

DOTS AND LINES: SEMIOTICS OF THE MOTIFS IN GOND PAINTING

Manash Pratim Goswami

Associate Professor, Department of Media and Communication,
Central University of Tamil Nadu, India, mpgoswami@cutn.ac.in

Priya Yadav

Scholar, Department of Journalism and Mass Communication,
Indira Gandhi National Tribal University, Amarkantak, (MP), India.

Abstract. The Gond painting, one of the most-significant cultural identities of the Gond tribe of central India, has emerged worldwide as a highly recognised and appreciated tribal art form in recent times. From Dighna to canvas painting, the traditional images and religious beliefs of Gond people have travelled from their tribal settlements to exhibitions of modern art galleries across the world. Pradhan Gond, a sub-caste of the Gond, is known for making traditional paintings on a variety of themes. In general, the Gond paintings are known as the expression of love for nature and quest for life. The central idea behind decorating the mud walls of the Gond people is to highlight their firm belief in the saying that 'viewing a good image begets good luck'. The Gond painters are traditionally known for filling the surface of the subjects of their paintings with some unique motifs. The forms, shapes, and sizes of the motifs of their paintings are highly influenced by nature, beliefs, folklore, culture and traditions of the community. However, several Gond painters have been using motifs of hybrid nature or inspired by motifs of other tribal or modern paintings in recent times. The commercialisation, competitions and intellectual property rights (IPR) norms have made almost every recognised Gond painter to follow individual and legally registered motif (s) as his/her distinct identity(ies). The Motif, any recurring element with symbolic significance in a narrative, can be understood and interpreted with the theory of semiotics. The semiotic theory as suggested by Professor Gillian Rose, in research work on 'Visual Methodologies' and the Innovative methodology proposed by Professor Mieke Bal, a Dutch cultural theorist and Professor Norman Bryson, an art historian, will be applied to study, understand and interpret the significance of different motifs of Gond artists.

Keywords. *Gond painting, motif, patterns, semiotics, visual communication*

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Introduction

In common parlance, the word 'Motif' suggests a significant theme or subject or an idea repeating consistently or woven throughout a work. The word 'Motif', originated from the French language, finds its prominent uses mainly in creative narratives e.g. literature, visual and music. It suggests a recurring set of words in literature and lyrics, shapes, figures and colours in visuals and notes in music. A motif may be repeated in a pattern or design, often many times, or may just occur once in a work (Latin Art, 2017).

According to Oxford Learner's Dictionary, the word 'Motif' means "design or a pattern used as a decoration." The term depicts any design emphasized in painting through consistent repetition. In painting, if any figure or design used as the central element and repeated to create artwork is called a motif. It is the most basic unit that forms design or composition in visual art. The motifs are broadly divided into four types, i.e. (a) Geometrical (b) Natural (c) Abstract and (c) Stylized for any artwork. Georges Seurat, a famous French painter, once said, 'Art is Harmony'. The connoisseurs of art believe that harmony can be best achieved when a repetitive pattern is used. The almighty is the ultimate artist of this earth who created harmony everywhere around us.

Motif as an element of art

The subject of Psychology suggests that every human being has an unconscious desire to beautify all that he/she holds within himself or herself. It is believed that ever since the creation of human beings on earth, he or she has begun to give shape to the materials provided by nature to meet his/her rudimentary requirements.

The source of inspiration for developing motifs starts from nature to human imaginations. It is closely linked to natural, cultural, religious, philosophical and socio-economic factors associated with a society or that prevail at any point in time. The human being has never been able to resist the inward urge to adorn and beautify his/her possessions and surroundings. Perhaps, these instincts have led to the creation of motifs in different parts of the world.

Even though motif has been an integral part of all art forms, the most exposed art form to motifs has been textile. Traditionally, the weavers use motifs to create a beautiful and meaningful design. For an instant, Phulkari, the well-known embroidery work of the Punjab region of India and Pakistan, is known for its linear positioning of motifs. The peacock has been embroidered by women of Punjab as a motif of Phulkari in different themes. The different forms of the peacocks, such as holding a lotus flower, in pairs, killing snakes, dancing, showing feathers and many more, are portrayed in the technique of embroidery. In Phulkari embroidery, the peacock has been depicted in different types of linear forms as realistic, geometrical, stylized and abstract (Kaur & Gupta, 2006).

