Indigenous Art Pedagogy:

An ethnographic study of visual narratives in the Bhil art of Madhya Pradesh India

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy by

Debjani Mukherjee

Roll No. 144130002

Supervisor (s):

Mazhar Kamran

Professor, IDC School of Design, IIT Bombay

Disha Nawani

Professor, Department of Education, TISS Mumbai



IDC School of Design

INDIAN INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY BOMBAY (2022)

Dedication

To my community

(mentors; Disha Nawani, Mazhar Kamran, Bhuri Bai,
grandparents; Sripati and Renuka Chatterjee, Nirapada and Suprova Mukherjee
parents; Mr Gautam and Tapati Mukherjee, Jayanti and Subir Roy,
in-laws; Chittaranjan and Swapna Bandyopadhyay,
husband and friend; Shayok Banerjee,
daughter; Tisha,
entire Bhil family,
friends, colleagues and to you.)

Approval Sheet

This thesis **Indigenous Art Pedagogy:** ***An ethnographic study of visual narratives in the Bhil art of Madhya Pradesh India,*** by Debjani Mukherjee is approved for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Examiners

(PROF. UTPAL BARUA)

Prof. Prasad Bokil

Supervisor (s)

Mazhar Kamran

Professor, IDC School of Design, IIT Bombay

Disha Nawani

Professor, Department of Education, TISS Mumbai

Chairman

Rohit Manchanda

Date : 02/02/2022

Place : Mumbai

Declaration

I declare that this written submission represents my ideas in my own words and where others' ideas or words have been included, I have adequately cited and referenced the original sources. I also declare that I have adhered to all principles of academic honesty and integrity and have not misrepresented or fabricated or falsified any idea/data/fact/source in my submission. I understand that any violation of the above will be cause for disciplinary action by the Institute and can also evoke penal action from the sources which have thus not been properly cited or from whom proper permission has not been taken when needed.

Date: __1st Feb, 2022_____



Debjani Mukherjee

Roll No: 144130002

Abstract

KEYWORDS:
Indigenous art, art, pedagogy, art education, artist community, transfer of knowledge, teaching and learning, culturally sustainable pedagogy, Bhil art, visual ethnography, experiential ethnography, collaborative art practices

ABSTRACT:
The artificial divide created by formal institutions, such as schools make us believe that learning primarily happens within the confined walls of a classroom. This assumption, besides certifying learning of a certain kind, inadvertently disowns learning practices in other informal contexts, past or present. The study endeavours to celebrate 'learning of an art form' which is perhaps more spontaneous, natural and organic, with the intent to draw pedagogic insights which might be later adapted to informal and formal learning spaces as well. The choice of the Bhil artist community in India was deliberate and conscious as it makes for an interesting case study where their artforms, which is in transition, reflects both continuity and discontinuity in their beliefs, relationship with art and their art practices, from the past. On the one hand, their ritualistic Pithora artform is essentially traditional, confined within the community and on the other, the Bhil Art is also emerging as a commercial artform. This transition is comparatively recent, that situates the indigenous art in the present by addressing the dynamism and evolution of the art itself.

The research objective thus has two aspects to it; understanding the nature of human-art relationship and the other, the pedagogic approach to its practice. The research posed several challenges particularly in identifying a particular theoretical lens which would do justice to the above research objective. Since the artform had various dimensions to the study, I have used critical insights from the works of several thinkers and scholars working in diverse areas. I have used Durkheim's lens (Durkheim,1912) to study the belief system of the community linked with art, Paniker's lens (Paniker, 1972) to interpret the oral narratives guiding the art and Dehejia's lens (Dehejia, 1990) to understand the visual narratives. Further, I have used the elements and principles of art to analyse the visual form of the art.

For a study of this kind, ethnography – the flesh and blood approach, which entails immersion in the field, using participant observation as a central tool, was an obvious choice. Given the complex nature of the study, its location in multiple sites, involving several artists/respondents, the methodological approach adopted in the beginning also kept evolving. The research tools were extended to involve structured/unstructured/group interviews and workshops. Visual ethnography helped in documentation through photographs, videography and sketches. Over and above this, a research methodology was designed such that the researcher herself started learning the indigenous art from a senior Bhil artist, Bhuri Bai[1] and documented the process through visual ethnography and reflective research. This 'experiential ethnography' along with reflective documentation later became the critical tool for data collection and analysis.

An important insight of this research is that in an artist community when art is an integral part of their lives, connected to rituals and is believed to heal, nurture and bring rain, it ceases to exist as art itself. Instead, there is an elevation of the status of art to become an inherent element to sustain life and eventually becomes a way of living. This indigenous knowledge, rooted in experiential learning is transferred through generations, within closed communities. Within the community, art is learnt not just for the sake of painting but, for a more significant cause that is often connected to their beliefs and emotional wellbeing. However, in the present time and context, the ritual painting styles have become commercialized and are being promoted as 'cultural emblems' representing the community. The result is that the artists have distinctly separated their beliefs related to the traditional art practices from the commercial art as explained through the sacred-profane dichotomy proposed by the French sociologist Emile Durkheim (Durkheim,1912). A conscious shift of the belief system of a community, has led to the co-existence of both the artforms and hence, affected its pedagogy.

The study of the secondary objective of interpreting the pedagogic approach to the art practices, gives rise to a structure of art education that is holistic, emotionally supportive, nature sensitive and spiritually inclined. Insights from the work of Rabindranath Tagore, KB Jinan, J. Krishnamurti, Rudolf Steiner, John Dewey and Maria Montessori have strengthened my understanding and analysis of the pedagogic processes involved in the dissemination of the artform across generations.

The entire analysis of the thesis could be concluded in a capsule of experiencing art as a way of life, being conscious of ones evolving relationship with art and accepting a holistic approach

[1] Bhuri Bai was recently awarded the Padma Shri Award in Arts in 2020.

to its practice. These three findings, interconnected with one another, are strongly situated in one's belief system that is supported by narratives. These narratives are further exalted and preserved by a community. Further, this community helps in offering a natural nurturing ground for growth of the artist and forwards them towards a life-long journey of self-learning and self-discovery, towards gaining happiness or peace. The impact of such a life-long relationship that positively affects the belief system of the whole community explains their unbreakable bond with nature, art, and its intricate connection to evolution. My contribution to the research has been, to organise and structure the non-verbal pedagogic practice of indigenous art and its various components that have been an integral part of community living. As a future scope, this pedagogic approach can be proposed to formal and informal learning environments.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Dedication

Approval Sheet……...…… v

Declaration….……...……vii

Abstract……...…….…….....ix

List of Images……...……..…….……..xiv

List of Annexures ……..……..……..……...xviii

Glossary of Terms ……..……..…….…….....xix

Organization of Chapters ……...…….....xxi

Chapter 1: Introduction: Art as a Way of Life

1.1 Contextualizing the Study……...……1

1.1.1 The Background……...……...….3

1.1.2 Rationale……...……..…….9

1.2 Aims and Objectives of the study……..... 12

Chapter 2: Review of Literature

2.1 Indigenous Art Education–Knowledge Systems in Ancient Indi…...……15

2.2 Positioning Indigenous Art in the Colonial Era …….….18

2.3 Indigenous Art Philosophy and Practice: Ideas from the East and West……..…...20

2.4 Conclusion…….……..... 27

Chapter 3: Research Methodology

3.1 Introduction……..... 29

3.2 The Theoretical Framework……..... 29

3.3 Methodology Framework……..... 37

3.4 Sites, Sampling and Respondents …….……..... 60

3.5 Tools……..... 63

3.6 Adapting Research Methods Further: Experiential Ethnography…… ……72

3.7 Conclusion……..... 77

Chapter 4: The Traditional Bhil Pithora

4.1 Introduction……..……..... 85

4.2 The Traditional Ritual Performative Practice of Bhil Pithora…….86

4.2.1 Practice…….……..... 87

4.2.2 Purpose…….……..... 92

4.2.3 Patronage and Practitioners…….……..... 93

4.2.4 Process: Tools, Preparation and Preservation ……96

4.2.5 Interpretation: Oral and Visual Narratives…….….99

4.2.6 The Social Structure …….……..... 109

4.2.7 Dissemination of Knowledge of Bhil Pithora……...111

4.3 Concluding Inferences: Traditional Bhil Pithora Art Practices ……...……113

4.4 Conclusion…….……..... 115

Chapter 5: Art in Transition and the Contemporary Bhil Art

5.1 Introduction…….……..... 117

5.2 External Interventions and Organic Progression…….119

5.3 Effects of Intervention on the Arts……..…….…….....123

5.4 Effects of Intervention on the People and the Community…….137

5.5 Dissemination of Knowledge of Bhil Art……..……143

5.6 The Social Structure…….……..... 143

5.7 Concluding Inferences: Coexistence of Bhil Pithora and Bhil Art Practices…….144

5.8 Conclusion…….……..... 149

Chapter 6: Inference: The Curricular Components of Bhil Art Practices

6.1 Introduction…….……..... 153

6.2 Art Practice…….……..... 155

6.2.1 Oral Narratives…….……..... 155

6.2.2 Visual Narratives…….……..... 163

6.2.3 The Visual Form: Understanding the Elements and Principles of Bhil Art……171

6.3 Summarizing the Curriculum Components of Art Knowledge……...187

Chapter 7: Indigenous Art Pedagogy

7.1 Introduction…….……..... 189

7.2 Art as a Way of Life…….……..... 189

7.3 Indigenous Art Pedagogy…….……..... 195

7.4 Evaluation…….…….…….....205
7.5 Conclusion……...…….…….....206
Publication……...…….…….....208
Annexures ……...……...…….…….....209
Select Bibliography……...…….…….....277
Acknowledgements……...…….…….....287

List of Images

For the purpose of convenience, all tables, figures, sketches and photographs are named as images. They are listed below.

Image 1: Map of the Bhil settlements in MP; Inset: Indian tribes map
Image 2: Traditional and the contemporary art of the Bhils
Image 3: Theoretical Framework used for the Research
Image 4: School visit in the Adivasi settlements of Madhya Pradesh, 2016
Image 5: Interviews with teachers and students during the school visit, 2016
Image 6: Artworks by the school students, 2016
Image 7: Sketches made during approaching the Bhil villages
Image 8: The Bhils cultivating maize and hunting for food.
Image 9: The Bhils eating maize roti's, dal and grounded chilli's as their staple diet.
Image 10: Art on the walls, animals and human skin in the form of tattoos.
Image 11a: Art (relief and painted) on the walls of the Bhil huts
Image 11b: A close relationship between the maize and the dots in the Bhil art.
Image 12: Art motifs on animals during Gohari Festival
Image13: Murals painted on Gathlas (the burial stones)
Image 14: The Pithora horses made during the Pithora festival to invite Baba Dev. Source: Internet.
Image15: The sacred horses made for prayers and wish fulfilment to Devi Sravan
Image 16: A collage of portraits taken during the fieldtrips, 2016.
Image 17: A collage of portraits drawn during the fieldtrips, 2017.
Image 18: Jewellery designs of the Bhils
Image 19: Popular tattoos of the Bhils
Image 20: Depicting myself sharing the same space and time with the community members.
Image 21: Depicting myself being observed
Image 20: The contemporary Bhil Art made by the children and the contemporary Bhil artists on the walls of the city, Bhopal.
Image 23: The Three-Fold Study of 17 artists during a month-long field trip.
Image 24: First generation senior, Prema Fatya with his nephew Thawar Singh, (2nd generation artist) as Bhil artists (lekhindras) in the traditional environment in their villages.
Image 25: First generation senior, Thawaria from Gujrat, explaining his contemporary Bhil Art on the Pithora.
Image 26: Self-taught second-generation artists, Dil Sharma
Image 27: Second generation artist, working at IGRMS Museum, Dubbu Baria from Dashera Maidan, Bhopal.
Image 28a: Sher Singh (second generation artist) with his mother, Bhuri Bai from Jhabua (first generation artist) and daughter Anjali Bhabor (third generation artist)
Image 28b: Anjali Bhabor's illustration of the Gal Bapsi Festival (third generation artist)
Image 29: Participant observation at Dubbu Baria's home with his son, Anand and daughters, Anjali and Pooja (Inset).

Image 30: Gangu Bai and Subhash, at work at IGRMS, 2016
Image 31a: Sher Singh, Bhil artist, conducting a workshop at IGRMS for 'outside the community' people.
Image 31b: A non-Bhil participant at the workshop
Image 32: Media coverage of 'Jaanbo ta Paabo' workshop
Image 33: Multiple sites in the field
Image 34: Group Interviews during practicing art together.
Image 35: Narrative and Group Interviews with Dubbu Baria and his extended family while preparing for an exhibition
Image 36: Family tree of Sher Singh
Image 37: Family tree of Bhuri Bai of Pitol
Image 38: Book Covers of the picture book 'Dotted Lines' in English and Hindi.
Image 39: Children from the Bhil community seeing a prototype of their book, The Origin of the Bhils.
Image 40: Collaboration: Working with Bhuri Bai on the book, Dotted Lines.
Image 41: Experiential ethnography: Learning Bhil art Bhuri Bai at her house.
Image 42: Experiential ethnography: Learning Bhil art from Dubbu Baria along with the children of the community.
Image 43: Notes from my fieldnotes on Bhuri Bai's art teaching practices; The sacred Pithora Horse
Image 44: Notes from my fieldnotes on Bhuri Bai's introduction to Bhil festival, Gathla
Image 45: Notes from my fieldnotes on Bhuri Bai's compositions
Image 46: Bhuri Bai, with her horses; Inset: Rene's painting 'This is not a pipe'.
Image 47: Handing a Gurudakshina to Bhuri Bai, in 2015
Image 48: Me and Pooja, displaying our elephants!
Image 49: Bhuri Bai working on the laptop for the first time. Inset: Us working together.
Image 50: Media coverage of the book, Dotted Lines, along with works of Bhuri Bai
Image 51: Cover design of our second book compiling the origin stories of the Bhils
Image 52: Traditional Bhil Pithora painting from 1984. Source: Painted myths of creation. Jyotindra Jain
Image 53: Bhil Akkho Pithora painting at IGRMS, showcasing the doorway and the sacred enclosure, by Prema Fatya (archive. Dated 2007).
Image 54: Ardho Pithora by Pema Fatya
Image 55: The Bhil festivals
Image 56: The fairs of the Bhils
Image 57: Art associated in marriage rituals: The wedding place
Image 58: Art associated in birth rites, self-embellishment and death rituals
Image 59: The festival and fairs of the Bhils on a yearly timeline
Image 60a and b: Prema Fatya and his wife: installed 'dots' during the last Rakhi Pithora, in his own house.
Image 61: Bhil Akkho Pithora painting from IGRMS by Prema Fatya (archive. Dated 2007).
Image 62: Preparation of mahua
Image 63: Bhuri Bai with a textured canvas, during her exhibition in 2017, Bharat Bhavan, Bhopal.
Image 64: Lado Bai and her painting

Image 65a: Pithora paintings by Prema Fatya in a contemporary context, at Bharat Bhavan. Source: Hacker, 2014
Image 65b: Thawar Singh and Prema Fatya making a Traditional Bhil Pithora painting. Source: Prema's personal collection.
Image 66: 'Sarkla' and 'amba' motifs for marriages, made by woman artists
Image 67: Interdependency and Relationship Model within the Bhil community in the traditional context
Image 68: The base texture on the wall and the complete Pithora Painting. L: Wall at IGRMS, R: Painting by Bhil lekhindra, Ramesh Katara.
Image 69: The difference in the texture of the Pithora painting on the wall and on canvas. L: Source Internet. R: Painting by Bhuri Bai
Image 70: Artist Bhuri Bai (of Pitol) explaining the base texture of the canvas and the motifs, in her painting representation the Bhil Pithora.
Image 71: Artist Bhuri Bai (of Zher) with her monochromatic relief work made with mud and clay, at IGRMS.
Image 72: Close up of maize kernels alongside a Bhil art made by a Bhil child artist, Anand Baria.
Image 73: Ramesh Katara and his painting
Image 74: Gangu Bai and her painting
Image 75: Jambu (Source:Naidunia) and his painting
Image 76a: Bhuri Bai (from Zher) and her painting
Image 76b: Bhuri Bai (from Pitol) and her painting
Image 77: Pithora by Bhuri Bai
Image 78: Drawings from village life by Dubbu Baria
Image 79: Festivity by Bhuri Bai
Image 80: Festivity by Bhuri Bai
Image 81: Individual elements by Jambu Baria
Image 82: Contemporary elements by Gangu Bai
Image 83: Sequential narratives: Before and after narrative of a man climbing the khajur tree
Image 84: Bhuri Bai's recent explorations on pots
Image 85: Bhil lekhindra Ramesh Katara with the Pithora art in the background, drawn at IGRMS.
Image 86: A painting of Bhuri Bai where she is seen riding a horse, in the mountains of Kashmir.
Image 87: A picture of Prema Fatya painting, from his personal archive.
Image 88: Prema Fatya's painting of the Pithora at the Godrej Hospital, Mumbai.
Image 89: Interdependency and Relationship Model within the Bhil community in the contemporary context
Image 90: Table depicting the contents of the Bhil traditional and contemporary images
Image 91: Contemporary elements find its place in Rathwa Pithora art
Image 92: insemination of land
Image 93: Birth of the community: the farmer, sky and his wife, the earth were the first cosmic couple.
Image 94: Spider
Image 95a and b: Sun and Moon
Image 96: Paintings with natural space as borders

