

A UNIQUE PAINTING TRADITION AMONG GONDS OF NUAPADA

Dr.Nakul Seth*

Panchayat College Bargarh,

Dr. Sudam Deep*

D.A.V (Auto) College, Titilagarh

Abstract

In Some part of our country basically in tribal dominated areas traditional drawings and paintings have drawn the attention of many scholars. The art and culture of tribal's always plays a pivotal role in reflecting the culture and tradition of a particular community or area. Tribal painting is one such exotic and historically rich form of art which has earned special mention for itself. It is the evidence of a rich experience and vivid memory of the tribal artists. During our field study in some villages Nuapada district of Odisha we have observed some Gond Paintings, which is called as Bana Painting. This traditional wall painting is significant so far the themes of these paintings are concerned. This form of painting is evolved from a long process in which mystery and imagination have been working in the minds of simple village tribe since time immemorial. The Gond painting Bana gains value due to its special cultural meaning and characteristics. It is a painting which seems to be primitive and having affinity with the prehistoric paintings of this locality. The cave paintings show motifs and animal art similar to those still being produced in the community art of the villages in this region. In this paper attempt has been made how the Gond paintings and their painting tradition bear evidence of human cognition on the natural environment and communication between the human and natural worlds.

INTRODUCTION

The Gonds are the largest Adivasis community in India and are Dravidian's whose origin can be traced to the Pre-Aryan era. The recorded history of the Gond people goes back to 1400 years. They inhabit in the area where Rock paintings dating back to the Mesolithic period have been found. Many of the Gonds customs echo that of their Mesolithic forebearers. An obvious example of this is the custom of decorating the walls of their houses, which is an activity that may originate in cave dwelling tradition of their ancestors. Most of their paintings are consistent to the prehistoric painting. The Gond tribal paintings have been taught by one generation to another depicting human cycles and the core of our existence. In certain unspoiled parts of India such as Odisha in eastern India the continuing artistic tradition from the Mesolithic period to the present day are evidenced in Meso-Chalcolithic rock art and continued in the contemporary ritual tribal villages of Nuapada District. They bear the stamp of the dependence of human perception on the natural environment and communication between the human and natural worlds. The ritual mural art forms of Gond community of Nuapada region with different forms of artistic, symbolic and material expression, visibly connected with the prehistoric rock paintings and drawing of the region first made by their ancestors.

SETTLEMENTS OF GONDS IN NUAPADA

People of Gond tribe are scatterly living in different parts of India and having a population of about 7.4 million. Since 9th century Gond tribes had settled in central India. Their territory came to be known as Gondwana which is modern Madhyapradesh, Chhattisgarh and Western Odisha. Around 14th century this tribe became a dominant royal community in modern Chhattisgarh and Western part of Orissa (Saha A.P, 1976: 65). It is said that there was as many as 18 forts or Garhs in Western Odisha. Among the 18 Garhs of western Odisha, Gond had exercised their political power over 10 Garhs of West Odisha. As many as 4 Garhs are located in Modern Nuapada district. Geographically Nuapada is situated in the western part of Odisha between 20° 0' N to 21° 5' N latitudes and between 82° 20' E to 82° 53' E longitudes. Its boundaries extend in