The folk art of India has great potential in the domestic and international market because of its traditional essence, aesthetic and authenticity. The rural folk paintings of India bear distinctive colorful designs, which are treated with religious and mystical motifs (Know India, 2019). Ankita Singh Rao, a former Assistant Professor of Fashion Design, writes 'Bright colors and wonderful arrangements of dots and lines are used in painting to make an amazing appeal. One of the recognising elements is the practice of 'signature pattern' that is used to 'infill' the bigger arrangements on the canvas. These infill arrangements are distinguishing recognisable symbols used by the Gond artists and every Gond painter has established his or her own signature arrangement (Rao, 2018).

Motif in painting

As the most basic or the smallest unit, motif helps in forming a pattern or design in painting. A motif is generally repeated in different ways to create patterns. The patterns are repeated to create a design. Motif has a distinct identity of its own in a pattern or design. A motif can be also defined as a signature or visual identity of an artist to distinct his work from others. Usually, each motif is developed from a geometrical shape or a combination of different geometrical shapes.

A motif plays an important role in visual communication. In any painting, one of the most popular forms of visual communication, the motif is developed mainly with colours, shapes, and figures. Cave painting should be viewed as part of visual art that needs to be analysed from the sociocultural activities of the prehistoric societies. (Jusoh, Sauman & Kamaruddin, 2017). The academic discipline of anthropology suggests that cave painting with primitive forms of motifs played an important role in the expression of feeling or idea during the early days of human evolution.

Motif and Tribal Painting

The art of human expression took many shapes and forms with changing times across the world. However, there exist several indigenous groups of people across the world still practicing one of the oldest forms of their expression i.e. painting. The tribal art in the form of paintings, one of the major constituents of tribal artifacts, reflects the creative instinct and wonderful folk cultures and traditions of the indigenous people. In fact, the tribal paintings have the potential to take someone to the hidden treasure of indigenous people. The Indian tribal paintings can be distinguished from each other largely in terms of themes and motifs used. From cave to canvas, the tribal painting found different mediums for creative expression in different periods. For instance, the artists of the Banjara tribe of Kishangarh, Rajasthan, make paintings of vibrant red and yellow colours with unusual motifs like scorpions, centipedes, chilies and ladders apart from leaves and creepers.

The Sugali tribal people, commonly known as Lambadas- a nomadic tribe of Andhra Pradesh, is famous for their traditional visuals. Banjara art includes performance arts such as dance and music as well as folk and plastic arts such as rangoli, textile embroidery, tattooing, and painting (Naik, 2000). Banjara embroidery works on clothes with traditional motifs. Similar embroidery painting work with tribal motifs on textiles is also seen in

Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh and other northern Indian states as these Lambadas move across India. The beautiful designs of Banjara work with traditional tribal motifs are available as home decor in recent times. Even, the motif of the peacock was found in the tribal paintings of Indus Valley civilization.

The Sauras, one among the most ancient tribes in India that find mention in the Hindu epics of Ramayana and Mahabharata, draw beautiful paintings as an integral part of their religious ceremonies. The famous anthropologist Verrier Elwin was known for his extensive study of the Saura paintings of Odisha.

The wall paintings of Sauras are called *italons* or *ikons* (or *ekons*). These paintings, mainly depicting tribal folklore, have ritualistic importance in the lives of the Sauras. The *ikons* were originally painted on the walls of the Saura huts. The artists of the Suara tribe include people, horses, elephants, the sun and the moon and the tree of life as recurring motifs for the ikons. Saura paintings have a striking visual resemblance to Warli art and both use clear geometric frames for their construction but they differ in both their style and treatment of subjects. In Saura paintings, a fish-net approach-of painting from the border inwards-is used while this is not the case with Warli paintings (The Hindu, 2011).

Similarly, the famous Pithora paintings of Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh, made by the Rathwa tribal community, have their distinctive patterns or motifs. Most of the paintings of the community are characterised by seven horses representing the seven hills that surround the area where the people of their community reside.

Usually, they use a surface of painting filled with tiny dots. The motifs of the paintings of Warli, another popular indigenous painting of Warli tribe residing mainly around the mountainous and coastal areas of Maharashtra and Gujarat border, is characterized by geometrical shapes and figures made with earthy colours.