Image 98a and b: Bhil artist, Jambhu's work
Image 99: Artist, Dubbu Baria's peacock
Image 100: Bhuri Bai's autobiographical paintings: fishing in the village
Image 101: monoscenic static state:
Ektangyo and Supadkanno,
Image 102: monoscenic state of action,
Indi Raja
Image 103: Dharti Rani (a plot of land)
Image 104a: monoscenic visual narratives: Sharma's painting, hunting in the village
Image 104b: monoscenic visual narratives: Bhuri Bai's painting, houses in America
Image 105: synoptic narratives: Bhuri Bai's autobiographical paintings: The day she was born
Image 106: conflated narrative: Bhuri Bai travelling to the city to sell the sticks
Image 107: conflated narrative: Bhuri Bai selling her paintings at Delhi haat
Image 108: continuous and linear narrative: Bhuri Bai's painting on the wall of Tribal museum.
Image 109: multi-narrative multi-element: Bhuri Bai's painting: travelling in an airplane
Image 110: multi-narrative multi-element: Bhuri Bai's painting: Visit of Swaminathan
Image 111: multi-narrative multi-element: Bhuri Bai's painting: Award ceremony
Image 112a: An early painting of Bhuri Bai depicting profile shots of people
Image 112b: Line drawing for tattoo motifs by Bhuri Bai
Image 113: Geeta Baria's painting of characters in profile shots
Image 114: Organic shapes: Bhuri Bai's painting of snakes in the fields
Image 115: Organic shapes: Bhuri Bai's painting of land, water and wind
Image 116: Organic colours: The traditional Pithora painting
Image 117: Bhil Art by Geeta Baria: central composition, radial balance
Image 118: symmetrical balance across horizontal line
Image 119: symmetrical balance across vertical line
Image 120: asymmetrical balance across diagonal line
Image 121: High contrast images by Bhuri Bai
Image 122: High contrast colour composition by Gangu Bai
Image 122: Central character focus by Bhuri Bai
Image 123: Different eye movements in each of Bhuri Bai's paintings
Image 124: Rhythm in dots in Bhuri Bai's Gathla paintings
Image 125: The Indigenous Art Pedagogy Model

List of Annexures

Annexure I: Photo Journal documenting the process of Bhil Art

Annexure II: A collection of Origin Stories from the Bhils

Annexure III: List of Respondents

Annexure IV: Interview Questionnaire

Annexure V: First Year of Learning Bhil Art from Padma Shri Bhuri Bai: A day-wise report

Glossary of Terms

aamba	mango
akkho	whole
ardho	half
Badwa	Village Priest, Shaman
behadvo	seated
Bhagoriya mela	Around Holi festival a Bhagoriya fair is held in their villages, which is famous for enthusiastic participation of young boys and girls. In this fair, the young Bhils gift beetle leaves to one another if they are in love and elope in consent. Later, if they find themselves compatible, they return to their homes to get married else, the relationship stands annulled.
Bhilli Word	English/Hindi Synonym/Meaning/Description
bundi	dots
chowk	is an essential custom at any festival or ritual practice. It is made inside the house during *holi or Diwali* festivals.
chuna	Calcium carbonate for white colour
dakshina	Payment made for the prayer services
daru ka dhar-charana.	The liquor of homemade *Mahua* is then sprinkled surrounding the *nevas*.
dori	thread
dorvu	Drawing lines with threads
ganja	Tobacco marijuana
Gathlas	The Bhils have a practice of erecting a Gathla or a memorial pillar for the dead. Earlier, it was made of stone or wood with relief work but now sometimes, it is also made of cement and painted on it. These Gathlas are made in memory of their deceased relative especially for those who die of snake bite, killed by wild animals or meet an accidental death. Figures of the sun, the moon, horse rider, the dead person and some of the favourite things of the dead are carved on these pillars.
geru	Colour orange
Gohari	Gohari festival is the celebration of the cattle where they decorate them and participate in fairs. Often buying and selling of cattle also takes place in these fairs. Celebrations follow with making mahua, dancing, community feasts and games. Often people with *mannat* (wishes) fall in the path of running cattle, once their wishes are fulfilled.
Haldi	turmeric
Haldi lagana	It is a tradition where the bride and the groom are applied a paste of turmeric to cleanse their skin, cure any skin ailments and made to look beautiful before wedding.
Hookah	A smoke
hutar	Sutra, thread
Jawar	grain
Khakra tree	the roots are very sturdy

Kihori Phul	Red flowers to make colour red, flowers of khakra tree
kumkum	sindoor
lakhvo	Write or Paint
Lekhindra	One who paints the Pithora painting along with the chants of the badwa
Lepna	The act of applying paint of the wall.
Macca	Maize grains
Mahua	A tree, the flower of which is used to make the local liquor. It is considered sacred to be offered to the ancestors and deities during all festivals.
mela	fair
Mittichitra	Paintings made with mud/clay
naghnya	Young girl
nav	nine
nevas	Leaves are placed with offerings on them.
nothral	A person who sends invites
padvo	To Read
pandu	white
parampara	Practice or tradition
patshala	A well-established schooling system of ancient times prevalent in the Indian subcontinent.
Pithora Painting	Traditional painting of the Bhils
Pithora Festival	A festival of the Bhils that involves ritualistic painting on the walls of the houses to situate the ancestors and deities.
raakh	Ash for black colour
rotis	bread
Sarkla	This tradition of making the Sarkla, in this specific manner of using their hands as a template, has been practiced through generations.
sarkla	motif
Tuar	Dal or pulses
vacvo	situate
Vatavaran	Learning environment

Organization of Chapters

Chapter 1 speaks of the rationale and personal motivation that drives the study. It aims to situate the context of the study by setting the background. The terms like 'indigenous' and 'community environment' are defined to situate and contextualize the study. The Bhil indigenous community environment is introduced through its art, belief and practices. Further, we delve into the visual narratives of the art, the transition that it has undergone over time and the present 'status of art' within the community. This overview guides the research objective and details the research questions at hand.

The literature review in Chapter 2 is guided by the research questions. We delve into studies of indigenous art in artist communities of India, its practices, transition, causes and effects. It aims to understand the pedagogy and the transmission of knowledge over time, in these closed communities. It further refers to art pedagogy practiced in the formal and informal settings outside the community, in India. Further, it discusses the alternative pedagogy practices in the East and West by various educational reformists. Thus, the differences in approach and practice of art pedagogy in the two settings lead to identifying the gap in literature.

Chapter 3 speaks of the various research methodologies that were applied to collect data. It defines the methodological and the theoretical lens of the study. The chapter also puts forward the need to adapt and evolve the methodologies at hand to achieve the required data.

Chapter 4 and 5 comprises the data that is procured from the multiple field trips to the Bhil Adivasi communities and their work spaces, over the period of five years. It situates the Bhil Adivasi artist community in the present by tracing its journey over time, through art. It introduces art in the traditional context (Bhil Pithora) as practiced by their ancestors and the commercial art practices (Bhil Art) that caters to the industry needs. We speak of the purpose, process, practitioners, patronage and art pedagogy in both contexts, the traditional and the contemporary and the co-existence of art. Further, we discuss the co-existence of the traditional Pithora painting and the contemporary Bhil art through the concept of sacred and profane of Emile Durkheim. Chapter 5 also discusses the external interventions, the organic progression and adaptive transitions of the art within the Bhil artist community, in response to the changing surroundings. We further elaborate on the kinds and causes of the external interventions, its effects on the art, practice and the practitioners.

In Chapter 6 we reflect on the curricular components of the Bhil art practice that the community values, preserves and disseminates, within a closed community. The data is viewed through introspection and reflection of the researcher as a participant learning the artform within the community. It attempts to understand the Visual Form, Visual Narrative and Oral Narratives through the various theoretical lens of Vidya Dehejia (1990), K. Ayyappa Paniker, Collins and Brown and Newman's Cognitive Apprenticeship Learning.

Chapter 7 focuses on the next two pillars of knowledge; Pedagogy and Evaluation. We discuss the prerequisite environment, philosophy, student-teacher relationships, nature-human-art relationships, curriculum, pedagogy practices and evaluation methods. A gap in literature to address all the aspects of indigenous art pedagogy through the above lens is identified and a need to develop an independent pedagogy structure to understand indigenous knowledge transfer is acknowledged. It eventually proposes the Organic Art Pedagogy Model based on the indigenous art practices, philosophy and knowledge transfer in informal setups within closed artist communities. The chapter concludes with a personal note of the effect of the study and the learning process of the researcher as an artist, and her evolving relationship with arts addressing her purpose and practice of arts.

Chapter 1

Introduction: Art as a Way of Life

1.1 Contextualizing the Study

This research work is integrally linked to my life, addressing my relationship with art, my practice and my understanding of it. It also addresses several experiences and questions that I grappled with, in my journey as an artist. As a child, I loved to weave imaginary stories through my drawings. I explored different materials and media, which extended itself from paints to sand and twigs, to engage and entertain myself. I liked to upcycle objects and create new things from the old. Seeing my interest in art, my family enrolled me in various art classes. But sadly, the art classrooms ceased to captivate me like before. I found the environment limiting and bereft of experimentation. Today, if I reflect back, maybe it was the structured classroom environment that restricted free play (Nachmanovitch, 1990) in me, as a child. I remember being asked to draw still life images, which I found frozen in time and dead, when I rather enjoyed drawing narratives. It evoked several questions in my mind that remained unanswered. Soon, I choose to engage with art without any formal guidance such that, I explored my relationship with it over the years.

Luckily, I grew up in an environment where art was a part of everyday life. The mornings began with switching on the music station on the radio or chants of hymns and prayers. In the evenings my family engaged for poetry reading sessions at home, visiting theatre, singing and making *alpona*[2] motifs during festivals. Also, growing up in a joint family with fewer toys and plenty of nature, forced the child in me to explore and engage myself through stories. I was exposed to lots of different kinds of literature, from oral narratives, *natya sangeet*[3], Bengali classics, English classics, African, Russian and German folktales, Indian and Egyptian mythologies to name a few. These different kinds of literature helped me visualize and make sense of the world around me, through imaginary stories that I created and often represented through my drawings.

---

[2] Decorative motifs drawn on the floor in the homes, as an auspicious symbol to welcome Gods and good spirits.
[3] Musical theatre

As I grew up to become a self-taught artist, if I may call myself so, I realized the difference between how I experienced art at home in its entirety as compared to how I was introduced to art in other formal environments such as, art classes in schools, private tuitions and an art college. When I graduated from a stifling art class in school to attend a design school[4], my relationship with art further evolved. Even though I was in a formal structured environment of a design school, I had plenty of freedom to explore art in my own individual way. It was here for the first time, I was introduced to a community of artists that expanded my views, challenged me and at the same time, nurtured me in many ways. I was also introduced to various indigenous artist communities across the western belt of India, through art camps and study tours. After completion of my masters in animation film design in 2009 and before venturing into the field of research in 2014, I had the scope and opportunity to work with indigenous artists, as an animation filmmaker. I cofounded an organization called BOL[5], a not-for-profit based in India, founded in 2010, that believed in engaging community children/youth in/with art, training them to raise their voices through animation films, picture books and music. Thus, BOL attempted to encourage them to share their own stories through the powerful medium of art. Keeping my passion for narratives alive, at BOL, we practiced community storytelling[6].

During the five years of data collection and groundwork for BOL community filmmaking, I often interacted with the young indigenous artists and was taken by surprise at their commendable skill and craftsmanship. I was intrigued and curious by their practice of the artform with all its paraphernalia in the community. Hence, when I asked the community youth about the process and method of learning the art, they often mentioned '*yunhi'* or '*aysehi'* which, when translated in English, meant 'just like that'. I was quite fascinated by the ease with which they claimed to have learnt a complex artform, embedded in their oral traditions. Since I had experience practicing art in an unstructured environment at home, the structured environment of a school and a semi-structured environment of a design school, I was drawn to the idea of studying the dissemination of knowledge in an indigenous community. I was curious to explore the pedagogy and the differences in teaching-learning practices in these different spaces. Thus, my curiosity in the area informed my research question for my PhD in Indigenous Art Pedagogy.

[4] National Institute of Design, Ahmedabad
[5] https://bolmasterclass.myportfolio.com/
[6] https://bolmasterclass.myportfolio.com/films

In 2014, during my first field trip for research, to the Tribal Museum and the Museum of Man[7] in Bhopal, I was introduced to the Bhil Adivasi community of Madhya Pradesh. To begin with, my focus was to understand and examine how the artform, an integral part of their life, was disseminated and transferred across generations. Gradually, as I spent more time with the community understanding their art form, I realized what art meant to these people were very different from our 'urban' understanding, experience and practice of art. Thus, an isolated focus on the pedagogy as an outsider, would defeat the very purpose of understanding the relationship between art, nature and humans in the artist community. The field of study was far more complex than I thought it to be and required sensitive, intensive and immersive communication with the community to have a nuanced understanding of art and its significance in the lives of the community members.

Art for the Bhil Adivasi community seemed to be a deeper engagement and not necessarily the way we usually look at art, namely; as some tangible output to be exhibited, an expression, representation or at times practicing art for arts' sake. For them, art seemed to be more like a way of life where they shared an intrinsic relationship with art. It seemed to be woven into nature, supernaturalism, rituals, ancestral knowledge that were mediated through the art. This baffled me initially but also seemed to offer immense possibilities, which if analyzed, could lend itself to fascinating insights, leading to a possible pedagogy, that could both have the organized structure of formal art education and the organic nature of informal learning.

Thus, this aspect of understanding the relationship of the community members with their art and nature, became my primary focus of study. The initial interest in studying the pedagogical transmission of art with communities in isolation, now appeared to me to be quite naïve and simplistic. Therefore, the dissemination of art across generations was retained as a secondary objective while the primary focused on understanding the overall context, position of art in the Adivasi life and exploring their relationship with art.

1.1.1 The Background

Life and World of Adivasi Communities of India: An Overview

According to Article 342 of the Constitution of India, there are over 700 Adivasi groups, around 104 million indigenous people and over 100 languages, with distinct differences in their culture

[7] Indira Gandhi Rashtriya Manav Sangrahalaya (IGRMS), Bhopal

and ethnicity[8]. While the term indigenous means essentially native, an indigenous community is characterized by its physical and cultural isolation, and most importantly by its closeness to nature; conceptually, physically and spiritually (Elwin, 1958). Most indigenous Adivasi communities in India maintain their physical isolation from the world by adhering to a well-defined geographical identity. However, most Adivasi people are also migratory by nature and relocate their settlements within a territory. The geography and topography of the region have a direct and deep influence on their culture, lifestyle, education, beliefs, and art (Doty, 1988) . Their deep connection with nature profoundly impacts their community identity. This community identity and spirit command the highest priority within a community. When it comes to respecting and honouring community identity, Adivasis often enjoy a strong sense of unity and pride in their lineage that is mostly linked to their ancestors and their creation myth. They practice endogamy within the tribe that serves to self-segregate and resist integration with the surrounding population. These communities practise their own laws of marriage, introducing equality and balance in their society. For example, the Bhil Adivasis have a *Bhagoriya Mela* or fair where young adults choose their partners and escape for a few weeks to live on their own. In case they want to continue the relationship, they return to the parents' place to get officially engaged and married. Else, the relationship stands annulled. Similarly, they have their laws for divorce, childbirth or theft leading to their unique definition of democracy. Further, they also often have their unique language or dialect, food habits and dressing style that defines their identity. Thus, kinship forms the basis of all Adivasi social structures.

