songs relating to the origin of the craft. A pair of Chong-Nok (shield and sword) is also kept at the base of the woodcraft. Jambili Athon is also exhibited during the crowning ceremony of the new traditional chief, the Indokpo. Experts play traditional drums producing characteristic beats on this occasion. The craftsmen of this artifact are known as Baroi. The craft itself has a central axis called 'Athon Pi', and the whirl of four branches round it is called 'Aro Anthon'. At the apex of the central axis is a carved bird referred to as 'Vojaru (racket tailed drongo) and on each lateral branch are perched specimens of grey capped woodpeckers. Seeds are used to create eyes and the craft itself is adorned with carvings of mortar, bracelets, pots, bananas, seeds of bottle gourd, and even beads and bits of looking glass this craft is representative of the skills of the makers and their unique way of preserving ancient knowledge through their craft practices.

In terms of popular acquaintance with the region and its woodcraft traditions are the images that are linked to the custom of head-hunting, mortuary rites, and the decoration of the morung hut or bachelors' dormitory. All of these are made with painstaking devotion and carry much significance. The images of the head hunters are usually carved in a standing position, holding a dao, an implement used for the killing act. Sometimes craftsmen even add a shield held in the left hand and the diminutive image of the 'kill' adorns the neck of the killer. A variation in place of the hunted man's head is a coiled snake worn as a neck ornament as a symbol of virility. The Naga woodcarvers, who have specialised in this craft, take great pains over their carvings particularly those of the effigies of the victims, and many of them are ornamented with coloured hair and cowrie shells, and the lips have two rows of incised teeth. Finally, ear decorations are added to the head-piece to enhance its appearance. Despite their gory antithesis, these faces wear a benign appearance and at times rows of heads are carved on a piece of wood. If only a pair of them is carved, they are placed on either side of the wood (IGNCA, 2023).

In addition to heads, there are also wooden grave masks found among the Wanchu and Konyak tribes. These are carved on wooden posts usually in pairs, where one of them is the effigy of the deceased while the other represents

the face of his companion who has come to take him heavenwards. But being specific to the occasion of death, the carver begins his work at the time of the death and continues with his preoccupation right through the period of ritual mourning. But the piece-de-resistance in the category of the woodwork from the area can be found in the carvings on morungs, where the pillars and beams are profusely carved in low relief. Also, the entrance door to the space and the sonkhon drum is enriched with carvings. As expected it is the hornbill that is a repeated motif, besides carvings depicting dancers, buffaloes, lizards and the mithun heads.

Another aspect of tribal art is that each of its art forms, represents the cultural mapping of the regions of their practice. As travel in the tribal belts has always been a restrictive factor, tribal art has had a strong indigenous foothold. Tribal art therefore, is a clear indicator of the topography of the region where it is practiced. A case in point is the artistic techniques of the tribal people of the region of Arunachal Pradesh. Their art practices, for instance, are intricately connected with various aspects of bamboo usage and species of stout cane, with which they make utility objects for the home as also rafts for river crossings and baskets for carrying appliances and goods. In the plains regions, materials like clay, metal and wood are the main resources, and bamboo or cane is an unheard item for such purposes. However, in some cases cotton for handloom weaving is an overlapping craft as cotton fibre is available in several areas across the country.

It is therefore proved, according to AK Das in his work 'Tribal Art and Craft' that the adaptation of culture to habitat has a definite significance. "Culture here is referred to as that aspect of human activity which includes material objects of human manufacturing and techniques. The technique is obviously more important for adaptation to a particular habitat." In other places, it may be clay, old rags, and cotton threads that are available in abundance and thus products of the region reflect these utility items. In some regions, while the raw product may vary, it is a sense of colour application that both demarcates and enlivens the craft produced in the region (Das, 1979).

Further on, it may be said that the key to the adaptation of culture to a particular habitat has been evolved by the tribal makers themselves, through the various techniques they have innovated in the process of making their art. But all through the long history of Homo sapiens, it has been observed that man has never remained content by merely adapting to a certain lifestyle for the sake of survival. He has also endeavoured to improve his technique and improve his sphere of activities. From this practice there develops a close relation between technical virtuosity and the onward march of craft development leading to fullness in the artistic makeover of its practitioners.