Likewise, the Pradhan Gonds of central India make traditional paintings on a variety of themes, including subjects based on folklore, religious beliefs, customs, nature, modernity, etc. Usually, the Gond paintings are known as the expression of their love for nature and quest for life. The basic philosophy behind decorating the mud walls of the Gond people during the festivals such as Nag Panchami, Diwali, Holi, etc. is to highlight their firm belief on the saying that 'viewing a good image begets good luck'. This inherited belief leads them to decorate their house walls and floors with a mix of traditional and modern motif usually referred to as Bittichitra. The Pradhan Gonds were the illustrious storytellers of the Gond Tribal community. They were entrusted the vital task of passing down folk-lore and tribal stories, in the form of song and to the accompaniment of the stringed 'Bana'. Gond art, in an almost literal sense then, is the translation of these songs into images of good fortune. The Pradhan Gonds are musicians, genealogists, and storytellers. (Saxena, 2017)

The painters of the Gond painting, who have developed their personal motifs and registered them to avoid duplication, portray stories on a variety of themes on different occasions of Gond life and rituals.

These Bittichitra have taken a big leap from mud walls to art paper and canvas and became a highly appreciated cultural identity of the Gond tribes in recent times.

Roma Chatterji, a renowned writer and connoisseur of art and culture, in her book 'Speaking With Picture', mentioned that Gond paintings of early periods were simple and less attractive, which didn't get much public attention. Later, when Jangarh Singh Shyam, the pioneer of modern Gond painting, developed and decorated the traditional paintings of the Gonds with new designs and motifs, which were mainly inspired by Pithora paintings, he received much attention across the world.

Of late, it has been observed that every professional Gond artist has developed motifs as his/her distinct identity(ies). For most of the Gond painters, the source of inspiration for their signature motifs came from the immediate surroundings. As the people of the Gond tribe reside mainly in hilly areas surrounded by flora and fauna, which are far away from the modern world, therefore, the motifs of natural objects dominate in their paintings.

The Gond painters have developed an array of motifs to make their painting more attractive and appealing in the present scenario of the commercialisation of art. The present paper focuses on studying, understanding and interpreting the significance of different motifs of the Gond artists.

Objectives

Although, the wide range of motifs to fill the patterns or designs have been an integral part of the Gond painting, but the growing popularity and commercialisation of the tribal paintings worldwide brought a lot of changes in the presentation of the creative instinct of these tribal people of central India, including the surface of the painting, subject, colour, motifs, etc. Motif plays a crucial role to fill the surface of decorative patterns or designs of Gond paintings. A motif of a particular shape, size, and form reflects the allusiveness and individualism of an artist. The present paper focuses to study, understand and interpret the motifs of different Gond artists, which include the following objectives:

- To study the reflection of culture and traditions in the motifs of Gond paintings.
- To examine the source of inspiration for selection and development of signature motifs for the Gond painters.
- To understand the intended or hidden meaning associated with the motifs of the painters.

Gond painting: A brief idea of evolution

The scholars and connoisseurs of art have the opinion that Gond customs echo their Mesolithic forbearers. The custom of decorating the walls or floors of their houses with paintings is an example that may originate in cave-dwelling traditions of their ancestors. (Goswami, 2018). The art of the Gond tribal community in central India is dense yet intricate, rich with meaning (Wolf, 2010).

Even though there is no credible history of the origin of Gond painting, many believe that the modern form of Gond painting started as decorative and symbolic art from Dighna.

The Gond traditional belief suggests that all such paintings possess the power to fight against evil powers and spread positive vibrations around.

In fact, the Gond traditional belief also suggests that 'viewing a good image brings good fortune'. This belief motivates the Gond people to paint the mud walls and floors of their homes with beautiful images. They usually paint walls or floors during festivals or rituals associated with seasonal changes like the sowing of crops, the onset of rains and harvest or on significant occasions like childbirth, marriage, pregnancy, death, etc.

The Pradhan Gonds, a sub-caste of the Gonds, were traditionally assigned to transmit folklore in the form of song in the Gond villages of central India. These Pradhans Gonds, who were also involved in the singing of songs of the glorification of the Gods, goddesses, and nature with a Bana, a traditional single-stringed musical instrument, are assumed to have initiated the tradition of Gond paintings. Perhaps, in the act of transmission of art, culture and traditions, the Pradhans were involved in the translation and transformation of these songs into images of good fortune.

Padmaja Shrivastava, a leading tribal art promoter, believes that it was during the Gond Kingdom when the Pradhan Gonds were assigned to entertain the Gond kings. Some historians have the opinion that Pradhan Gonds were the professional musicians, story-tellers and genealogists. They used to keep and carry the collective beliefs of the Gond tribe in the form of stories for centuries. Later, these Pradhans transformed the songs to images. In the Gondwana region, the unmatched creative vision has been shown by the Gond tribe. Gond tribal walls come alive with vibrant depictions of local flora, fauna, and Gods such as Marahi Devi and Phulvari Devi (Goddess Kali), fantastical birds, anthill-covered alligators, spirits, humans, and long-snouted crabs (Bharadwaj, 2014).