The Adivasi Philosophy

An indigenous community also has its own beliefs and a worldview that is distinctly different from their surrounding settlements. The Adivasis believe in offering to nature what they consume from nature. The festivals and celebrations are linked to nature, such as the celebration of germination and harvest of crops. The Bhil Adivasis believe the earth to be a living womb that they need to pierce to sow seeds and then harvest (Jain, 1984). For the same reason, festivals are often marked with sacrifices, celebrating the cycle of life. They believe that nature finds ways to punish man when they are not attuned to the laws of nature (Naik, 1956). Interestingly, the beliefs of the Adivasi community are shaped and expressed through their narratives. These narratives are often origin stories that connect art, human, nature, and universe. Some communities also believe that all non-human entities and elements of nature possess a spiritual

[8] Retrieved from www.minoritygroups.org on 14.01.2021

identity and that the spirit world of their ancestors protects the community. These beliefs are reiterated every year during fairs, festivals, and rituals. The rituals are mostly multi-sensory experiences that involve and engage more than one sense, through art, dance, music, oral narratives, food and drink.

Nature also forms the backbone of their economic structure and occupation, which is mostly agriculture and hunting. The communities celebrate festivals and rituals that are deeply embedded in nature both, contextually and philosophically. The night between days marks their sense of time, and the seasons guide their sense of growth with respect to agriculture. Thus, in an indigenous community, the art, art practices and the knowledge transfer are situated in the social and religious context. They rarely believe in idol worship, though in recent times we see the influence and presence of the Hindu deities, such as *Ganesha*, in their artwork. According to Dubbu Baria, a Bhil artist who mostly paints *Ganesha* in the Bhil style, there is a popular demand for Indian Gods and Goddesses especially *Ganesha*, by the prospective buyers of contemporary Bhil Art. We find similar influences in other folk artforms such as Maithili (Heinz, 2006, 1997) and Gond (Mahapatra, 2017). However, the Bhil Adivasis continue to believe and pray to their community Gods and Goddesses (*Kul Devi*) in their annual festivities that are celebrated with offering the deities with homemade alcohol (*mahua*), tobacco (*ganja*), meat and grains. Thus, these cultural elements of a community are forever dependent and reflective of the environment and socio-economic surroundings, and hence, always in transition.

Even though indigenous communities share similar characteristics in beliefs and philosophies, they should not be understood and perceived as a homogenous community. In this research, we enquire about the indigenous art-pedagogy through the case study of the Bhil Adivasi community that may have similarities with other indigenous art practices in spirit and pedagogy practices, but unique in its own beliefs, art practices, oral narratives and festivals.

Introducing the Bhil Adivasis

The term Adivasi, coined in the 1930s, was derived from the Hindi word, '*adi'* meaning 'of the earliest times or from the beginning' and *'vasi'* meaning 'inhabitants'. Adivasi represents the indigenous people of India who are the earliest inhabitants of the land. Tribal, on the other hand, represents the aboriginal people forming minority groups and could belong from anywhere in

the world[9]. Thus, with the above context in mind, there is a need to clarify that henceforth I would use the term Adivasi instead of Tribal to represent indigenous communities of India.

The Bhil Adivasi is the second largest indigenous community of India after the Santhals and the Gonds. The Bhils are classified by the Indian constitution[10] as a tribe inhabiting the western Deccan regions and central India. The Bhils are also known to be a migratory tribe (Naik, 1956) residing in MP, Gujarat and Rajasthan. In Madhya Pradesh they mainly live in Jhabua, Thandla, Petalawad, Alirajpur, Jobat, Narkundi, Bag, Chhota Udaipur, Dhar, Barwani, Khargone, Talod, Shahada, Sirpur, Amjhera and Ratlam areas. They speak the Bhil language, a subgroup of the Indo-Aryan languages. Bhils have also settled in the Thaparkar district in Sindh, Pakistan and the borders of Bangladesh near Tripura. Further, they are divided into a number of endogamous territorial divisions, which in turn have a number of clans and lineages. Many Bhils now also speak the language of the region they reside in, such as Marathi, Hindi and Gujarati.

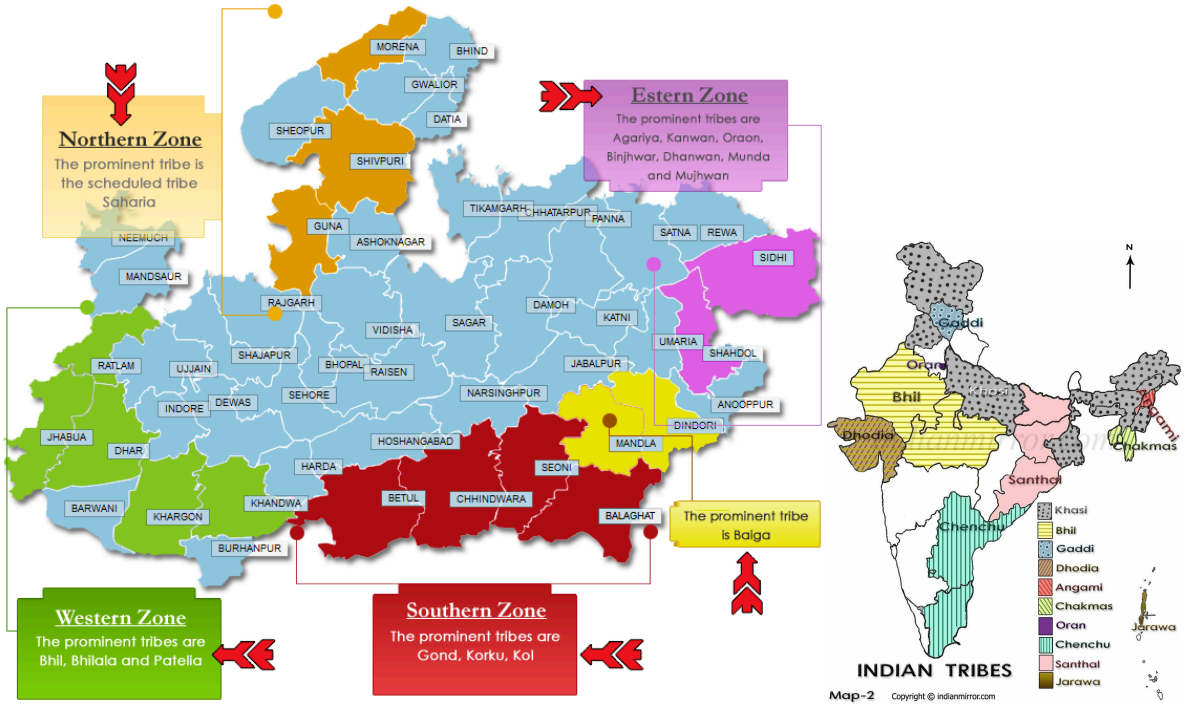


Image 1: Map of the Bhil settlements in MP; Inset: Indian tribes map

The Bhils, like all *Adivasis*, live close to nature with their sole economy based on agriculture. The Bhils of Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh, presently are a community of settled farmers, with a significant minority who are landless agricultural labourers. For them, a subsidiary occupation

[9] According to Indian tribal heritage, the terminology of tribes, Adivasi have individual meaning and unique identity. https://indiantribalheritage.org/?p=15257

[10] The Bhils as classified by the Indian constitution https://www.prsindia.org/sites/default/files/bill_files/ST%20order%20%28A%29%20Bill%2C%202019.pdf

remains hunting and gathering. When rain fails, they are forced to migrate to Bhopal, Kota and Delhi to work as construction labour. Some choose to work in the cities between the sowing and harvesting seasons. Traditionally the Bhils were a matriarchal society with most communities practicing their own belief patterns and customary institutions within a broad frame of indigenous religion (Naik, 1956). The community has, with time, integrated the religious and cultural practices of the region which they have settled in. Presently, the Bhils residing in Gujarat and parts of Madhya Pradesh, often identify themselves as Adivasis practicing a sect of Hindu religion, with Nidhi and Tadvi Bhil following Islam, and few sub-groups in the Dangs following Christianity. However, they continue to worship tribal deities such as Baba Dev, Mogra Deo and Sitla Matta.

Bhil is an ancient Adivasi community which finds mention in mythological legends such as Mahabharata[11] and Ramayana[12], and therein they are referred to as Nishad. There are multiple origin myths (Annexure II) of the Bhils that date back to the beginning of the world. The Bhils consider Valmiki[13], Eklavya[14] and even Lord Shiva[15] as their ancestors. The term Bhil is probably derived from "Bil", a Dravidian term used for a bow. There is a saying in Sanskrit- *"Bhidanti Iti Bhillah*", which means a Bhil is the one who pierces. The Bhils are also good marksmen and even today, like to keep their bow and arrows with them, when in their villages. The young Bhils even kill the fish in small rivers or ponds with bow and arrow (Naik, 1956).

[11] In Mahabharata, the longest epic the world has ever seen and written about 200 B.C. the Bhils are referred to under the name of Pulinda as participants in the Great War described in the epic.

[12] Valmiki's Ramayana, which is believed to have been composed about 500 B.C. is also aquainted with the Bhils. They fought in Rama's army against Rawan, the despotic demon from lanka (Ceylon). Rama the seventh avatar of Vishnu, is said to have eaten berries from the hand of a Bhil woman, Sabari. If, as is generally supposed, Rama should have lived and reined about 1600 B.C., the Bhils must have been a people known in India since the time of Moses' appearance in Egypt. Besides these two epics, other holy books of the Hindus, e.g. Panch Tantra mention the Bhils.

[13] Valmiki, the great author of Ramayana, was a Bhil. He was originally a Bhil bandit, who turned saint and later wrote the Ramayana.

[14] Eklavya too, was a Bhil who learned archery by making a statue of his teacher and practicing the art in from of the idol. However, the legend goes that he sacrificed his right thumb to his teacher when asked for.

[15] Bhils also consider themselves to be the descendants of Lord Shiva. According to them, once to relieve himself of severe pain, Lord Shiva went in search of herbs in the jungle. It so happened that he met a young Bhil woman and his pain disappeared completely just by the sight of the young lady. The lord was fascinated and proposed to marry the lady. He had several children of that union. But, one of his sons was very mischievous and crafty. He killed Nandi, the bull of Lord Shiva. The Lord was furious and as punishment, he was banished to the forest. It is said, that his descendants were later known to be the Bhils. In mythology the Bhil woman is glorified as being plucky, pretty and chaste. Thus, for instance, when Pravati wanted to charm Mahadev in order to make him forgo his ascetic life, she adopted the shape of a bhildi (bhil woman).

Historians believe that the Bhils mainly inhabited the Kushalgarh and Udaipur districts of Rajasthan where they were referred to as Damore and served the Rajput chieftains. This is one of the reasons why they also consider themselves to be the descendants of the Rajputs. There are mainly four subgroups of the Bhil Adivasis, namely, the Bhilala, Patilya, Barela and Rathiya. Other communities as Nayak, Dhanuk, Tadvi and Mankar also consider themselves to be the descendants of the Bhils (Naik, 1956).

The rich cultural tradition of the Bhils of Madhya Pradesh is manifested in their rituals, songs and dance, tattoos, ornament designs, myths and lore (Appendix III). The presence of art and art related practices in their homes point to the centrality of art in their traditions. During their *Pithora*[16] Festival, the walls are plastered every year and decorated with clay relief work, *mittichitra*, and paintings. Their materials are simple, homemade – pigments extracted from the leaves and flowers of various plants, daubed on with brushes made of rag or a cotton swabs fastened to twigs of neem. Everything connected with the Bhil life is painted – the Sun, the Moon, the animals, trees, insects, rivers, fields, mythological figures, the god, *Bhilvat Deo Baramathya*, who has twelve heads, *Ektangyo*, who has only one leg. The Bhils and the Bhilala's[17] share a rich culture of visual-tribal art, dance and the *Pithora* Painting. Other traditional practices that involve art as a part of their livelihood are the creation of the *Gathlas*[18], *Gohari*[19] paintings, crafts in the *Bhagoriya mela*[20], decorating their houses before *Diwali* and the making wedding chowks. The Bhils are also known for their technique of making homemade liquor with mahua flowers during the *Pithora* season.

[16] As the story goes, once in the kingdom of Dharmi Raja, the people had forgotten how to laugh or sing and dance because the land was dry and there was no rainfall. Pithora, the prince, then had undertaken a journey on horseback to the abode of the goddess *Himali Harda*, who blessed them with rain and in turn them back their laughter, songs and dance. The Bhil *Pithora* wall paintings depicts this origin folk tale where every year, price Pithora comes to reside in their homes and bless them with ample food, laughter, songs and dance.

[17] A neighbouring sub-tribe of the Bhils, believed to be a mixed caste sprung from the alliances of immigrant Rajput's with the Bhils of the Central India.

[18] The Bhils have a practice of erecting a Gathla or a memorial pillar for the dead. Earlier, it was made of stone or wood with relief work but now sometimes, it is also made of cement and painted on it. These Gathlas are made in memory of their deceased relative especially for those who die of snake bite, killed by wild animals or meet an accidental death. Figures of the sun, the moon, horse rider, the dead person and some of the favourite things of the dead are carved on these pillars.

[19] Gohari festival is the celebration of the cattle where they decorate them and participate in fairs. Often buying and selling of cattle also takes place in these fairs. Celebrations follow with making mahua, dancing, community feasts and games. Often people with *mannat* (wishes) fall in the path of running cattle, once their wishes are fulfilled.

[20] Around Holi festival a Bhagoriya fair is held in their villages, which is famous for enthusiastic participation of young boys and girls. In this fair, the young Bhils gift beetle leaves to one another if they are in love and elope in consentment. Later, if they find themselves compatible, they return to their homes to get married else, the relationship stands annulled.

The traditional Bhil visual art consists of the *Pithora* painting and the *Kothi* relief art that is created on their walls of their houses, on the storage place for the grains and the *Gathlas*. The relief art is usually made with hay and mud tightly bound together. These traditional practices were mostly done by or in presence of their community priest, called *badwas* on a ritualistic occasion, followed by prayers and a community feast. The contemporary Bhil art on the other hand, are practiced mostly on canvas and sometimes as murals for museums. The images below list some of the traditional and contemporary art practices of the Bhils.



Image 2: Traditional and the contemporary art of the Bhils

1.1.2 Rationale

Choosing the Bhil Adivasi Community of Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh, India

The word Adivasi leaves us with an impression of the community being situated in the past and hence, we often disconnect them with the present and deny their evolved existence in the present times. Presently, while the Bhil art in Gujarat reflects the traditional practices of Pithora art and that of Rajasthan ceases to exist[21], the Bhil art in Madhya Pradesh is undergoing a

[21] As documented from the respondents during the fieldtrip.

transformation in its form, content, gender practices, purpose and growth of the artist community in the present. The Bhil artists had migrated from their villages to Bhopal, in search of employment and were later associated with the Museum of Man, Tribal Museum, State Museum and Bharat Bhavan as either daily wage labourers or artists. On one hand, the Bhil Adivasis celebrate their traditional festival called the *Pithora* by painting ritualistic images on the walls of their homes and at the same time, make Bhil Art on canvas for commercial purposes. Thus, a new art and profession is born within the community and words such as 'painting', 'art', and 'artist' form an integral part of their daily lives. An art that was confined to the traditional rituals transitioned to individual expressions/narratives and the art that was confined to the males of the society are now practiced by passionate artists, irrespective of their caste and gender. This interesting transition prompted me to confine my field engagement primarily to Madhya Pradesh and its borders.

Further, this transition is comparatively recent, compared to the other communities, that situates the indigenous art in the present by addressing the sustainability of their pedagogy and the dynamism and evolution of the art itself. This duality in practice of the traditional *Pithora* and the commercial Bhil Art is a perfect ground to understand the dissemination of knowledge which forms the crux of my research question. Thus, at this field site I could experience the co-existence and transition of the traditional *Pithora* and the commercial Bhil Art (Jain, 1984).

Rationale of the Study

The study of the dissemination of knowledge in the Bhil indigenous community is extremely important for several reasons.

There has been research documenting the migration patterns, cultivation, agricultural equipment's, demographic features of the Bhils of Madhya Pradesh and their association with ancient mythology. However, there is scant literature documenting the rich and vibrant tradition of the *Pithora* artform transitioning to give way to the contemporary Bhil Art, practiced by the Bhil community of Madhya Pradesh. A tradition that is believed to be hundreds of years old, needs to be documented, mapped, reflected upon and at the same time, acknowledged as a living form that is in transition with the present times.