According to Saryu Doshi, "In tribal society, artistic activity is not a separate domain but it is inextricably linked to the mundane activities of everyday life and to the production of utilitarian objects. Actually, the imaginative faculties and the emotional states of the tribals are rich and complex. They stem from a way of life circumscribed by religious beliefs and age-old traditions. Their myths and customs derive their vitality as well as their virility from a past stored in the collective subconscious of the community. Thus, tribal art is both an artistic activity and a manifestation of creativity. This seeming duality may only be understood by adopting an approach that views the arts as not dissociated from life but integral to it, i.e., experience and creativity are its central concern – whether it be termed Art or Non-Art in conventional terms. The rich cultural world of tribal arts is a legacy that can never go out of the radar of Indian aesthetics, on account of its close links with the mosaic of Indian art. While contemporary artists may have taken the language of art to newer discoveries, the range and significance of tribal art remains the core source of our cultural heritage.

It is important at this stage to take note of the fact that tribal art is more than a pictorial demonstration on a wall of a home, or a ritual dance or music. First and foremost, what tribal art achieves is the fact that it links together the people of the region where it is practised. Whereas contemporary art is a lonely pursuit confined to the limitations of a studio space, tribal art is a culture that is a communal identity, and maps out the cultural experiences of a particular region through the tribal practitioners dwelling in that area. As it is hereditary and passes down the generations, it imbibes the very ethnicity of the area, and through it influences the outer world upon its surroundings and its lifestyle. From time to time there appears innovative inputs that are visible in their art forms too. These adaptations do not become standalone additions but are melded into the mainstream art creation, to emerge as an extension, and not a deviation from the core practices of the original tribal art.

A case in the point is the way paintings on the walls of tribal dwellings, a common tradition across several tribal groups, till recently, was confined to the dwelling space alone. It underwent a physical shift when J Swaminathan, the then Chairman of Bharat Bhavan, Bhopal, offered a sheet of paper to Bhuri Bai one of the women labourers on the site of Bharat Bhavan, and asked her to reproduce the wall painting of her tribe on it, the transformation of wall art on a new medium, made this art form turn international. It found appreciation, as also markets, among collectors worldwide. By this transformational shift, the benefits of their art practice not only widened the commercial potential of tribal art, but also preserved the sentiments and traditions associated with the people intact because the art per se, was left sacrosanct and only the medium of its creation was altered (Swaminathan, 1987).

Another aspect of tribal art is that, in whatever form it may be practised, it reflects the ethnicity of the tribe. In short, the art that they create is actually not a thing of beauty alone, but is a depiction of the identity of the people itself. The myths that they follow are the forms and subjects of their art. It is also the conduit for them to express their joys,

the seasonal changes in the surroundings, the customs, their closeness to their surroundings and their manner of integrating with their surroundings. Outwardly, these art forms may be visually decorative in nature, but intrinsically, they are a way of recalling personal and social ties in their particular settings (The Marg Foundation, 1946). Thus, births, deaths, marriage and other landmarks in their personal lives, are glorified with a set of tribal expressions through art, music, religious customs and practices using special motifs, ceremonies, propitiations and more, to record these happenings. Even the malevolent forces of nature, such as wild animals, occurrences in nature such as floods, storms, typhoons, etc. became the subject of their art and an important source of knowledge about the lifestyle of the people, among themselves and also for the scholars undertaking a study of these people. Hence, the rubrics of their artistic manifestation through the forms, patterns, usages and compilations in tribal art, is a way of focusing attention on interrelationships, resulting in what some critics have termed as 'integrity' making tribal art distinct from de-contextualization of artistic manifestation.

According to a report of IGNCA: "This kind of approach to artistic practices is a departure from such notions as 'art for art's sake', conflict-confrontations, binary divisions, (sacred-secular, high-low, literate-non-literate, urban-rural or tribal, traditional-modern, etc.), structural-functional, unilinear or multi-linear evolutionary models and so on". To reach a more authentic understanding of what makes tribal art special and distinct, we must concede that it is the imaginative faculties of the tribals that lie at the root of their rich and complex output. Their art symbols, ideas and customs are culled from their rich way of life which is linked to age-old traditions, as well as myths and customs. Altogether, these aspects form the collective subconscious of the community (Netzone Magazine, 2015).

From the wellsprings of such a collective ethos, has sprung up a rich tapestry of artistic practices that draw their sources from such phenomena as the coming and going of the seasons, the waxing and waning of the moon, the rising and setting of the sun, the abundance of forests surrounding them, all of which have become grist to their artistic resourcefulness. The rites and practices of the community that groom each generation, in tribal ways, subject the celebration of transitions in life cycles (such as birth, puberty, marriage, parenting, motherhood and death) to a host of cultural and artistic adaptations. Then again, beyond the actual world, there is the shadowy world of evil spirits. They haunt their surroundings and constantly need to be propitiated through customary rituals that require the painting of their images or the moulding of the same, and then decorating them for them to become a customary painting, depicting a world of secrecy, a world to be feared, and a world to be revered.