The Gond paintings, developed by Pradhans in Patangarh village, Dindori District, Madhya Pradesh, were initially painted on mud walls with natural colours. Most of the subjects of Gond paintings were inspired by nature, wildlife, religious belief, mythology, and folktales. They painted asymmetrically and lacked details.

Later in the middle of the 1980s, under the leadership of Jangarh Singh Shyam, the subject, colour, medium of painting and motif of Gond paintings had a sea change. The painting on canvas, use of acrylic colours, experimentation of contemporary subjects along with traditional folklore, uses of modern and painters' signature motifs have found dominance in the traditional paintings of the Gonds. Over the years, the 'Gond' style has become an autonomous art form and has achieved global recognition (Chatterji, 2012).

From Dighna to canvas painting, the traditional images and religious beliefs of Gond people emerged as the cultural identity of the tribe and travelled from their tribal settlements to exhibitions of modern art galleries. It is said that the process of transition started in the early years of the 1980s when a few creative Pradhan Gonds came out of their traditional profession of the bardic priest performing Gond ceremonies to narrate oral histories, religious and folk stories and their relations with mother earth with colourful visual art. From the traditional mud wall to canvas, natural to artificial colours and traditional stories to contemporary themes, the tribal visual art of central India took a big

leap with the commercialisation of the art. Later, the Gond painters went on to use animated films, ink on papers and silkscreen prints.

The Gond painting, emerging out of the traditional Dighna painting to canvas painting, may have found spaces in exhibitions or art galleries or walls of drawing rooms or hotels, etc. over time, but authentic information and literature of its origin, development, and techniques of Gond painting are found to be minimal. The oral literature of the origin and development, passing of painting techniques from generation to generation and getting restricted to a small community of painters and area, have been the hurdles for the slow growth of Gond painting.

Motifs in Gond Painting

The forms, shapes and sizes of the motifs of Gond paintings are highly influenced by nature, religious beliefs, culture and traditions of the community. However, several Gond artists in recent times are found using motifs of hybrid nature or inspired by motifs of other tribal or modern paintings. For instance, the tiny dots in Gond paintings used by Jangarh Singh Shyam are believed to have been adopted from another popular tribal painting called Pithora painting. In fact, the commercialisation and market competitions have influenced almost every recognized Gond painters to follow an individual and legally registered motif as a distinct identity or the signature motif of the painter.

Theoretical perspective of the study

Semiotics, also called semiotic study, is the study of the sign process. A sign is anything that communicates a meaning, that is not the sign itself, to the interpreter of the sign. In particular, semiotics has an elaborate analytical vocabulary for describing how signs make sense. It is any form of activity, conduct or any process that comprises signs. Signs help any individual whether literate or illiterate to understand his/her environment, identify places and things around him/her. Signs can communicate through any of the senses such as visual, colour, auditory, tactile, etc.

Professor Mieke Bal, a Dutch cultural theorist and Professor Norman Bryson, an art historian, expressed and illustrated an innovative methodology of understanding art exhibited in museums and galleries. The authors wrote- "Human culture is made up of signs, each of which stands for something other than itself, and the people inhabiting culture busy themselves making sense of those signs" (Bal & Bryson, 1991).

They further elicited by this methodology is an expansion of the purview of the essay's titular focus of semiotics role in art history to how semiotics is a theory and method of meaning production always in process in the everyday. This approach, a semiotic method, reconfigures the viewer's relationship with art, and the process of meaning production; advocating a historically and socially specific and relative, subjective, and reception-based methodology (Piper, 2012). The book titled 'Visual Methodologies: An Introduction to Researching with Visual Material', authored by Professor Gillian Rose, has discussed motifs from the perspective of semiotics. In the book, she writes "A semiological analysis entails the deployment of a highly refined set of concepts that produce detailed

accounts of the exact ways the meanings of an image are produced through that image” (Rose, 2007).

Methodology for study

The researcher found that the early writings on Gond art were authored mainly by anthropologists and ethnographers, whose interests were based on the cultural significance of the art rather than the forms and content of art. However, it is noteworthy that their efforts laid down a good foundation for understanding and classifications of Gond Art. Only a very few social scientists and scholars have explored the significance of motifs from communication viewpoints. The limited literature available makes it difficult to study Gond art from the perspective of the elements of visual communication.