There is a need to understand the sustenance and continuity of the artform across several hundred years. These ancient communities have survived generations with transferring knowledge within their communities such that it was seamlessly organic, embedded in nature,

culturally inclusive and a sustainable model. Their traditional artform, often an integral part of their lifestyle, rituals and festivals, underwent transition over time to give rise to a more commercial and popular form of art. This transition of art is evident in *Patua* from Bengal (Chatterji, 2012), *Warli* from Maharashtra (Prakash & Raman, 2009) (Dalmia, 1988), *Maithili* paintings from Bihar (Fleury, 2017) (Thakur, 2017) (Heinz, 2006, 1997), *Sora* and *Patta* from Orisha (Guillaume-Pey, 2019) and *Pithora* paintings from Gujarat (Tilche, 2014) to name a few indigenous art communities of India. These communities along with their artforms and art practices, are all in transition at different paces, balancing their traditional and contemporary artforms. With the transformation of role and status of ritual paintings to commercial art, the pedagogy of art practices also underwent a metamorphosis. This 'parallel' pedagogy that co-exists with the ritual painting practices has seldom been studied for a community in transition. On one hand, the pedagogy is soaked in nature, has strong beliefs, healing powers associated with the art, and practised only during rituals as part of a multisensory ritual. On the other hand, it addresses the transition in art, change in material used, demands of the new patrons, interventions, influences, exploration, and experimentation of the community artists. Thus, before the practices of knowledge transfer and its philosophy get further adapted to the present, there is a valid need to document it. This study aims to fill the gap in the literature content contributing to the knowledge of *pedagogy of indigenous art* within artist communities in transition, in this case, the Bhil artist community of Madhya Pradesh, India.

This is of particular importance as the traditional artwork evolves itself organically to give birth to a new commercial artform. The causes and effects of this transition also need to be mapped over time, which the research has attempted to briefly address in the data chapters.

Trying to understand aspects of knowledge dissemination across generations may throw several insights into the world of traditional knowledge, which perhaps could be integrated with formal teaching of art as a future scope. It is interesting to note that while India shies away (Kumar, 1991) (Dharampal, 1983) from its ancient pedagogy practices that are embedded in nature and culturally inclusive, contemporary teaching-learning practices like Eco-art education, having its roots in nature, are becoming popular practices in the West. Eco-art education is also referred to as environmental or ecological art education. It integrates art education with environmental education as a means of developing awareness and engagement with concepts such as interdependence, biodiversity, conservation, restoration, and sustainability (Inwood, 2010). This research topic has been touched upon in a non-indigenous context with the introduction of the laissez-faire approach of teaching art as 'natural' (McArdle & Piscitelli, 2002). There have

also been alternative studies on teaching 'art without teaching' (McArdle & McWilliam, 2005). Lave and Wenger (1991) argue that learning should not be viewed as merely the transmission of abstract and de-contextualised knowledge from one individual to another, but a social process whereby knowledge is co-constructed.

I was drawn to the idea of studying the dissemination of knowledge in indigenous communities as compared to my previous experiences of learning art in different structured and unstructured learning environments namely; practicing art in an unstructured environment at home, the structured environment of a school and a semi-structured environment of a design school. I was keen to understand the pedagogic approach in an indigenous community and note the differences in teaching-learning practices in these different spaces. Thus, it formed the core research questions for my thesis on Indigenous Art Pedagogy.

This study endeavours to recognise learning of an art form which is perhaps more spontaneous, natural, and organic, with the intent to draw pedagogic insights that may be attempted in the future, to impact formal and other informal learning. The study requires following an indigenous artist community from close quarters to analyse how they comprehend art as a way of life.

1.2 Aims and Objectives of the study

As mentioned earlier, my research has two main objectives namely; the primary objective of addressing the relationship of the community members with their art and nature, whereas, the secondary objective being the dissemination of art across generations. It gives rise to the following research questions.

Research Question

1. What is the nature of the relationship between an indigenous artist community and the art practiced by them?
2. How is indigenous art knowledge and its practices disseminated across generations, that is simultaneously evolving over time?

Elaborating on the above, the primary research objective is to study the nature of the relationship between the Bhil Adivasi community and the art practiced by them. This includes the way the community perceives art, relates to it and depends on it to mediate their

relationships with objects, people, nature, ancestors and even God. The study will also try to examine the transition of artform over time with the market playing a central role in creating a demand for these artworks, its associated monetary benefits and exposure to the world beyond. The study will therefore focus on both the traditional (*Pithora* painting) and the contemporary (Bhil Art) forms, without necessarily looking at them as two separate categories. A subset of questions stated below are derived from the above research questions that are used as guidelines to collect the data.

1. What are the beliefs and rituals practiced by the Bhil community concerning Art?
2. How does the Bhil community look at art and its positioning in their life?
3. What are the external factors causing changes in the traditional *Pithora* artform?
4. What are the ways in which the *Pithora* artform has adapted and evolved over time to give birth to the contemporary Bhil Art?
5. How is the *Pithora* artform disseminated and sustained over generations?
6. What are the central pedagogical insights that one can extract from the study?

Conclusion

With the above research questions, I visited the field site in Madhya Pradesh, India to understand and experience the importance of art in their lives of the Bhil community, and its dissemination of knowledge, over generations. However, before that, I examined literature in the area, relevant to my study, that is discussed in details in chapter 2.

Chapter 2

Review of Literature

Through my research, I attempt to explore the nature of relationships, processes and the dissemination of art practices in an indigenous community. In this chapter, I summarize the discourse that has shaped the understanding of indigenous art in all its folds and complexities. This literature review, driven by my research questions, looks at knowledge systems in ancient India with a focus on indigenous communities, the positioning of indigenous art in the colonial era and post-colonial indigenous art philosophy and practice. Further, we discuss ideas of philosophers and artists from across the globe, exploring the relationship of art with nature, the principles of art, the learning environment, the role of the participants and their relationship with the practitioners and art itself. At the end we conclude with identifying the gap in the literature that frames the rationale and sets the context of the research.

2.1 Indigenous Art Education–Knowledge Systems in Ancient India

As mentioned earlier, Indian society is not a homogenous entity but fairly complex in terms of its diversity in food habits, spoken languages, attire, religion, art practices and rituals to name a few. Not just this, it is also diverse in terms of regional specificities. Similarly, the team indigenous communities are not a monolithic homogeneous category but have several variations. Thus, each of them has their unique knowledge systems, cultures and practices. These societies are mostly self-sufficient, and their systems and practices respond to their immediate geographical and social needs. Surveys and reports on the state of education conducted by British officials during the eighteenth and nineteenth century reflected well-defined systems of education, including higher education. The three successive Adam's Reports (1835-38) explored the state of indigenous education systems in the nineteenth century and found that each village or community had their unique education institution (e.g. *tol* or *patshala*[22]) for transmission of what they thought was important. Even the Adivasi communities

[22] *Patshala:* A well-established schooling system of ancient times prevalent in the Indian subcontinent.

had their independent knowledge systems that represented their cultures and ensured their sustenance over generations (Dharampal, 1983).

While there is documented evidence on systems of traditional education, Dharampal (1983) observes that there was a dearth of studies that documented the teaching of art and art technologies. An early 19th-century survey in the Madras Presidency (ibid. 59-60) revealed the sheer variety of crafts and technologies that existed. However, these surveys were more utilitarian and served the purpose of governance (Naithani, 2005). They did not acknowledge the various artforms that were traditionally practised in India. Further, the philosophy and processes of knowledge transfer particular to art, and how they were passed on over generations remained largely ignored. The documenters, mainly scholars, administrators and missionaries, were more interested in the technologies than in the holistic understanding of the art and its context, philosophy and processes.

Chakraborty (2011) talks about how traditional artforms cannot be classified into watertight categories such as folk, tribal, classical, as they have dynamically evolved through the beliefs, ceremonies and rituals that each community held important. These artforms represent the collective repository of knowledge, skills and technologies that are passed on organically over generations and hold the key to their sustenance. In the pre-colonization period and even today within indigenous art communities of India, all traditional art objects made by the artists serve a purpose. The making of homes, textiles, paintings on the wall, ritualistic masks, manuscripts, figurines etc. all had a place in society and were an essential part of their lifestyles and the community belief systems. Each art practice in ancient India therefore was defined by a purpose, which in turn varied from community to community. Given the highly heterogeneous nature of the people and societies that were a part of the land, there coexisted a variety of art practices and processes that could be either highly structured and regimented or naturally evolved from the cultural practices of the community. Let us now look at two such divergent knowledge systems that were prevalent in India.

It may be noteworthy to mention that conventionally a large part of India has always practiced oral tradition of imparting education under the long-established *guru-shishya parampara*[23] (teacher-disciple tradition) institution. Followed in the *Vedic* era thousands of years ago, the practice ensured that every aspect of *guru's* teachings was passed on verbally and mastered through practice. The gurukul system needs to be understood on two planes, first the physical

[23] Practice or tradition

where the student goes to live with the teacher in an ashram and engages in the theory and practice of the craft, and secondly the metaphorical, where the guru takes shape as the mentor or spiritual guide of the student (Parikh, 1993 and Raina, 2002). A variety of subjects were introduced to the students ranging from language, music, culture, environment, archery, horse riding, chanting and so on and each discipline emphasized memorizing and reciting the theoretical knowledge since the practice of writing was not yet prevalent. Various texts on Indian culture have mentioned that in the *Vedic* era mantras or '*shlokas*' were chanted in musical intonations and music was an integral part of any formal gathering, occasion, religious practices and festivals. For example, a study of the guru-shishya *parampara* by Ajinkya (2011) in a *Gurukul* for learning *dhrupad* music, mentions how almost every student is taught differently. The highlight is the one-to-one relationship maintained during the period of learning. It is an immersive experience where 'the *vatavaran*[24] is maintained 24 hours a day' (Ajinkya, 2011). In the performing arts, the concept of *Natyashastra*[25] came into being following a vision that entailed physical, mental, spiritual and emotional involvement in comprehending the goals of *natya* (theatre) pertaining to both objective and subjective features (Rao, 2001). Equal importance is given to detailed and specific physical and mental factors involved, and each of their transcendence is specified at the same time to broaden the scope of experience, both for the actor and the spectator (Kumar, 1991).

The practice of visual art, however, e.g. as paintings, murals, scrolls etc., unlike the teaching of languages or crafts, was not taught formally in the Gurukul system (Kumar, 1991). Rather, it was an integral part of the lives of the people who practiced them. So much so that there exists no nomenclature for 'art' in many indigenous languages of India. Mountford (1976) observes something similar for Australian Aborigines, where there is no distinct separation of art from daily life. The act of painting is often closely associated with a ritual or festival and thus, the act of making it is also named after the ritual (Elkin, 1961). It was often patron-based, supported by kings and community members who would invite the painters for religious functions and festivals. These paintings would be based on traditional themes based on their socio-cultural scenario and human values (Pandey, 2020). Indigenous art mostly falls in this category. These artists were also engaged to express and communicate religious, cultural and moral values through mythological or origin stories, folklore, songs, etc. (Jain, 1984).

Similarly, murals, cave paintings, clay tablets, all had a spiritual, social, ritualistic or intrinsic

[24] Learning environment
[25] It stands for 'natya' as in 'to act' and 'shastra' as in to represent. It is a Sanskrit treatise on the performing arts of India.

purpose of their existence. Further, the purpose was supported by a lived experience of the community. Pandey (2020) talks about a native style that is reflected in the imagery, ideas and expression of these paintings that is often connected to the cultural consciousness and identity of the people. The art reflected the local landscape, flora, fauna, animals, lifestyles and was deeply rooted in their ways in life and belief. The art process often involved the whole family where the children would prepare the colours or help in the patterns, the elders would lead the art, facilitating learning through art experiences (Thakur, 2017). It encouraged learning through stories, rituals, customs, lifestyle and techniques which involve preparation of the colours, using the local ingredients, identifying the landscapes and being deeply rooted in nature and its nuances. This learning was inclusive of human psychology, inclinations, ambitions, achievements and one's capacities.

To illustrate the contrast with the more regimented gurukul system, Ojasi Sukhatankar (2016) writes on the practice and pedagogy of Indian Classical dance versus Folk dance. She mentions how Folk dance stands different from Classical where it is not taught through the formal *guru-shishya parampara* practiced in a *Gurukul*. She notes that folk dance is a collective living experience, practicing free expression, performed on socio-cultural occasions and an integral part of one's life. It is interesting to note that while the gurukul system of learning is romanticized to this day, the pedagogy of folk art remains largely ignored by bracketing it as part of community living and therefore the lack of the need for a special pedagogy.

2.2 Positioning Indigenous Art in the Colonial Era

The indigenous knowledge systems discussed in the previous section continued to adapt and evolve over time. It was with the advent of imperialism in the late eighteenth century that historians started to document the existing practices to suit their administrative purposes. Dharampal (1983) summarizes the various reports published during that time (e.g. by Adam, Leitner, etc.) and infers that the sense of neglect and decay of indigenous education seemed to permeate within a few decades of colonial rule. The century under subjugation and its aftermath included a massive drain out in indigenous resources. Moreover, it created a new modern society that began to view the indigenous systems with disdain. With the spread of western supremacy, impressions of decay began to plague the mind of educated Indians as well. As Kumar (1991) puts it, the English administrators saw it as their job to change the indigenous system to one that would conform to their cultural ideals. He argues that it was the advent of colonial education that destroyed the base of indigenous education–while the latter was community-based, highly flexible and inherently linked to the student's social milieu, the

former was state-led and directed, highly structured and standardized, and had no connection to the child's lived reality. As a consequence, indigenous art and crafts that were closely linked to the lived experiences of the community found little space in this new curriculum. Such indigenous practices continued to survive in closed communities but at the same time, were relegated to a space outside the purview of formal education. Mahatma Gandhi, in a British-sponsored conference on India in London held in 1931, reiterated this very perspective and illustrated how the British administrators had successfully set out to root out the indigenous knowledge systems from their very soil 'till the beautiful tree perished' (Dharampal, 1983).

Devi Prasad (1998) was an artist and educator with a critical understanding of the reason and purpose of the transition of the Indian education philosophy, especially the arts. He believed that the colonial rule of around two hundred years in India systematically and strategically changed the value system of knowledge in terms of the educational, artistic, industrial and cultural traditions of our country. So much so, that this ancient knowledge that was deeply rooted in the lifestyle of the people was uprooted and a superficial, need-based education, or in his words, training was introduced. This caused a dislocation of the value system and especially our confidence in anything indigenous. In his own words,

> *"The system of education the British constructed was totally divorced from the daily lives of the people. It could not have been otherwise. For, the sole purpose of that education was to manufacture clerks for the colonial administration. Instead of education being geared to the human needs of the community, it was built around the needs of the colonial administration, through textbooks."* (Prasad, D.1998)

With the advent of modernization and industrialization, an artform deeply rooted in the beliefs and daily practices of the people gradually started to promise economic potential. Indigenous art began to be looked at as 'consumable' (Malkani & Rajani 2017) 'commodified' (Das, 2014), 'heritage' (Herwitz, 2012) and as 'authentic' cultural products (Kulchyski, 1997) that needed to be preserved as 'relics and curiosities'[26]. Thus, *Adivasi* along with their culture, beliefs and art practices were considered to be a thing of the past, suitable for sanctuaries and museumization. However, in reality, the life and art of the indigenous people also underwent a transition. They continue to survive in the present, practice their independent ways alongside new ways of adapting to the present. As Andre Beteille (1986) puts it, rather than ideal types, a researcher is more likely to find tribes in transition.