the north, west and south to Raipur district in Chhattisgarh and in the east to Bargarh, Bolangir and Kalahandi districts of Odisha. This district spread over an area of 3852 Sq.kms (2.47% of Odisha) and has a forest covering an area of 1849.69 Sq. kms (48% of the total area 3,852 Sq.kms). The population of the district is 6, 10,382 as per the 2011 Census of India out of which 225841 (37.11%) are schedule tribes. The Prominent among them are Gond (66.56%), Sabars (12.30%), Saora (5.82%) and others tribal community (15.20%) (Mendaly S. ; 2015). As the Gonds were forest dweller they are in majority in villages adjacent to forest region of Nuapada. According to Historical account, among those 18 Garhs of Western Odisha Komnagarh, Gudagarh, and Kholagarh had been dominated by Gond tribes. These three Garhs of Gonds form the Khariar state which is now a part of Nuapada district. However, four major categories of Gonds are seen in the villages of Nuapada. Such as Raj Gond, Amet Gond, Drugond and Muria Gond. (Dalton, E.T., 1976; p.68) These four types of Gonds lived in the densely forest villages like Mahaggaon, Hatibandha, Brahmaniguda, Litiguda, Talpadar, Karlapada, Jharbandh, Patrapada, Boden, Khairbhadi, Sardhapur, Ranipur, Dharambandha, Kuntimuda, Singer, Nilji etc (Mishra, S 1998: 13). During our field study we have visited many Gond villages. Their settlements drew our attention towards their traditional life style and cultural activity.

CULTURAL TRADITION OF GONDS

Culture is a way of life of a group of people, the knowledge, behaviors, beliefs, values, and attitudes, symbols that they accept generally without thinking about them, and that are passed along by communication and imitation from one generation to next. Culture includes a group's skills, knowledge, aesthetics; religion, concept of universe, material objects etc. Gonds cultural traditions are originally connected with nature. Their pantheon represents all the aspects of nature. Their songs, dance forms, myths and legends, folk tales, customs, art, paintings and rituals reflect a close bond with nature and are all inter-related. The understanding of one leads to an understanding of all the others (Bagchi T. 1994). Some of their tradition and culture are reflected in the form of art and painting too. Like other cultural practices Wall painting is also one of the significant practices among the Gonds of Nuapada. Together with other activities that may have been ritualistic in origin. Painting was one of the earliest ways in which man sought to express his own personality and his emerging understanding of an existence beyond the material world (Mishra S.1998). In most of the Gond houses traditional wall paintings have been seen. Gond houses are beautifully decorated with *digna* and *bhittichitra* during weddings and other festive occasions. The Gond paints the inner and outer walls of their house with Digna which is the traditional geometric pattern, while *bhittichitra* is a composition of likenesses of animals, leaves and flowers. This type of painting in Nuapada is known as Bana Painting. Vegetable and mineral dyes are used for colour –flowers, leaves, clay, stones, rice, and turmeric. These practices reflected the unique culture, customs, and traditions of Gond tribe and were instrumental in maintaining the health and stability of tribal communities.

PAINTING AMONG GONDS

Tribal painting is one such exotic and historically rich form of art which has earned special mention for itself. A large number of cave painting have been discovered from western part of Odisha in which we can find the influence of tribal communities. These cave paintings of this locality show motifs and animal art similar to those still being produced in the community art of the villages in this area. The village people believe that this art was painted by their ancestors. Such traditional believe of Gonds is still existing in Nuapada which is clearly reveals from their paintings. Their painting is locally known as “Bana or Jhotichitra”. It a type of traditional wall painting. The tribal households of this region are decorated with these paintings as the people invest their spare time in such creative activities. They traditionally paint on mud wall of their houses. They have created unprecedented depiction of their natural, mythological world, traditional songs and oral histories. Often this painting depicts the various celebrations, rituals and man's relationship with nature. Many a time the paintings symbolize super natural entities and deities in the form of trees and animals. (Mohanty, K.C. and Behura N, 2008; p.15) The huts of Gonds are decorated with *Bhittichitra* (wall Painting) and *Digna* painting (Geometrical painting) springs from the community belief. The Gonds of Nuapada paint inner and outer wall and floor of their homes. These painting are often made during on special occasions. The paintings “Bana” made by this tribe carry religious significance. These are

drawn on wall surface during religious and other cultural occasions such as harvest, child birth, marriage etc. Besides During the construction of a new dwelling hut, these painting are created in a dark corner inside their hut and outside also (Tripathy B. 2005). These painting are very much famous and unique for their elegance, charm, iconography, aesthetic and ritualistic association.