The Motif, any recurring element with symbolic significance in a narrative, can be understood and interpreted with the theory of visual communication in semiotics. The book titled ‘Signature: Pattern in Gond Art’, written by Gita Wolf and published by Tara Publisher, UK, has a collection of some motifs of Gond painters. The author has furnished a brief account of some of the registered motifs with their owners. Two art and cultural centers-Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts (IGNCA), New Delhi and Bharat Bhawan, Bhopal, have also a collection of few paintings of Gond artists.

A total of 23 motifs, including those mentioned in Geeta Wolf’s book and collected from Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts, New Delhi and Madhya Pradesh Tribal Museum, Bhopal, have been taken as the universe for the present study. The limitations like lack of clarity, irregular pattern of formation, uncharacteristic elements, among others have made 14 motifs to discard for the current study. Of the 23 motifs, only 9 motifs of the painters on careful scrutiny have been found suitable to meet the purpose of the study.

The proposed research is qualitative in nature. The focus of the study would be on the semiotics that underlay in the motif vocabulary.

The interactions with some of the painters, information collected from secondary sources and researcher’s insights on the subject will be discussed, analysed and interpreted to draw some meaningful conclusions for the current study.

The selected motifs have been studied and interpreted mainly from the following two primary perspectives.

- Physical appearance
- Psychological aspects

The physical appearance of the motif includes size, shape, colour, etc. On the other hand, the psychological aspect of the study consists of interpretation of the importance, presentation of the idea and intended meaning behind the physical appearance of different motifs. The concept of semiological analysis as suggested by Professor Gillian Rose and the innovative methodology of understanding art exhibited in museums and galleries as proposed by Professor Mieke Bal and Professor Norman Bryson, will be applied to study, understand and interpret the significance of different motifs for the current study.

Analysis of Gond Motifs

Motif of Rajkumar Shyam

Rajkumar Shyam, a Gond painter, who loves to fill the painted surface of his subject with a unique combination of circles and lines (see Fig. 1). Once he said in an interview that his signature motif is inspired by the surface of a lemon. His motif can easily figure out if one cuts a lemon across in half. Although, the inspiration of Rajkumar Shyam's motif may be the structure of the upper crust of lemon, but it is a geometrical shape.

Figure 1.



Photo courtesy: IGNCA, New Delhi

The use of a simple geometrical figure or the combination of two or more geometrical figures is common in Gond tribal painting. The tribal paintings of the Warli tribe, the indigenous group of people inhabiting the mountainous as well as coastal areas of Maharashtra-Gujarat border and surrounding areas, are known for using motifs of geometrical shapes such as triangle, circle, square, etc. The motifs of geometrical shapes provide smoothness, flow, and charm to the paintings.

Motif of Kala Bai Shyam

The popular Gond painter-Kala Bai Shyam uses her registered graphical shape as a motif. According to her version, as mentioned in the book entitled 'Signature', written by Gita Wolf, she keeps in mind the image of woven rope (see Fig. 2) while detailing her work. In her paintings, one can see the formation of geometrical shapes like line, square, rectangle, etc. in the images of woven ropes. The unique motif of Kala Bai Shyam looks very attractive and soothing to the eyes. She describes the subjects of the paintings with systematic uses of her signature motif and varieties of colours.

Figure 2.



Photo courtesy: IGNC, New Delhi

The Motif of Jyoti Bai

The paintings of Gond artist-Jyoti Bai Uikey, are found to be influenced by nature and wildlife. She uses some motifs similar to the symbols of Baiga tattoo (see Fig. 5) to fill the surface subjects of her paintings. The Gond and Baiga, the two central Indian tribes, live in a close neighborhood in the rural areas of Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh.

The custom of body modification, commonly known as tattoo, with indelible ink is an essential part of the cultural practice for Baiga women. She uses the symbols of Baiga tattoo such as *tipka* (see Fig. 4), *Adhrabenda* and *Khadabenda*, (see Fig. 3), etc. in her paintings. In the local language, *Khadebenda* means a vertical line, which Baiga uses to symbolize trees. Similarly, *Ardhabenda*, which means a horizontal line, suggests a river and *tipka* i.e. dot, stands for fire among the Baigas.