[26] Retrieved from https://poojapm93.wordpress.com/ on 02.12.2020

Commercial interventions and exposure to artists paved the way for the transition of the traditional arts and adaptation of the artform that often challenged them to keep up with the new patronage and their demands. Traditional art was 'customized' and explored beyond the ritual context (Hoskote, 1996). Carolyn Brown Heinz, Meenakshi Thakur and Mani Shekhar Singh have made observations particular to the Maithili Adivasi community and the evolving subjectivities of the Maithili paintings (Heinz, 2006) (Thakur, 2017) (Singh, 2004). Beatrix Hauser speaks of re-evaluating Bengali Patua scroll painting (Hauser, 2002), Cecile Guillaume-Pey has written on the transformative journey of Sora paintings from ritual images to animated movies (Guillaume-Pey, 2017) whereas Alice Tilche works on the altering social and divine relations of the Bhil *Pithora* painting in transition (Tilche, 2015). As stated by Heinz (2006), a few 'celebrity' artists who are 'gifted' but not representatives of the ritual wall art of the Maithili Brahmins during weddings have altered the original form of the art. According to Chatterji (2003), folk art that has survived has had to adapt to commodification and electronic transmission. J. Swaminathan (1987) however, argues that tribal artworks have become powerful presences that need to be acknowledged in their own right. Thus, what we find common in the literature review is the transition of the art from the ritual context to the evolution of 'high art', the interventions, causes and effects. It further highlights the transition from a multisensory ritual performance to de-ritualization of paintings and re-configuration of the religious visual motifs. Thus, the transition of arts and its over-commercialization often resulted in transforming traditional ritual arts in a way that it morphed itself to exist in a new form.

These two sections of the literature review attempt to summarize the discourse on indigenous knowledge systems. The first section attempts to observe, acknowledge, identify and document this indigenous art knowledge system, in all its complexities, that form a part of the lives of the practitioners and that continues to adapt with the changing times. In the next section, we will discuss ideas about art education practices proposed by philosophers, who were known to be practitioners rather than researchers, where they look at art education as a way of life.

2.3 Indigenous Art Philosophy and Practice: Ideas from across the World

Art, not just in indigenous communities, but is essentially, a sensory experience. It involves how one looks at the world, absorbs and makes meaning of experiences, and interacts with the world through expression. Art is a unique blend of feeling, observation, imagination, spatial relationship and fact (Sahi, 2009). The philosophy of art is therefore integrally interwoven with nature and human relationships. Art practice is reflective of this overarching relationship

between human and nature. It establishes a visual language and grammar specific to a community, culture and place, exactly like the spoken language (Sahi, 2009). We will now look at a few important philosophers from different parts of the world who have explored this art-human-nature relationship through their work.

Steiner (1922) dedicated his life exploring the relationship between science and spirituality, which later came to be known as spiritual sciences or anthroposophy. His philosophy attempted to understand spirituality in eastern philosophy with a clarity of the western philosophy, the tools of which relied on arts, nature and rhythm in the human body. All three exist in the context of indigenous art as well. Tagore too emphasises the relationship between human and nature and tried to explore it through his concept of Ashram living. In his essay titled, Personality (1917) Tagore says that 'Art is the response of an individual's creative soul to the call of the Real'. With such words from Tagore, art assumes an exalted role from the metaphysical to the sublime and, eventually, the spiritual. He aptly mentions that we can attempt to express it through our work. Yet, it remains a mystery, as we cannot analyse or measure it. Tagore differentiates it with science, as it has a characteristic that does not coincide with our world of experience and expression. Montessori (1949) too, believed that art (stories, visual arts, music) is an expression and voice of a community that seals the existence of the civilization.

Man, as part of the society and constantly interacting with the environment, stores group experiences, receptions and perceptions. The characters, objects, events and occurrences are never in isolation. Dewey (1934) considers art as 'the most complex expression of longing and aspirations of a society'. They are connected in space and time and thus, contextualized. They are the transporters of meanings. Thus, stories of nature, birth, death, marriage, joy and loss, speak of the people in their local perspective and yet generate universal emotions. For Dewey, art is thus embedded in the context and a reflection of it. It is for the outsiders of the community, to understand their culture and beliefs surrounding it. The interpretation of the chaotic balance of nature binds the community through a belief system. It is protected and nurtured within the community through a pedagogy that is practiced over generations. He also proposed re-establishing community life through artwork that can transform abstractions and philosophy into reality through lived experiences (Dewey, Tufts 1908/1978).

Art helps to address the human conflict, reconnect and strengthen ties with one's self. Krishnamurti (2008) argues that art, when divorced from life, has no significance or contribution to one's growth. He believed that only when art is an integral part of life and a daily practice, can it become an integral part of our expressions. Nandalal Bose (1952) in a similar vein

considered the practice of the art of being a lifelong meditation rather than a hobby. He thought of art as a practice leading to spirituality and inner peace. Similarly, this journey of art practice is often self-learnt, self-reflected, self-motivated and practiced. Devi Prasad, artist, art educator and also a student of Nandalal Bose, echoed a similar viewpoint and felt that art cannot necessarily be taught as we understand teaching in the western world. He says,

"I realized that if during my childhood had I not had the opportunity to "meddle" with the tools and the raw materials of the craftsmen who renovated our house, I would not have developed the taste for "making things"! Without this experience would I have understood children's nature, as I think I did in later life, I often wonder!"

(Prasad, D. Art as the Basis of Education 1998)

According to Prasad, the main objective of education is to prepare an individual to become an integral part of his community and at the same time, nurture his inherent human nature so that it contributes positively to his humankind. In his words, "educational planning will be sound only if it can strike a healthy balance between the socio-economic ideals of human nature with the potential of building a liberated individual". Thus, the inclusion of arts and its objective in education is not solely to train the physical skills, but to develop a sensitive heart and nurture a thinking mind that together contributes towards holistic growth. Like Aurobindo too feels, the first principle of teaching is that nothing can be taught (Das, 2016).

Now we attempt to discuss art pedagogy further by specifically looking at the role of the environment, participants (teachers and students), relationships and also the components of art practice.

Role of the Environment

Interaction with the immediate surroundings and the environment helps to develop one's perception or understanding of the world. This expanded perception cultivates an understanding of the surroundings, societal balance, and practical insights on survival. According to Dewey, art functions as experience and the artistic process functions as the bridge between the self and the environment. He believed that the aesthetics of beauty and design couldn't be taught or understood through second-hand experience. It needs to be experienced and cultivated from childhood by living in an aesthetically pleasing environment and keep interacting with it. Dewey (1934) also believed that these societal insights converse a moral purpose in humans and initiate

him/her to take an action. It further stimulates a reflection on the purpose of life. Thus, he recounts that an aesthetic and harmonious environment develops a standard of taste in a child, whereas barren surroundings eliminate a desire for beauty. This nurturing and stimulating environment triggers natural expression and exploration in a child and starts shaping the child's inclination. The environment also contributes to developing empathy in a child as it activates his/her relationship with their surroundings and helps them grow as enthusiastic and participatory individuals. These participatory individuals play a key role in keeping a society or community together, such as the shamans or storytellers of the ancient civilizations. In this context, art transcends beyond personal context and comprehends values that bind societies.

Montessori (1949) believed in introducing an immersive art environment for the children in their early years, like the preschool. Through art, they are constantly exploring, creating and expressing themselves. Montessori schools, based on her philosophy, provide a rich art-space in every classroom. Visual and rhythm aesthetics are introduced through colours, rhymes and play activities carefully designed, keeping the above in mind. She trusted art to connect man to his/her environment and through it, reveal his larger purpose. Thus, the environment played a critical role in addressing the purpose of education. She observed that a homely (secure) and stimulating environment was ideal to encourage learning. The philosophy of Jane Sahi's 'Sita School' too is deeply rooted in the environment. She believes that a school prepares the child for the life ahead that is in tune with the self and the environment. She aims to provide a platform and cultivate joy, wonder, reverence, sensitivity, creativity and human empathy that cannot be learnt through textbooks.

Tagore (1917) has also emphasized on an intimate relationship with one's cultural and natural environment for holistic development. He believed that real education connected one to the environment, people and the larger universe. It cultivated the feelings of the 'mind, heart and will'. He also truly believed that nature is the guiding mentor who helps us understand our mind, heart and soul. It is one's best teacher. It encourages self-reflection, self-realization, and self-correction. He strongly believed that the correlation between man and nature was most free, unadulterated and innocent in the early years. He encouraged playing with soil, twigs, water, sand, flowers, stones, seeds, etc.… things that are essentially free in nature. It would thus develop sensitivity and empathy in the child through direct interaction and experience of nature. He believed that in the early years, the consciousness is most alert and agile and thus a critical time to develop a relationship and connect with the larger universe. Here, nature acts as the guiding force of the consciousness, and what shapes the child's character (O'Connell, 2010).

Profoundly influenced by educators like Friedrich Froebel (Frobel & Jarvis, 1895), Founder of kindergarten, Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi (Pestalozzi & Heinrich, 1977) and Maria Montessori (Montessori, 2004) understood the importance of learning through engaging activities. Rather than teaching the child, she believed that a responsible teacher's role was to create an environment for the child to learn on her own. The expertise of the teacher lay in creating this nurturing environment that had a balance of activities to engage, challenges to stimulate, and variety to explore. The engagement with art develops the motor skills, control of actions, hand and finger strength, eye-hand coordination, dexterity and concentration in children. Unlike adults, the children are involved in the process of art-making rather than the final product. Thus, the process contributes to self-development, satisfaction and inner joy. Hence, at the Montessori (2004), the children are encouraged to explore and play with art as a form of self-expression where the teacher's focus on the process and not the product. Dewey too believed that these students further engaging with art develop a sense of empowerment, critical analysis, principles of democracy and responsibility (Goldblatt, 2006). With art as core education (Dewey, 1925), the students learn to investigate, question, communicate and construct their lived experiences. This new knowledge that was self-initiated and expressed generates a sense of empowerment. The analysis of information, making connections on various levels, categorizing, comparing, meaning-making and finding patterns of the artworks develop critical thinking and enhanced cognitive skills.

Sahi and Sahi (2009) emphasize the importance of a rich sensory environment. A teacher must be aware that each child has a different pace and style of learning. It is dependent on their temperament, experiences, emotional and intellectual growth, and thus the path of learning becomes unique for each child. The time for learning in young children, according to Sahi, should be allocated for the time of experimentation and not for practicing rules and overemphasizing on skill development. Thus, the teacher's function is to facilitate the experimentation of the child by providing space and materials and being a responsive and sympathetic listener to the child. The teacher encourages the child to touch, listen, see, move and manipulate materials, especially natural materials and asks probing questions to help them look at the world around them with eyes of inquiry. As the child grows, the teacher has to continue feeding their curiosity, keep them engaged and keep alive the excitement in the learning process.

Krishnamurti (1974), on the other hand, emphasizes on sharing responsibilities of education of a child, by both the teachers and the parents. As educators, he feels the first and the foremost task is to identify one's prejudices, vices, fears, assumptions and societal conditioning before one attempt to further pass it on to the child. Again, having a healthy teacher-student and parent-child relationship is important for understanding the intangible sensitivities of the child and strengthening his/her inner nature. He talks about the need for a healthy learning environment where a child can learn at his/her own pace and liking. The role of a teacher in any Krishnamurti foundation is to address the natural insecurities of human beings, either in their spiritual or societal growth. This balance in growth and its holistic component together contributes to education.

Aurobindo has said that art condenses a lot of theories of education into pedagogy, closer to an integral approach to education (Das, 2016). Introduction to art at an early age makes learning a self-starting, self-propelling process. An ideal teacher's responsibility is not to teach, but to create an environment of learning. His natural surrounding and environment facilitate the self-learning of the child. Similarly, Steiner's pedagogy seeks to encourage learning by imitation and observation that comes naturally in all human beings. On one hand, this encourages self-learning from the environment around and on the other, self-reflection of the assimilated knowledge. It aims to develop the intellectual, artistic and practical skills of a child integrated holistically that connects the child to his immediate environment and further to the universe. His pedagogy, popularly practiced in the Waldorf Schools[27], emphasis on knowing the inner self, the purpose of birth, the contribution to the society and growth of the spiritual self. By this, Steiner means that art needs to be practiced as a way of teaching and not confined to a subject of art education. Often, in a Waldorf classroom, the children are asked to paint a lecture. The children make their notebooks, toys and learning material using art and craft as a medium. Further, they are also responsible to clean their classrooms and workspace. The teacher introduces art in her way of speaking, dressing and teaching. Further, she practices the forms of art such as narrating stories, theatre, painting, rhymes, music and so on. Thus, the children acquire some introduction to art and its understanding at a very early age.

[27] Waldorf Education was developed in Europe nearly 100 years ago, by Austrian philosopher, social reformer, and visionary, Rudolf Steiner. Today, it is an independent school movement practiced around the world.

Like in Steiner's Waldorf Schools, Tagore's Shantiniketan[28] also introduced arts as aesthetics in the curriculum rather than confining it as a subject. Tagore initially categorized education at Shantiniketan as education of the senses, education of intellect and cultivation of feelings. Later, he further categorized it and suggested an early exposure to intellectual development, physical development, aesthetic development and spiritual development as part of holistic education that led to the holistic growth of the child. He emphasized on intellectual development to counterbalance emotional instability and immaturity. He believed that the development of the imagination, creativity, freethinking, futuristic thinking, strengthening of spirit and curiosity and alertness of mind cannot be learnt through textbooks. Rather, interaction with peers and debates is encouraged, where students have their own views and standpoints (Bhaya, 2008). At Shantiniketan, aesthetic development is given as much importance as intellectual development. Music, visual art, dance, drama and literature were given great importance at the school. The students practiced them unanimously in their evening free times, such that it unconsciously became a way of life. He believed that pottery, visual arts, crafts, music, dance and likewise each of them there is a grammar of procedure that has to be learned, but it is a grammar, which is not detached from life. The campus has multiple workshops and craft corners. The students were strictly barred from 'studying textbooks' in the evenings but encouraged to interact with the community, play, engage in creative arts, performance or simply submerge in the existing art environment. Physical development is encouraged through yoga, games, sports and most essentially, dance. Spiritual development is initiated through self-reflection and self-realization. Tagore believes that nature plays a vitally important role in spiritual development (Ganihar & Policepatil, 2019).

Devi Prasad (1998) argues that a teacher's foremost responsibility is to create a learning environment. This should be followed by being a mentor, giving assurance and security, inspiring the child, removing doubts and confusion, understanding their inner personality and helping them define and express it. He believes that a student-teacher relationship is built with a sense of togetherness, mutual love, care and inner growth. Both have to constantly nurture this spirit of exchange. In the words of Tagore, "The teacher's heart continues to receive every moment of his life and that is why he continuously gives himself." Prasad believes that an art teacher should treat his students as fellow artists and active members of the community. They both learn together as art is an exploratory pursuit which always brings a novel experience to both, even if it is practiced again and again. Prasad feels that an ideal teacher has a good sense

[28] Shantiniketan was first established by Devendranath Tagore as an educational hub which was later expanded by his son, Rabindranath Tagore. Shantiniketan is a university town today, with the establishment of Visva-Bharati.

of discretion and aesthetics that he needs to transfer to his students. This is built through patience, encouraging self-expression, setting examples through the teacher's work and giving the students their due recognition when they deserve.

Devi Prasad (1998) reminds that in India we have never been able to compartmentalize art and life. The main objective of education was the pursuit of knowledge and contribution to the community or larger humanity. Thus, education was related to the professional family and social needs of young learners. Artisans too had their own 'gharanas' or educational traditions, in which along with learning the skills of their trade, social, religious as well as ethical values and their practice were given great importance. He further delves into the importance of the artistic environment around that provides a natural space for learning the art. Thus, art in such an environment is learnt, cultivated, practiced and lived. It is not necessarily taught, as we understand teaching in the western world.

Art, as viewed by these philosophers, artists, practitioners and connoisseurs as discussed above, has always served a larger purpose. The process of art is more important than the product because art is the medium or tool of expression through which the larger purpose is achieved. This purpose has varied from Dewey's understanding of lived democracy to Tagore and Krishnamurti's realization of the path to freedom and self-discovery. The artists and the audience both connect on a common ground of responsibility when they share the common emotion and expression through their work of art. It could be based on social concerns, raising awareness, standing against oppression, discrimination, socio-political-economic scenarios, etc. Together, they form the public consciousness.

2.4 Conclusion

In the last section, we discussed ideas on education incorporating art practices proposed by philosophers. However, it is also important to keep in mind that these philosophers were essentially practitioners rather than researchers, which has its own strengths and weaknesses. Thus, these recordings may seem direct, often-prescriptive and instrumental where they look at art education as a way of life.