FEATURES OF BANA PAINTING

The Gond community of Nuapada has a distinctive technique of painting. Bana is such a peculiar wall painting which is found in every house of Gond community in the Gond villages of Nuapada. Gond people of this region draw this painting in the front wall of their huts. The abstract painting are generally drawn either at the lower or upper portion of the wall or around the door corners. The themes for these paintings are chosen from nature and natural elements of their surroundings (D.N. Pathy, 1984:149). The representative figures are generally trees, flowers, birds and human being which are found on the wall. Various types of geometric and non – geometric designs are also found on the wall surface. Each painting is composed of numberless dots creating different patterns and shapes and each dot represents a deity as well as living organisms. The lines and patterns on these paintings are an infinite combination of simple geometric shapes. The triangle, the square, the circle and a straight line are the basis of every drawing and a simple combination of these can offer an infinite range of symbols. A certain sense of balance and symmetry can be observed in the pattern used such as spirals forms along with trees, leaves animals and human figures (R.N. Dash, 1985). All these are painted in bright colours. All the drawings are done in free hand and within the simple imperfection, lie the very beauty of this art. The oldest forms in the contemporary tribal paintings of the Gond villages of Nuapada are similar to the rock art of earlier period. These paintings are practiced by the ancestors of this primitive tribe who live in leaf houses, trap small animals, gather honey, and make string nets and ropes. It has been noted that many forms common to rock art appear in the wall paintings of Gonds. Many geometric designs and motifs which are found in the rock art site of the Jogimath and other areas of Western Odisha are reflected in the Bana paintings of Gonds. some of the oldest motifs such as the circle in the cross and the tree of life, the concentric circle, yam figures and other motifs less often found in the rock art of this region. Similar types of art but not so primitive are made by the Gond tribe who finger-paint the mud walls of their houses. (D.N. Pathy, 1984) Among the old motifs such as the zigzag line, wavy lines, cross, circles, dots, foot prints, double triangle, oval shapes etc are prominent. A Gond painting from Brahmaniguda shows that a number of dots are used for making a mountain like structure. In addition, in Bana Painting we have observed that use of oval shape and dots are frequent for making creepers and flower design. Some of the forms are playful and naively drawn, painted with great felicity and imagination. It is the evidence of a rich experience and vivid memory of these tribal artists of the wild forms of animal, bird and plant life, and decorative motifs.