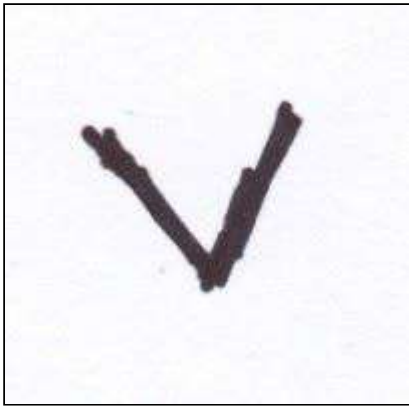
Figures 3, 4 & 5.



Photo courtesy: Signature, a book written by Geeta Wolf; *Tipka* and *Khadebenda*

Motif of Satrupa Urveti

Gond artist Satrupa Urveti uses two popular Baiga tattoo symbols i.e. *chulha*, (fireplace) and *tipka* (dot) as her signature motif for paintings. As mentioned previously, the tattoo symbol - *tipka* (see Fig. 4) stands for fire. The 'V' shaped Baiga tattoo symbol called *chulha* (see Fig. 6), which Baiga women get tattooed on their forehead, suggests for the hearth.

Figure 6. *Chulha***Gangotri Bai Tekam**

The motifs of the paintings of Gangotri Bai Tekam depict scales of fish (see Fig. 8). According to the painter, the movement of fish, glittering and shining of scales of fishes draw the attention of humans. When picking up painting as a profession, she decided to apply scales of fish as her motif for painting.

Figure 7.