To summarize the insights gained from the chapter, while speaking of art pedagogy practices in the West, we see a progression in thought and reforms in the field where one moves towards accepting the physiological, psychological, emotional and spiritual role of art in life. They eventually identify art as not just a subject but, rather a way of being. On the other hand, in ancient civilizations like India, art was always a way of life, deeply embedded in the

community's beliefs and practices and so much so, that it was difficult to think of art in isolation. However, as this ancient civilization grew older with time and specifically, strewn with the liabilities of the post-colonial leftovers, the once formidable and extraordinary education system started fading away, giving way to other schools of thought, eventually losing its relevance to anything indigenous in the way. Today, as we see the west is progressing towards acceptance of art as a practice, the education system in India still seems to be overwhelmed by the traditional western pedagogy of treating art as an isolated subject in schools. At the same time, the myriad culture and the huge population in India allows various reformers and philosophers to establish and preserve the art in life through smaller, informal schools and institutions and communities that keep the practice alive through their beliefs and traditions.

The sections of this chapter have therefore examined indigenous knowledge systems, their purpose and evolution, and myriad influences. It has been established above that art cannot be viewed in isolation and has to be understood in connection to the lived world of the people who practice it. Adivasi art finds mention in many articles and papers about the transmission of knowledge through successive generations, under the pretext of traditional belief and cultural preservation. This is where a more serious reflection is required to make sense of the indigenous art in its context. While the processes and skills involved in the various indigenous artforms have been expertly documented by researchers, a lacuna arises in the area of transmission of that indigenous knowledge and dissemination of art that has sustained over generations. The pedagogy of folk-art stands ignored over time, perhaps more so because it doesn't fall under the much-celebrated and often romanticized Gurukul system of learning. Learning in Adivasi communities is often loosely categorized as taking place through observation (Das, 2011), or through western notions of apprenticeship learning (Sabnani, 2011).

"While older women generally draw the outlines, young girls fill them in. Girls usually start learning floor-drawing from their female relatives around the age of six, the practice thus being passed down successive generations of women." (Das, 2011).

"Learning takes place through apprenticeship and observation. There is no formal training. Transfer of knowledge from father to son is stiff and formal in Bassi. Ramkishanji did not enjoy learning from his father because he felt there was very little conversation or encouragement.

Ghanshamji feels his son is not interested in learning the traditional method, which requires patience." (Sabnani, 2011).

Pedagogic transmission of art as we understand is a fairly complex, multi-dimensional experience involving the whole of the learner, the teacher and the overall context where the teaching learning takes place. Thus, here we refer to art in its entirety and not art as a subject, in narrow instrumental term, as interpreted and understood in traditional schools. This brings us to the concerns/questions such as 'whether the dissemination of art knowledge in indigenous communities can be singularly explained by observing the artist practicing his art?' Or could it be explained through the western theoretical lens of cognitive apprenticeship learning? Or does it warrant a more in-depth exploration of art-human-nature relationship and their role in the dissemination of knowledge? My research will try to unpack these questions further in the next few chapters.

Chapter 3

Research Methodology

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I discuss the methodological framework which has been adopted in consonance with the research objectives of the study. My primary research objective attempts to understand the nature of the relationship between an indigenous artist community and the art practiced by them. Based on this understanding stands the secondary objective to interpret how indigenous art knowledge and its practices have disseminated across generations, which is also simultaneously evolving over time. Thus, it required a deep engagement with the community, relationship building and mutual participation. I also had to identify a critical lens to understand the community and its relationship with art in its larger socio-cultural context. This led me to research and identify important concepts and theories in literature, and then borrow specific theoretical lens to view the complex socio-cultural context.

The theoretical lens further helped to devise a methodological framework to initiate the field work and data collection phase of the research. The methodological framework guided the study and put forward various methods and tools used for data collection. This chapter further introduces the multiple sites and the sampling methods used to identify the respondents.

In this chapter, I also reflect on how my methodological framework has evolved over the course of my field work in an attempted to understand the community and their practices better, and as a result, procure the desired data. I further encourage a discourse on the need to devise newer approaches and methodologies to guide similar ethnographic research.

3.2 Theoretical Framework

An appropriate theoretical lens to view the larger context of the cultural beliefs and practices required a macro perspective that could take into account the socio-economic-cultural experiences of the community as a whole. Given that art in such a community is integrally

woven with life, such a lens would help to look at the artform as a way of life, from a nuanced academic and holistic perspective as opposed to art as an isolated form of expression. Durkheim's conceptualization of *the sacred and the profane* (1912) helps to understand indigenous art as rooted in its religion and beliefs, which in turn leads to art being deeply ingrained in the daily activities of the community. Further, moving from art practices as a whole and delving deeper into the artform in itself, one would also need to look at its integral components namely; the oral narrative, the visual narrative and the visual form. I have adapted Paniker's (2003) approach to categorize India's rich oral literature and Dehejia's (1990) approach to visual narratives, to fit into my understanding of the visual narratives and the associated oral narratives, of the Bhil community. Finally, for art dissemination, I have used the much-cited cognitive apprenticeship learning model (Collins, Brown & Newman, 1989) to understand the nuanced processes that are involved in the organic dissemination of knowledge over generations. Therefore, I have used multiple theoretical lenses to scaffold the study. The proposed theoretical framework for my analysis is depicted in the diagram below.

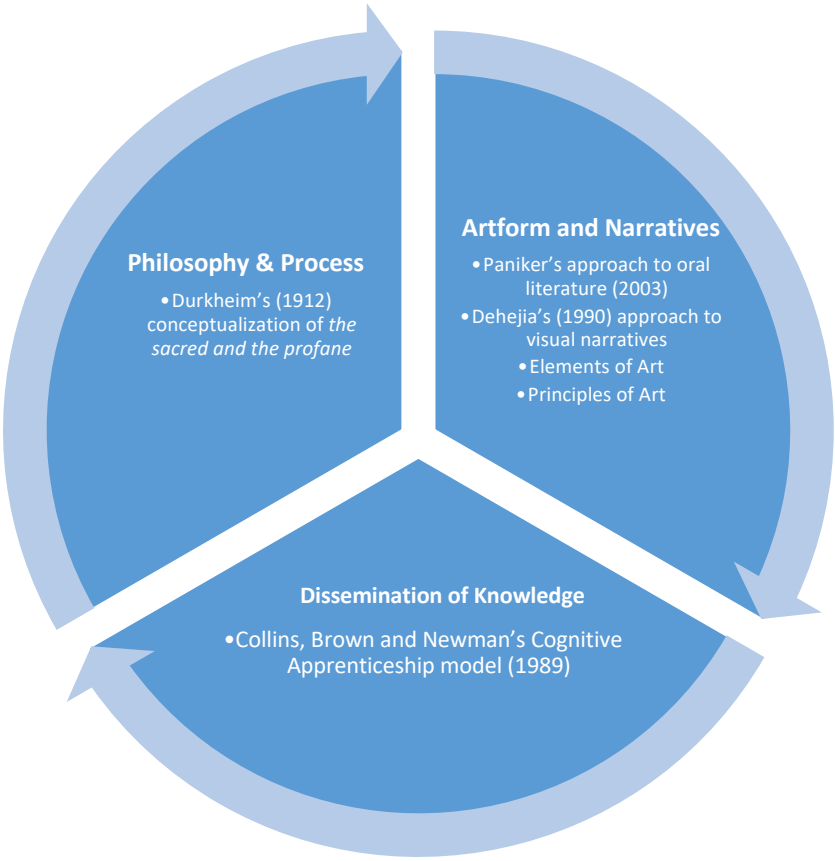


Image 3: Theoretical Framework used for the Research

According to Durkheim (1912), the essential parts of any religious system is based on the *sacred* and *profane* concepts of things. *Sacred things* are those isolated and protected by powerful interdictions whereas, *profane things* are those which, according to those interdictions, must remain at a distance from their sacred counterparts. He further reiterates that, "*religious beliefs* are representations which express the nature of sacred things and their relations, either with one another or with profane things; *religious rites* are rules of conduct which prescribe how one should behave in the presence of sacred things; and finally, where "a certain number of sacred things sustain relations of co-ordination or subordination with each other in such a way as to form a system having a certain unity," (Durkheim, 1912). These practices, beliefs and rites thus together constitute a *religion*. These constituents are interdependent on one another and tied together by the concept of *totem*[29], or a religious symbol, that serves as an emblem of a community. Thus, the totemic symbol represents the clan, creates a bond of kinship and imparts the quality of being sacred. The theoretical idea of Durkheim, based on the belief that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts, generates the emotional energy or effervescence of the community. It is interesting to note that the concepts of sacred and profane are bilaterally opposite to one another. One cannot exist without another's presence. A community comes together to create a sacred object and separate it from the profane. Thus, the emotional belief of the community is larger than all the individuals put together. The high levels of emotional energy or effervescence generated when a community gathers together is illustrative of this process of reinforcing morals and values.

The theoretical lens of Durkheim contributed towards situating the study in content, providing a macro lens to observe and make sense of human behaviours and beliefs associated with art and art practices within the Bhil community. As mentioned in the previous chapter the association and relationship of the indigenous Bhil community with their art practices is quite different from our urban understanding and relationship with art, even as an urban artist. Hence, when studying an artist community, where art is a part of ritual, it is imperative to therefore have a deeper understanding of the social concepts of ritual, community, sacred and profane at the very outset.

[29] In the Bhil community, the *Pithora horse* stands as the totem of the community; as explained in details in the data Chapter 4.

K. Ayyappa Paniker, in his book 'Indian Narratology' (2003) attempted to categorize the various forms of India's rich oral literature and further analysed its content and nature. Taking the narrative literature of India as a whole into consideration and studying their exclusive features vis-a-vis the narratives produced in other cultures, the author identified ten distinctive features in the narrative literature in India. He coined them as *Interiorization, Serialization, Fantasisation, Cyclilisation, Allegorisation, Anonymisation, Elasticisation of Time, Spatialisation, Stylisation* and *Improvisation*. Paniker's proposed analytical categories informed the study with a greater understanding of the narrative that was addressed and elaborated in the Bhil artform and connect it to its larger cultural references. Below, I briefly share Paniker's proposed features in the Indian narrative literature.

In *interiorization*, the text has a subtext or counter text or a parallel narrative that forms the core of the story. Thus, there exists a contradiction or contrast between the surface text and its internal essence, that is often fore-looked by a shallow reader. The cleverer the narrator, the more complex becomes the inner fabric and simpler the outer framework. Ramayana is an example of this narrative form. *Serialization*, as the name suggests, has a series of episodes that could be streamlined together around a single protagonist. This episodic flexibility of the Indian narrative form allows variations of tone and style, adding descriptions of nature and space and filling gaps through humour, songs or dance. Thus, it makes the Indian narrative highly adaptable to the region and newer audience, making it a living entity. Mahabharata is an example of this narrative form. *Fantasisation* celebrates a phenomenon of felt reality rather than observed reality. It is an interface (world) shared by the imagination of the author and the imagination of the audience. It is unique to the Indian and Asian narratives. The Vedas, Puranas and Fairy Tales fall under this genre. *Cyclilisation* binds the notion that every event or story may repeat itself sometime in the future, as it may have repeated its past. Jataka stories, embedded in rebirth and karma, are the best examples of this form. In *Allegorisation*, the author speaks in allegories and transposes the human characteristics onto animals as if possessing similar traits of nature. Panchatantra tales are an example of this form. *Anonymisation* is a unique characteristic of Indian narratives where the author chooses to stay anonymous and often addresses the gods or a mythical character as its original teller. For example, the vast literature of the Puranas is ascribed to Vyasa and *Brhatkatha* to Lord Shiva. The origin of such ancient tales are often impossible to trace historically and hence, justifiable to the author's selfless attitude. According to Paniker, narrative time in Indian ancient literature is more psychological in character than logical. Hence,

they cannot be traced back to a historical and linear time but rather, placed in the fluidity of time. This phenomenon is called *Elasticisation* of Time. This opens up the opportunity of the story being situated in any indefinite moment of time. Alternatively, Indian narratives are more constrained and specific in their placement of story within the certain framework of space. Jakata tales are located in Varanasi and Panchatantra mentions Mahilaropya. The idea of the space becoming more important than time is called *spatialisation*. Indian narratives give ample scope for Stylisation and Improvisation and thus achieves a remarkable balance. It also ensures sustainability in the motives and contents of the story. The narratives, even though guided by pre-established codes in the structure, have flexibility in improvisation through the manner of telling, showing, enacting or performing. Examples of this can be found in Indian Classical music.

According to Paniker, the *'Tribal model'*[30] can have a 'non-classical' and 'non-literary' form and at the same time address beauty in its narrative pattern. He believes that Tribal narrative is perhaps the richest and still untapped resource of the Indian narrative imagination, that is oral in composition as well as communication. It is unique to a community, owned by it and practiced by all, as part of their way of life. Thus, it highlights the collective consciousness of an individual, within the community. Further, it is not institutionalized and has a freestyle with enormous scope for improvisation.

While studying the Bhil artform, I found that every image drawn during rituals and every element in the Bhil Pithora painting had either a symbolic representation or a story behind it. Without being informed of the narrative, that was mostly translated and preserved as an oral knowledge within the community, the image/painting in isolation stood decontextualized and lost its meaning. Paniker's lens helped me concentrate on the narratives in each painting and interpret them as a visual communication. It further helped me critically analyse the characteristics in the Bhil oral narratives as explained in data chapter 4 and analysis chapter 6.

Visual Narratives

Visual Narrative, also known as visual storytelling, is a story told through the use of visuals and are often supported and enhanced through music, dance and oral narratives, as in an artist

[30] Paniker (2003) also classifies ancient Indian literature into ten models namely, The Vedic Model, The Purana Model, The Itihasa Model (Mahabharata), The Srnkhala Model (Kathasaritsagar), The Anyapadesa Model (Panchatantra, Hitopadesh), The Mahakavya Model (Kalidas), The Buddhist Model (Jatakas), The Dravidian Model (Manimekalei), Multiple Model of the Folk and Tribal Narrative and the Mixed Narrative Model (Kadambari).

community. Visual narratives have been a part of Indian culture since almost a century before Christ and observed in ritualistic paintings and ancient monuments. Through the study of the Bhil visual narratives, I identified three integral elements namely; the characters, depiction of space and depiction of time. The artist also enjoys the freedom to depict the same or similar narrative in multiple ways. In a similar vein, Vidya Dehejia identified seven distinct modes of visual narration (Dehejia, 1990) namely, *Static Monoscenic mode, Diachronic mode, Synchronic mode, Synoptic, Conflated, Continuous and Linear Narrative.* Below, we take a brief look at these modes.

In the *monoscenic* mode of narration, the artist uses a single scene from the story to stimulate the viewer's recognition of the story. It is usually a 'being in a state' or 'being in action' or a memorable moment from the story, that is easily re-collectible to the audience since the narratives were usually familiar to the audience. 'Being in a state' is a depiction of a *monoscenic* narrative when the narrative content is reduced to an image after the narrative event has taken place. In Indian narratives, 'Being in a state' it is often a larger than life image. In *synoptic* narratives, multiple scenes from a story are depicted in a single frame. However, there is no order to the sequence of the scenes. Often multiple images of the protagonist appear in the same frame without distinguishing between their space and time. In other words, multiple scenes are perceived simultaneously by the viewer, across time and situated in different spaces. Here the audience needs to be well versed with the story or needs to decode the visual narrative alongside with the oral narrative. Thus, the artist depends on the 'all-knowing' audience to fill in the gaps, arrange the story in the right order, identify and separate the space and time of each scene, to decipher the story as a whole. In other words, the audience becomes an alternate storyteller and the story has the flexibility to multiple interpretations. Thus, making him an active participant in the narrative. *Conflated* narrative is similar to synoptic mode in the sense that multiple scenes are depicted in the same frame but, unlike synoptic, the image of the protagonist is conflated instead of being repeated. In *continuous narrative mode*, there are multiple scenes depicted from the story starting from the establishment scene, all the way to the climax. In each scene, the characters are repeated but there are no framing demarcations to separate the scenes. Hence, it is called *continuous mode*. However, the viewer assumes the character exists in a different space in a different time. We find a combination of *monoscenic* and *continuous mode* of narrative at Sanchi, India. *Linear narrative*, like *continuous narrative*, has multiple scenes depicted from the story situated in different space and time. However, these scenes are framed unlike *continuous narrative*. They also have an order, generally moving from left to right. The scenes are usually framed by trees, columns, vertical divides or even with the positioning of characters.

Dehejia's (1990) narrative modes will be further explored in context to understanding Bhil artforms and illustrated in detail in the subsequent data chapters.