Fig.2.Floral design on wall surface



Fig.3.Bana Painting on Ochre colored surface

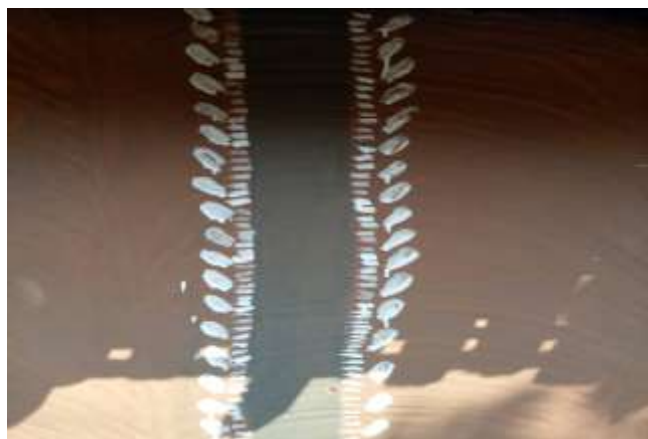


Fig.4. painting on a Bichrome wall

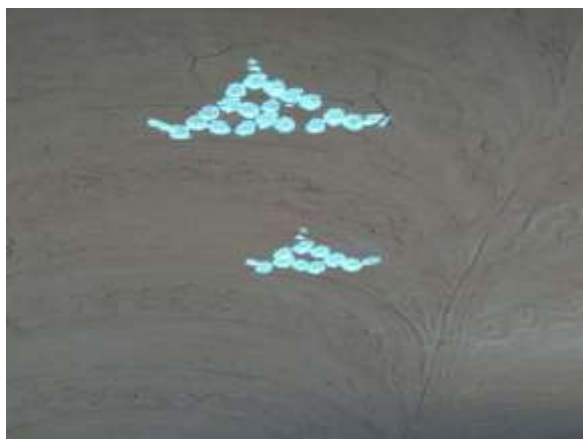


Fig.5. Bana painting from Limpada



Fig.6. Painting with Palm print on Mud wall



Fig.7. Traditional Bana of Gonds

PAINTING TECHNIQUES AND RAW MATERIALS

Before going to draw a Bana painting, Gond women make the wall surface of their hut plain. The wall is completely repaired and plastered with mud, after which it is given a coat of cow dung and mud mixture. Then it is covered with a coat of black earth, so called *Kala Mati*. This type of *mati* or soil is applied in a circular half-moon stroke. After the black-earth coating has dried, a layer of the *Geru Mati* or Ochre coloured soil is applied on it. On Plain Ochre coloured wall surface depictions are made. The Gond women use their fingers and twig brush to make designs. The Colours applied and images drawn often represent various meanings and concepts of their ancestral tradition (R.N. Dash, 1985). The Gond tribe of Nuapada used various types of materials mostly local floral and faunal remains in their paintings. Colours for their painting can be organic and inorganic. Various types of colours are used which are natural and made of charcoal, cow dung, leaves, coloured soil, ochre etc. Like many a folk art traditions Gond people also use vegetable, mineral dyes made out of locally available flowers leaves clay, stones, rice, turmeric etc as colour. This tribe used colours including various shades of white, red ochre, brown green and black. But white and red were their favorite colour. The paints used by these people were made by grinding various coloured rocks. Some sticky substances such as resin from trees may be used while mixing rock power with water. Red and yellow are considered auspicious (Mishra, S.1998:12) The Panchavarna such as red, yellow, green black and white are preferable for Bana paintings. White colour is made of rice dust or limestone. The red earth is gerua or Ochre which is very common and sometimes is found in a beautiful pink shade or lavender. The deep purplish red colour which also appears in the paintings of Gonds is hematite, which is made by grinding the stone of the same colour with water. Coloured clay in shade of yellow soil obtains from river Tel and its tributary Under. Chhui soil, Ochre, charcoal etc were used to traditionally to create painting. Bana painting is done with a variety of implements or tools made from natural materials such as thin sticks stripped from long grass, Brushes made of bird's feathers, and Bamboo sticks. (Tripathy B.

2005:93) Besides Brushes are handmade and are usually made out of twigs of Neem or Babul plant covered with a rag on strip. Apart from this different types of brush of different shapes are used depending on the requirement of drawing.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Bana is a popular wall painting among the Gonds of Nuapada. We have observed that this type of painting purely traditional in character and fully influenced by nature and natural elements. Thus this painting has affinity with the rock painting of this locality. Many symbols and motifs of prehistoric art have been imitated by the Gonds in their Bana painting. This shows that this painting has been continuing since the time immortal among them. Although some changes has been noticed in early form of painting and modern painting, still this form of art bear the testimony of their rich cultural heritage. A change in building materials of their huts and lifestyle of this community has been gradually diminishing this traditional art. The skill and practice of community paintings is also declined along with it the knowledge. A painting done in a traditional style represents the heritage of a community and a region. Such cultural heritage must be kept intact. The Gond painting Bana gains value due to its special cultural meaning and characteristics. They constitute the only record of the forgotten human past, which is irretrievable. Where they exist as living traditions among contemporary cultural manifestations they constitute an increasingly endangered heritage. They may be considered the most precious gift from the past to the present in modern India, and a possession not only of India, but of the world.

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