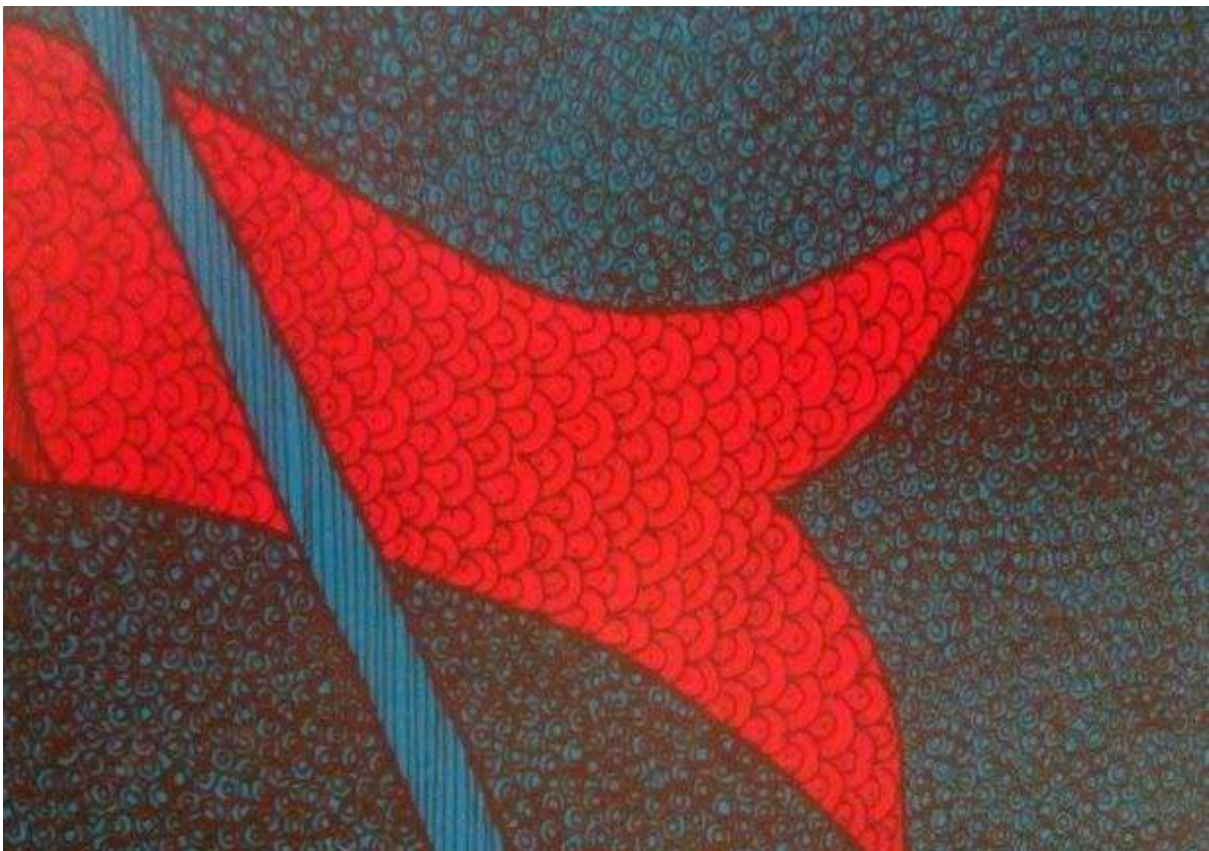


Photo courtesy: *Signature*, a book edited by Geeta Wolf

Motif of Suresh Kumar

Similar to Gangotri Bai, the paintings of another Gond artist Suresh Kumar depict fish scales with drops of water (see Fig. 7) as his signature motif. The motifs of both Gangotri Bai and Suresh Kumar may be inspired by scales of fish, but there are some differences in the visual effect created by their motifs from each other. The fish scale motif of Suresh Kumar consists of two semi-circles along with a dot in the inner semi-circle, whereas the fish scale motif of Gangotri Bai is little simple and produces a different visual effect from Suresh Kumar. Her semi-circles are much broader and apart from each other.

Figure 8.



Photo courtesy: Signature, a book edited by Geeta Wolf

Subhash Vyam

Traditionally, tribal people are fond of residing close to nature and wildlife. They understand and respect nature as it gives them major sources of survival and inspiration. They consider nature no less than God.

Subhash Vyam, a relative of Singh Shyam, depicts love for nature in almost all his paintings. He likes using black colour and often uses ink on paper painting. He frequently fills the surface of the subject of his paintings with the design of peacock feathers (see Fig. 9). Similar to the design of the peacock feather, the signature motif of Subhash Vyam consists of two semi-circles and horizontal lines touching the semi-circles.

Motif of Sunita Shyam

The heavenly objects like stars, sun and moon have been attracting tribal people from the time immemorial. A young Gond artist Sunitha Shyam uses twinkling stars (see Fig. 10) as a

signature motif for her paintings. For her, the twinkling stars mean the mysterious creation of God. Once, she said that she had painted what it looked to her from the earth.

The Gond painter Kala Bai Shyam, who uses semi-circles as her signature motif, credits the crescent moon (see Fig. 11) for her inspiration. In the painting of birds on a tree, Kala Bai Shyam filled the surface of the subject with semi-circles resembling a crescent moon drawn with different vibrant colors.

Figure 9.