Vidya Dehejia's theoretical lens helped me look deeper in the Bhil artform and identify its existence as a visual narrative. This perspective immediately weaved in the community, its context, beliefs and practices and helped me have an holistic understanding of the art. For me, these images were no longer beautiful, rudimentary drawings of Adivasis but rather ancient narratives preserved and translated over generations, reaching out to its interpreters to be 'read'.

Visual Form

Meanwhile, studying visual form as an element of art, one may refer to a three-dimensional object within a three-dimensional composition (Stewart and Mary, 2006). The visual form can also be explained as the artist's way to represent or communicate using the elements of art and the principles of art. If the elements of art are described as ingredients used by the artist, the principles of art would be the method and the ways to use the ingredients. For my research, I have looked at seven basic elements of art namely, line, shape and form, colour and value, texture and space. Moreover, I have also studied seven principles of art, namely, balance, contrast, emphasis, movement, pattern, rhythm and unity or variety as discussed in chapter 6.

These elements and principles of art form the basics of all visual artforms. It also helps understanding, interpreting, dismembering and analysing the art form to identify its style and characteristics. For this study, I borrowed these elements and principles of art to understand the characteristics of the Bhil indigenous artform. On one hand, the lens helped me look deeper into the quality of image in the sense of interpreting the fluid lines, shapes, colour, value, texture, space and on the other, interpret the composition through balance, contrast, movement, pattern and rhythm. It is interesting to note that these elements and principles are quite organically and consciously transferred through practice of art in an indigenous community, though often not technically named within the community. Nonetheless, viewing a visual form through these lenses helps one intricately view and analytically interpret the characteristics of the image.

Now, we move on to choosing a lens to view the secondary research question, which is the process of dissemination of art over generations in the Bhil community. As popularly addressed by many researchers, the cognitive apprenticeship learning framework as proposed by Collins, Brown and Newman (1989), is invoked to understand the dissemination of knowledge in most

indigenous Adivasi communities. Thus, I too have borrowed the same framework to reflect and understand art dissemination in the Bhil community.

Dissemination of Knowledge

I feel that Indigenous community knowledge a partial similarity with Collins, Brown and Newman's Cognitive Apprenticeship Learning in its *Method, Sequencing, Sociology* and *Content*. For my research, I have specifically delved deeper into the *Method and Sociology* as proposed in the model.

According to Collins, Brown and Newman's Cognitive Apprenticeship model (1989) there are four important aspects of traditional apprenticeship *Method* namely, *modeling, scaffolding, fading and coaching*. In *modeling*, the apprentice observes the master at work whereas the master demonstrates the stages of the process. This also coincides with Lave and Wenger's Situated Learning model (Lave & Wenger, 1991) where the learning fundamentally happens through observation in a learning environment that is essentially *situated*. *Scaffolding* is the growing guidance received from the master to the apprentice whereas, *Fading* is the idea of removing the support as and when the apprentice gains the skills. *Coaching* is the entire pedagogy of the process where the master guides the apprentice from initiating the process, supervising the growth, introducing challenges, addressing weaknesses and evaluating the process. Later, aspects of *articulation, reflection and exploration* were introduced to the model. *Articulation* helps the learner to articulate, interpret and develop their newly acquired knowledge through reasoning or problem-solving processes. There are many methods of articulation, one of which is inquiry teaching (Collins & Stevens, 1982, 1983) that leads students to redefine their understanding of the concepts through summary and articulation. The process of *reflection* guides the students to analyse their own performance and further compare it with that of an expert and other learner to help improve their own practice. *Exploration* enables students to participate in self-initiated problem-solving learning. It is an expected natural culmination of the fading of mentors' support. It thus helps the learners own and extend their own knowledge. Apart from the Method of Cognitive Apprenticeship Model that essentially elaborates the pedagogy of apprenticeship learning, other dimensions of the learning environment include *Content, Sequencing* and *Sociology*. In my research, apart from on the *modelling,* I have focused primarily on the *sociology* of the learning environment, which entails developing a *community of practice* that involves creating a learning environment where the participants are in constant dialogue and practice, related to the subject. This creates a sense of

community, ownership and mutual dependency through shared experiences of the apprentice and the masters. *Intrinsic motivation* involves the apprentice to be committed in the learning process where the purpose is essentially personal and self-motivating for them rather than a superficial, extrinsic purpose (Collins, 1986).

The Collins, Brown and Newman's Cognitive Apprenticeship model (1989) informed the study of the various stages of the learning process and identifying the defining pedagogic practices in each stage. It also situated the study in a sociological context giving me guidelines to note the different attributes of the practice in the society. It also made me conscious to look for various dimensions in the process, that later helped me reveal newer dimensions unique to the context and subject of my study.

Therefore, I used the multiple theoretical lenses as explained above, to address and view various aspects and dimensions of the study such as its philosophical context, oral narratives, visual narratives, visual form and the dissemination of knowledge, so as to have a wholistic understanding of the topic.

3.3 Methodological Framework

In the ever-changing timeline of evolution, our lives have changed, and so have the lives and practices of the Bhil Adivasis. On similar lines, the Bhil artform too is in transition from the traditional *Pithora* to the commercial Bhil Art. Since the research aims to understand the nature of relationship with man and their art practices, and its dissemination, one has to take this evolving timeframe into consideration. Further, the Bhil community perceives art as an integral part of their lived reality, and hence, this study required an immersive approach that involved spending considerable time with the community members, observing and participating in their practices. Hence, initially, I adopted the **ethnographic research methodology** that involved studying the Bhils in their work and traditional environment, with the aim of recording a think descriptive account of their tradition, cultural practices, belief system, social relationships and environment. As an artist, I also explored **visual ethnography** recording their lives through photographs, films and sketches. Later, I also practiced **participant research method** by not just observing, but also participating in their activities, in their natural and traditional environment. Below, I document my detailed journey in the field through challenges and shortcomings to adapt a methodology for this specific study such that it helped in appropriate documentation of data.

Since my research entailed the study of art, human-art relationships and art-education, I thought of starting my fieldtrip with a journey and visit of all the government schools in the route from Bhopal to Hoshangabad to Sehore and the road back. I visited thirty schools and interviewed around sixty teachers and the students (in groups) with the hope to understand how the art was practiced at their homes, and 'taught' in their schools. These interviews (structured, unstructured and group) were on the art practices, beliefs and art teaching and learning environment. Since these schools were situated in scheduled areas of Madhya Pradesh, that was a cradle to many indigenous and Adivasi communities, I expected the art teachers to contextualise the subject with respect to the background, the place, stories and art practices. Below are some of the pictures of the schools that ranged from three-roomed spaces to a classroom for every grade (Image 4), the school students (Image 5) and their artworks (Image 6).

As a later reflection on the artworks of the children, I found the narrative alive in each of their artwork. For example, each illustration had a story; a beginning, middle and an end. When interviewed, it was this story that the students eagerly explained. Also, the students utilised the entire sheet to tell the stories which is reflective of their understanding and representation of art as a whole and not depict elements in isolation. However, I missed the existence of 'dots' in these images, and I conclude that it may be an effect of the homogenised education practiced in these classrooms, rather than a contextualised pedagogy.



Image 4: School visit in the Adivasi settlements of Madhya Pradesh, 2016



Image 5: Interviews with teachers and students during the school visit, 2016



Image 6: Artworks by the school students, 2016

However, my observation from the visit entailed high student-teacher ratio (where one teacher taught all subjects or sometimes even addressed multiple grades together), few amenities (shortage of water, frequent power cuts), high pressure and expectations from teachers (from picking up students from their homes to feeding them and dropping back), high performance pressure (to produce the proof of teaching rather than teaching itself) and low remuneration. In the given circumstances art found its way into the classrooms in a free-period to engage the children or during a school event. Thus, the onus of art practice in a formal environment was left to the students who were self-motivated and interested in art, maybe from art practice in informal contexts.

The search for practice of art in informal contexts, took me deeper into their villages. It required shadowing the artist community closely to understand their lifestyle, tradition, culture, beliefs behind the rituals and their myths that would then further reflect on their art, art practices, art process, levels of growth and art learning methods within the community. Thus, I made multiple fieldtrips over a period of five years to the Bhil settlements in M.P. to experience and document their ways of life. Following are some sketches from the fieldtrip that reflects the terrain and geographical characteristics of the place (Image 7).

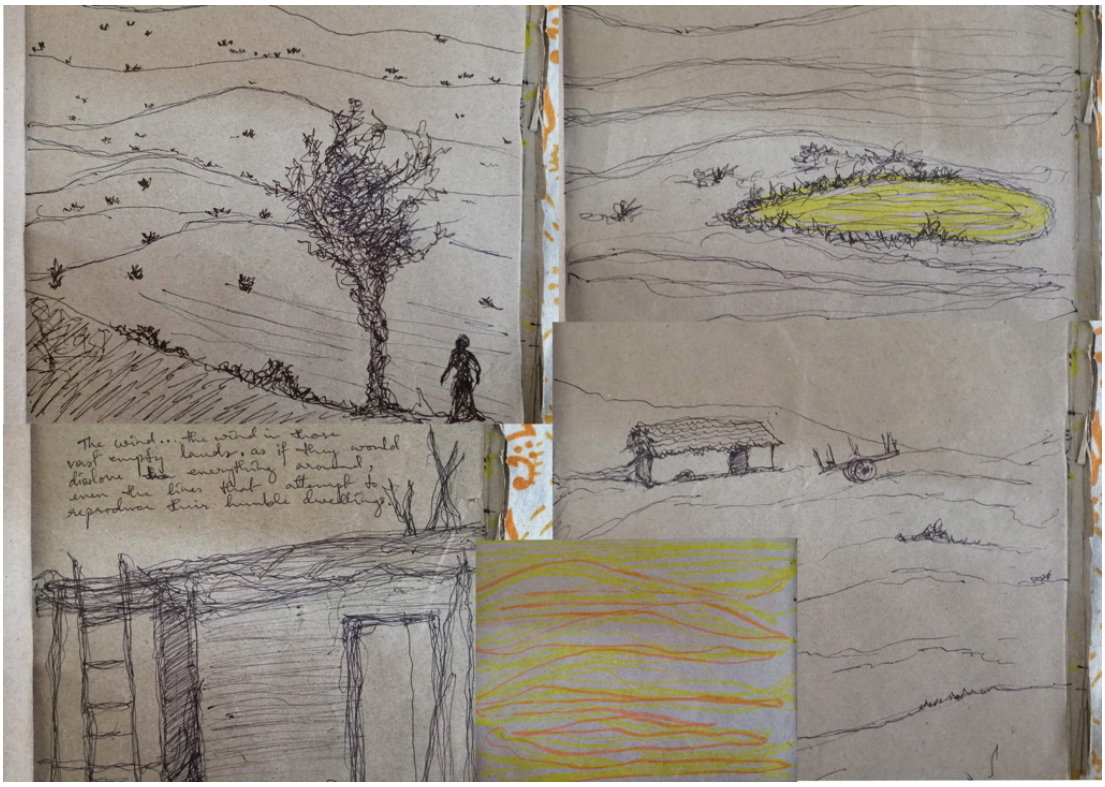


Image 7: Sketches made during approaching the Bhil villages

The photographs below showcase the source of employment (maize cultivation) and the living conditions of the Bhils in the arid lands of M.P. with very little rainfall (Image 8). Most of the time, they can produce only a single crop during the year, which only lasts them a couple of months. During the other seasons they rely on daily labour and hunting to feed their families.



Image 8: The Bhils cultivating maize and hunting for food.

The Bhil staple food is maize *rotis* with grounded chilli paste. Once in a while, when they can afford, their *rotis* are complimented with a dal (pulses that they need to purchase) and sometimes, after a successful hunt, they cook some meat (Image 9).



Image 9: The Bhils eating maize rotis, dal and grounded chillies as their staple diet.

During these visits, one cannot help but notice remnants of art engagement and practice in their lives (Image 10). There are paintings on the walls of their homes (Image 11a), their kitchen and cooking spaces, on their earthen utensils and on their bodies (Image 19). One cannot help but recognize a close relationship between the maize, produced in the area and the dots in the Bhil art (Image 11b). They also painted their animals during *Gohari*[31] festival (Image 12).

[31] On the sixteenth day following Diwali, Gai Gouri or Gohari is celebrated where Bhil men swear to undergo the penance similar to Dharmi Raja, if they give birth a male child. During this festival, men prostate themselves in front of a running cattle of cows.

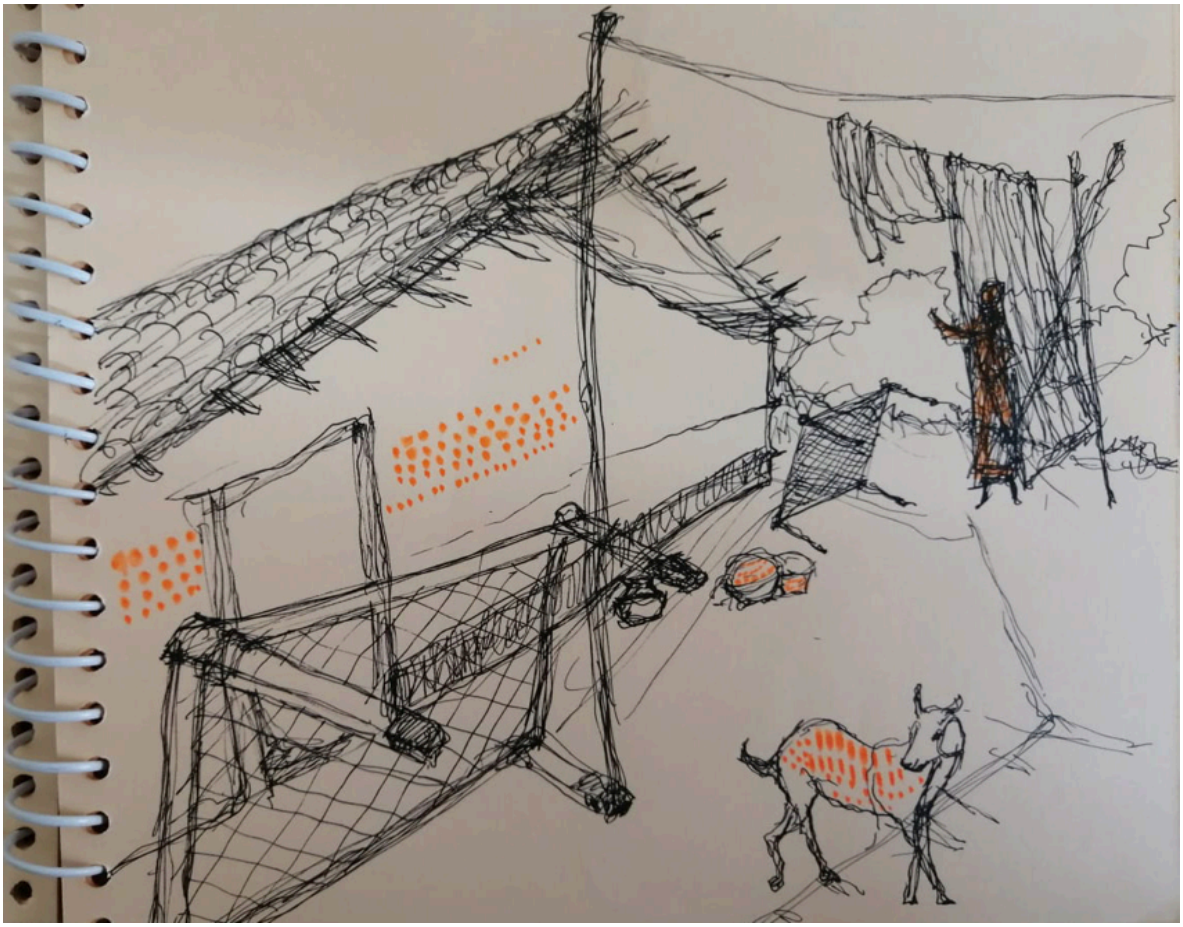


Image 10: Art on the walls, animals and human skin in the form of tattoos.



Image 11a: Art (relief and painted) on the walls of the Bhil huts



Image 11b: A close relationship between the maize and the dots in the Bhil art.



Image 12: Art motifs on animals during *Gohari* Festival

Art also finds its way in many forms (music, dance, tattoo art, painting, mural making) and in the multitude of the Bhil festivals. For example, during *Gathla*[32], the memory stones are either painted or made as a mural in the memory of their ancestors (Image 13).