In any case, whatever may be the reason behind a celebration among the tribal communities, the aesthetic faculty appears paramount to their creations. It manifests itself in various forms, right from the decoration of their bodies, notably faces, to the world around them. These forms of decoration range from permanent godna (tattoo) to temporary paintings with chalk and coloured powder. The tribal urge to bedeck themselves does not stop at that; it even extends to jewellery wearing as also innovative ways with clothing. With the help of tree gum, leaves, grass stalks, bamboo, shells and feathers these people make amazing ornaments that are not just accent pieces, but are even worn in lieu of clothing among some tribes. In the case of clothing too, while the ground material is a coarse weave in cotton, the designs on them pose a contemporary artist's envy. The hypnotic symmetry of nature is reproduced in repeats of triangles hexagons, zigzags and diamonds to represent the sight of tree clumps, rippling streams, fluttering butterflies and even serpents. Elsewhere, among the Banjara and the Lambadi tribes, the Toda women of south India, the art of embroidery and cotton weaves make for stunning ensembles that a modern designer would find an eyeful. In other words, "the concept of tribal art is a fusion of the decoration with the symbolic, auspicious, ceremonial, votive and the magico-religious in every category. The associations overlap and interconnect in a holistic manner and cannot be unravelled. It is the totality of vision and experience that is significant" (Gillow & Barnard 2008).

Thus, the paper suggests the principles of complementarity, pluralism, concurrency, coexistence, polyvalence and synergy, to view works of tribal art – within the framework of the universal category of the creative art and obviously this implies that there are no fundamental qualitative hierarchies amongst the two spheres of creativity and often so assessed through the adoption/application of socio-economic yardsticks of 'development' and 'progress'. Hence, the concern of artistic manifestation as examined in this paper, is to focus the attention on dynamic interrelationships, towards what one may call 'integrity' as distinct from de-contextualization of artistic manifestation and expression.

While in this sense there is no distinction between what happened in artistic manifestation in ancient times and more recent eras, it does not discard altogether any evolutionary processes, or archaeological records rather, the art development along both fronts become subsets of larger categories, which even in terms of contemporary scientific notions suggest principles of concurrency, simultaneity and space-time continuum in preference to linear progressive movements. In times when the written word or thought had not become so specialised, man was in touch through his various senses to nature, to the stars and so on, i.e. there was the central role of inner experience, beyond the person and individual, expressed and articulated through non-verbal expressions or there was a balancing of the inner/outer, verbal/nonverbal and the recognition of fuzzy areas, beyond rigid clear cut demarcations. Thus, the art was not compartmented into categories such as art, music, dancing, but was a rounded phenomenon of social and

economic (subsistence patterns) life. In other words, the art as a creative act revolves around the common core principles that are equally valid for all cultures albeit these may have evolved and are articulated in many different ways, sometimes consciously as theoretical artistic/aesthetic concepts, and at other times as participatory observation, both of these ways are of equal values, and may be considered as interdependent and interrelated.

Of course, the natural and social environment do shape artistic expression but the causes of creativity remain unknown, whether it is in the sphere of tribal art or present day creations. In turn, creative expression affects the natural and human environment. In this way life-functions, life-cycles, social needs, economic political systems, mythical world-views and so on, are placed in a symbiotic relationship. This is what provides the context of an art, when it is seen as creativity. Taking the above idea a notch further, we may also concede that not all the arts are participatory or an individual process, which may or may not have been nurtured by the natural environment. The creativity is timeless in this sense, since it springs from a still interiority, a silence that is a form of contemplation. Thus, the art in this sense, is a manifestation of the unspoken and authentic experience, which invokes, evokes, provokes, stimulates, sustains and disturbs the viewer (Smith, 1989).

In short, art, whether tribal or otherwise, may be seen in its forms, manifestations, and products as an integral part of the totality of life-experience by an individual and at a collective level. Its playful or unpredictable quality is its power, poetry and potency. Artistic activity is correlated and integral to rituals, fairs, worships, beliefs, festivals. Under certain situations and conditions, the forms of art reflect a plurality and diversity which also has specific functional contexts for the artistic products albeit at the same time the aesthetic aspect is often transcultural spatio-temporally. Thus, there are different orders of experience, different levels of functional attributes and formal values and so on of art as such. All this is equally true right from the manifestations of rock art, to the present-day manifestations of it, worldwide.