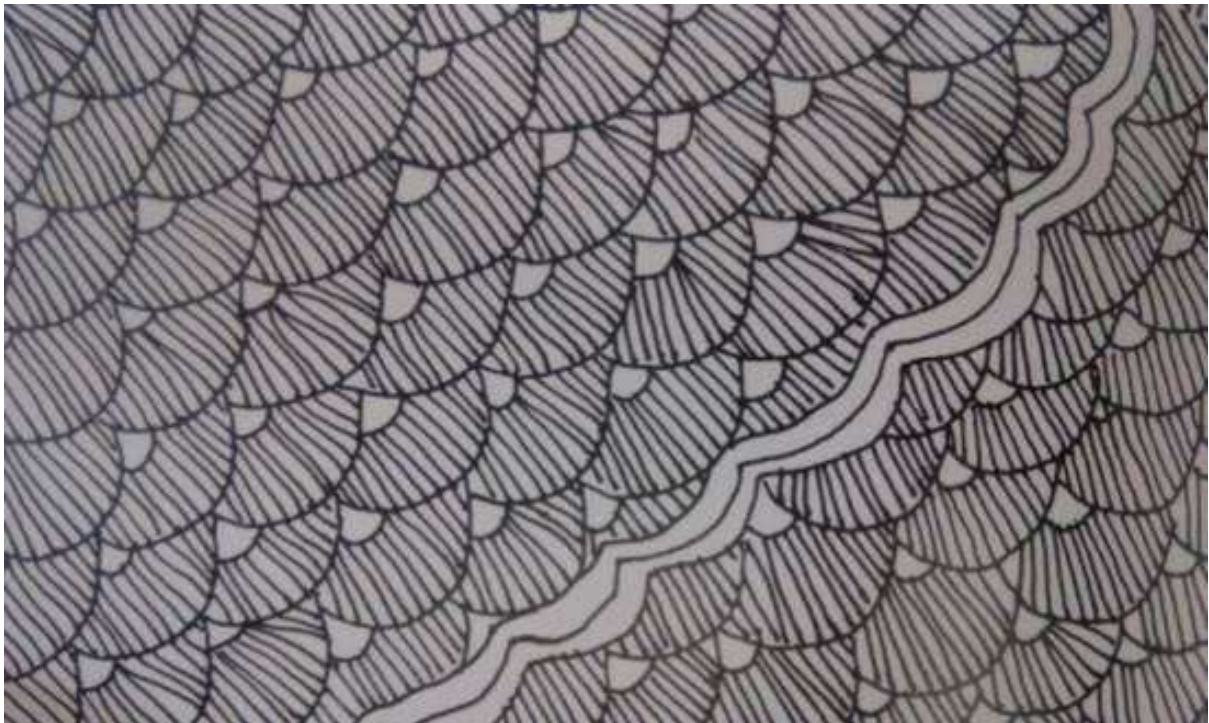


Photo courtesy: Signature, a book edited by Geeta Wolf

Figure 10.

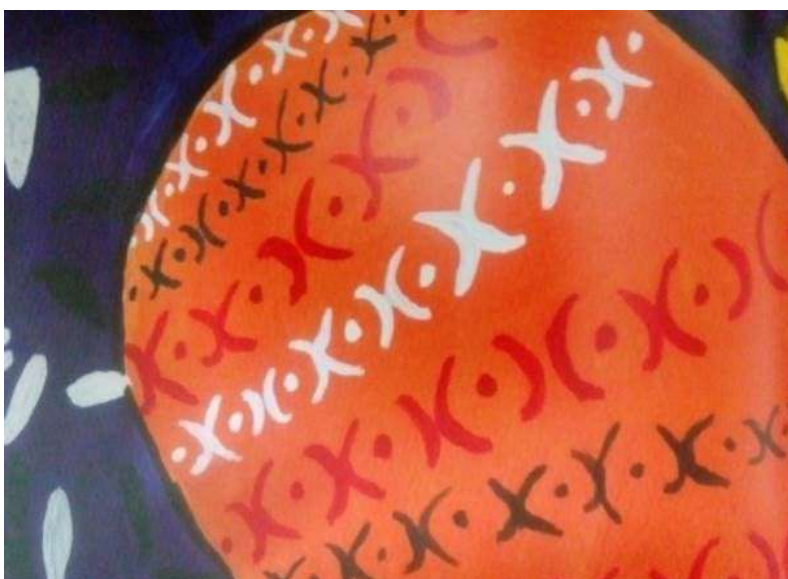


Photo courtesy: Signature, a book edited by Geeta Wolf

Figure 11.



Photo courtesy: Signature, a book edited by Geeta Wolf

Motifs of Kamla Shyam

The signature motif of Kamla Shyam consists of a line of spiders (see Fig. 12). According to her, she imagined the image a spider can create in its way while creeping as her signature motif for paintings.

Conclusion

The current study suggests that in colourful motifs, the intrinsic part of Gond paintings, the traditional tribal artists find a medium to express their happiness on possible thing close to them, such as their love for nature, animals, birds and even certain occasions of happiness like wedding, childbirth, Diwali, Nagpanchami, Holi, etc. The artists of Gond painting are found to adhere to the harmonic progression of the repetitive patterns in their paintings.

The semiotic study of signature motifs of more than half a dozen Gond painters has suggested that the painters use geometrical shapes such as dot, line, semicircle, circle, etc. for motifs. They borrow the idea for developing their signature motifs mainly from the nature and culture of their immediate surroundings.

The subjects, shapes, and meaning of signature motifs are so simple that anybody whether literate or illiterate can easily relate them with their immediate surroundings and understand the intended meaning associated with them.

The present study establishes the opinion - "Human culture is made up of signs, each of which stands for something other than itself, and the people inhabiting culture busy themselves making sense of those signs" of Professor Mieke Bal and Professor Norman Bryson. The popular paintings of the Gond tribes consist of meaningful signs and the painters make sense of those signs with respect to the prevalent culture.

Figure 12.



Photo courtesy: Signature, a book edited by Geeta Wolf

Even though the signature motifs of some of the artists may have been taken from the art and culture of other tribal communities, those signs are simple and self-explaining. However, in both cases, whether taken from own or different cultures, the signs used for

motifs have close associations with the socio-cultural milieu of the Gond tribe and tribal communities living in its immediate surroundings.

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Manash Pratim Goswami is an Associate Professor in the Department of Media and Communication, Central University of Tamil Nadu, India. He may be contacted at mposwami@cutn.ac.in

Priya Yadav is a doctoral Scholar in the Department of Journalism and Mass Communication, Indira Gandhi National Tribal University, Amarkantak, (MP), India.