B. Use of modern technology in Tribal Crafts

Even though tribal crafts are an age old tradition, it is now being realized that many of their practices have technological roots. The mud walled dwellings in which they reside are re-plastered once a year, using natural resources. These materials make the home weather proof as also provide insulation and protection against extremes of weather. Today, modern housing is looking for alternate materials to duplicate these techniques (Smith & Kochhar 2002).

In the case of tribal crafts too, the tendency to adopt techniques that would make craft making easier, without losing out in its tribal character, has driven these craftsmen to resort to acrylic colours, but still keep their original forms pristine.

Designs of products and the introduction of new products today, in tribal craft production is oriented to customer needs, unlike previously when crafts were strictly used for personal or religious demands. With the internet and access to mobile phones, craft makers are in direct touch with associations that are promoting their craft. Even Government aid and welfare schemes can be accessed in the remote tribal regions, using the phone and the local authorities in the area, to keep abreast of welfare schemes for tribal arts (Government of India, 2023).

A case study was undertaken between the Indian National Institute for Science, Technology and Development Studies (NISTADS) to introduce a new fuel-efficient furnace technology in place of the traditional form used in the dhokra craft of Bikna. It was expected to be a catalyst for change in the region over a period of time, but the old traditional way was left behind in the face of the new technology in a matter of months, showing that tribal art makers are ready to embrace technology to their advantage, from all sources. Also, what was not anticipated was the speed and the extent to which the traditional way of doing things underwent a change without any external coercion any more (A Case Study of the Dhokra Artisans of Bankura, West Bengal (Smith & Kochhar, 2002). These examples are not exceptions but reflect the ongoing trend in tribalcraft making.

CONCLUSIONS

These early attempts to express creativity with the help of clay began to expand into higher order skills, and inventions such as the potter's wheel came about. By the third millennium, the Harappans had even devised the mould, so that clay pots could now be churned out with factory order efficiency, and then decorated and fired according to individual design sensibilities. Also, it was the era of brick making, using moulds that led to creating such wonders as the Indus Valley Civilisation city drainage system, the tower and the giant bath, which fills one with a sense of wonder even today.

From domestic objects, it was not too long when clay became associated with religion, in the array of tribal deities, as also in more codified religions and a rich pantheon of Gods and Goddesses came into being in the hands of the clay craftsman. There were not just innumerable twists and turns of the main Gods, but even deities for propitiation such as the snake goddess, popular depictions of Ganesha among others, and as each year fresh deities needed to be made, the design charter for the handicraft maker became more innovative and subsequently, the potencies of these figures as artistic specimens, became more evident. And of course, there was the seasonal demand for clay items in

artistic or conventional shapes, such as diyas for Diwali, or toys for children and special pots for worshipping Goddesses, not to overlook the ‘mangal ghat’, an auspicious accompaniment at every religious occasion. For leisure time occupation perhaps, tribal potters are also adept at making animal forms, in the shape of bulls and elephants, complete with seated riders on them. The shapes of these items are both moulded and handmade and show a fine sense of proportion. The rider has a regal air with his erect posture atop the animal. The animal likewise, is not made to scale but given a twist of imaginative input, with the animals’ mouths made broad, the eyes elongated and the feet stretched to form a rectangle, so that the finished toy can stand comfortably on the ground. Above all, these craftsmen have become the inheritors of a rare faculty in art. The making of rhythmic compositions is stunningly alive and attracts senses with their liveliness. Technically, the craftsman follows the principle of relating the size of his motif to the surface or form he is crafting, but what he manages to infuse magically is the totality of the complete picturisation in the product that he is making. These, then are coded verbally through a system of passing from generation to generation using the codified rules of ‘ShilpaShastra’ which are kept alive through customary observances, oral traditions and religious observances, making this knowledge multi-pronged and amazingly flexible yet contained. That is what gives the final product of tribals its artistic value and consequent significance. Tribal art along with being aesthetic also engrains in it the essence of life in harmony with nature. The tribal work has crossed regional boundaries to become a source of inspiration for contemporary art. Further, the fusion of tribal art with symbolism and daily life is a living example of amalgamation of tradition and innovation (Jena, 2010). It celebrates the delicate balance between tradition and modernity, spirituality and reality, and deserves our firm support and preservation efforts.

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