[32] A Bhil festival where they worship their ancestors by making memory stones in their memory. These stones are often embossed/mural painted showcasing the deceased riding the 'sacred' horse on their journey to the heavenly adobe.



Image13: Murals painted on Gathlas (the burial stones)

Other festivals are the famous *Pithora* Festival where the origin stories of the Bhils are painted on the walls of their houses to please the God (Baba Dev) and invite him to stay in their adobe (Image 14). Sometimes, I also let the community children document their festivals through their own lens (Image 15). During the fieldtrip, we visited Baba Dev's shrine where clay horse figurines will a hollow stomach, were sacrificed to the Gods. People stuffed this belly with their wishes symbolically represented by flowers maize and red powder as in (Image 15).



Image 14: The Pithora horses made during the Pithora festival to invite Baba Dev. Source: Internet.



Image15: The sacred horses made for prayers and wish fulfilment to Devi Sravan[33]

[33] The rain God also worshiped for fulfillment of wishes and blessing with children.

During my fieldtrip, apart from my field notes and photographs, I also relied heavily on live sketching. **Live sketching** helped me take quick visual notes of the landscape, terrain, water bodies and activities of the people around. This could also be documented through still photographs as shared before. However, a sketch provided me time to engage, reflect, absorb the situation, and soak in the present environment, while the hand was busy in the craftsmanship. For example, (Image 16) and (Image 17) both represent Bhil portraits. However, as an artist, I feel that photographs are absolute in nature giving so scope for the subject (for lack of a better word), to have any authority in my depiction of themselves. On the other hand, an illustration is never complete or an absolute depiction of the subjects. It lends itself to complete its representation to its beholder both, the subject and the reader of the illustrations.



Image 16: A collage of portraits taken during the fieldtrips, 2016.



Image 17: A collage of portraits drawn during the fieldtrips, 2017.

Taking photographs can also be intimidating during research fieldtrips whereas a quick illustration can be informative, reflective and intricate as in (Images 18) and (Image 19) that document the jewellery designs and tattoos of the Bhils. Also, since the study involved working with artists, it created an excellent platform to break the initial barrier, to be introduced to and be accepted in the community, as another fellow artist as depicted in (Image 20). Here I depict myself sharing the same space and time with the community members engaging and having conversations with them. Being an animator and an artist helped me immensely in this process. Often, I ended up sharing my own work (sketchbook) with the artists while I studied their artwork. It opened up various grounds and topics of discussion such as our individual styles, content and even commercial aspects of the artwork. Some of these sketches were made while I was in the field, making a quick scribble while eyes are watching over my shoulders whereas, some were made while reflecting in isolation (Image 21).



Image 18: Jewellery designs of the Bhils

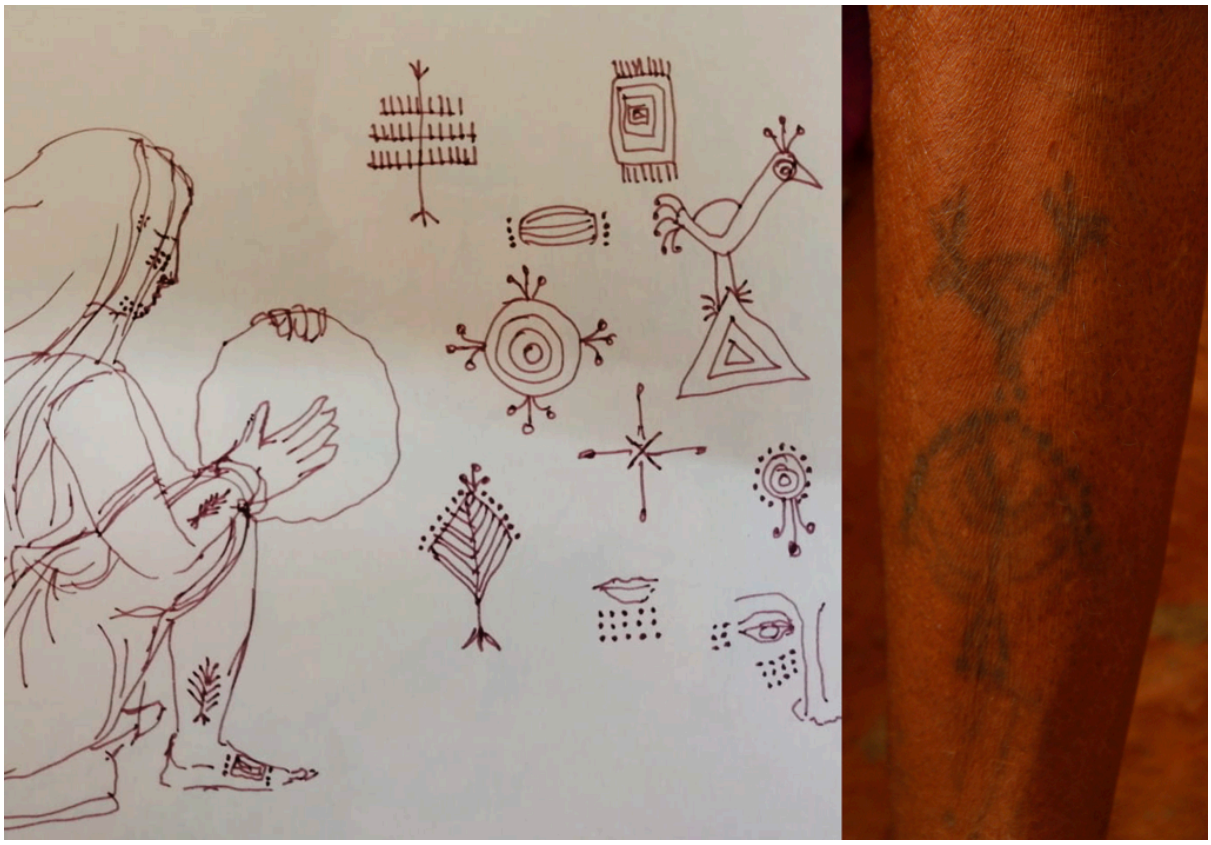


Image 19: Popular tattoos of the Bhils

These sketches also reflected my personal self, inhibitions and experience while in the field. They were often a combination of images and words representing the thought. In (Image 20) I depict myself sharing the same time and space with the Bhil woman, eating, chatting, getting dressed together and sharing jewellery. I also document my experience of how a Bhil women asked me if I was a foreigner because of my fair skin. I also illustrated how uncomfortable I felt (but did not protest) while she touched my skin and kept holding my hand while I was around.



Image 20: Depicting myself sharing the same space and time with the community members.

I also noticed and felt the strong female gaze while I interviewed the men in the community on their practices of the traditional Bhil Pithora (Image 21). As an artist and researcher, these became important notes during my process of data collection.

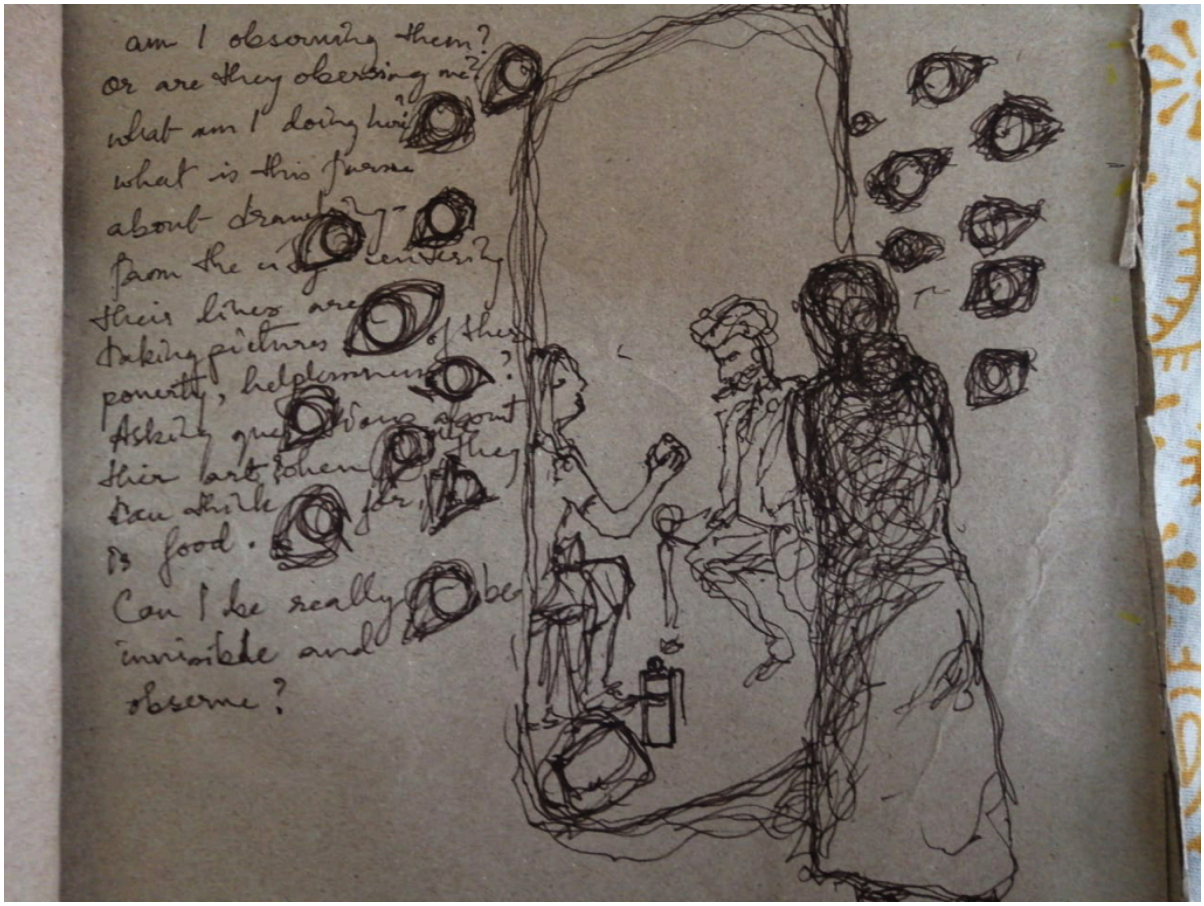


Image 21: Depicting myself being observed

As an independent artist, I also shared their concerns of working for clients (here patrons), outreach and marketing of artworks. I met a few woman in the villages who would paint the Bhil Contemporary Art on canvas and sheets of paper (Image 22) to be later marketed to the city with the help of their family members. Children often drew their oral stories in the school notebooks. Some artists also took assignments for painting the walls of the city. Of course the remuneration for these artists were very different compared to the artists living in the city of Bhopal and procuring direct assignments from the government. However, the practice of contemporary Bhil Art continued to be an alternative source of income in the villages.

As mentioned above, being accepted as an artist by the Bhil artist community rather than an ethnographer, had its own benefits. I believe that the community sooner accepted me, an outsider, on common grounds of being an artist rather than accepting me as a researcher where they became '*the subject'*. It somewhere made us equal in the conversation than sharing the 'ethnographer and the other' relationship. The relationship between us, that was built over the period during the fieldtrip, led them to understand the purpose of my research, better. There was a trust and a responsibility that we shared and a hope we nurtured that my work would eventually help their art get better recognition in the world outside.



Image 20: The contemporary Bhil Art made by the children and the contemporary Bhil artists on the walls of the city, Bhopal.

I further involved in engaged fieldtrips as a **participant observation**, shadowing the artists in Bhopal and in their villages. It provided a firm ground to take the study forward. I noted and categorised the artists into three-generation of learners. I devised an initial three-fold study to structure and organize the method of data collection through participant observation and ethnographic interviews.

The Initial Three-Fold Study

By this stage, I had listed 27 artists and around 13 child artists in Bhopal, (Annexure III) willing to share their knowledge with me. The total of 40 artists were divided into three distinct generations namely, 1st generation (aged 40+), 2nd generation (between 15 to 39) and the 3rd generation of young child artists (under 15). I planned to meet and interview the 40 artists, over a period of one year, through regular field trips. This is because multiple meetings were required to build a rapport and then understand their art and their techniques. Narrative interviews were recorded with prior permission of the artists. Sharing below the chart from a single field trip.

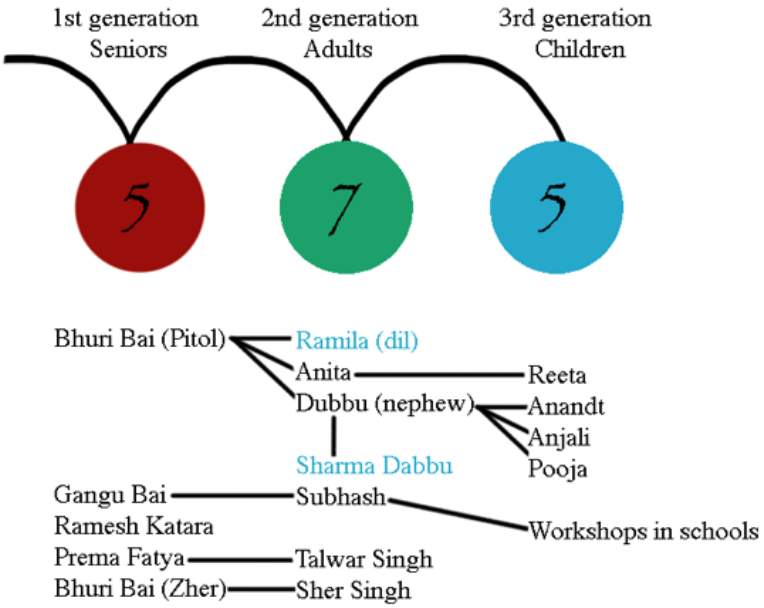


Image 23: The Three Fold Study of 17 artists during a month long field trip.

The three generations of artists had some distinct characteristics that reflected in their style of art. The first-generation artists born in the Bhil community living in the villages, had migrated to Bhopal from Jhabua as daily laborers, carrying the community art in the 1980's, as in (Image 24) and (Image 25). Presently, they continued to practice both, the traditional and contemporary Bhil Art.



Image 24: First generation senior, Prema Fatya with his nephew Thawar Singh, (2nd generation artist) as Bhil artists (lekhindras) in the traditional environment in their villages.



Image 25:First generation senior, Thawaria from Gujrat, explaining his contemporary Bhil Art on the Pithora.

The second-generation artists were born in the city of Bhopal and were introduced to the Bhil art in an urban environment. However, they were not exposed to the art taught in schools or to the urban concepts of graphic designs in their initial stages of practice. They were essentially self-taught artists married into the community and then picked up the style from their seniors at home, and contemporaries (Image 26). However, later, some of the artists associated with the museums, received training workshops on their contemporary art based on the requirements of the patrons (Image 27).



Image 26: Self-taught second generation artists, Dil Sharma



Image 27 : Second generation artist, working at IGRMS Museum, Dubbu Baria from Dashera Maidan, Bhopal.



Image 28a: Sher Singh (second generation artist) with his mother, Bhuri Bai from Jhabua (first generation artist) and daughter Anjali Bhabor (third generation artist)



Image 28b: Anjali Bhabor's illustration of the Gal Bapsi Festival (third generation artist)

Now, the third generation of artists are children born in Bhopal to parents already associated with the Museums and practicing the Bhil Art independently. On one hand they are growing up in a practicing environment where they observe their parents practice the Bhil Art and at the same time, they are exposed to formal art education in schools. Alongside this, they are also exposed to all the other tribal art forms and commercial art practiced in the Museums through regular workshops (Image 28a and 28b), (Image 29).



Image 29: Participant observation at Dubbu Baria's home with his son, Anand and daughters, Anjali and Pooja (Inset).



(Inset: Pooja, 5 years old)

Once the data was collected through the initial, *three-fold study*, we compared the results between the first-generation teachers and the second-generation learners & the second-generation teachers and the third-generation learners. We had additional information of the learning process from the first-generation on their art learning process, based on their memory. The images hinted at the close art-human-nature relationship in the artwork and narratives of the community that we have talked about earlier.

Participant observation helped me form an overview of the lifestyle of the artist community, with a special focus to understand how art was weaved into their lives, employment, rituals, beliefs and practices in both, the traditional context in the villages and the contemporary environment in Bhopal.

I also had the opportunity to practice participant observation in their professional environment, where I could be an observer and watch the mother-son duo[34], (Gangu Bai and her son, Subhash) renovate the Bhil Exhibitory Room at IGRMS, Bhopal (Image 28). Gangu Bai and Subhash were both established and popular contemporary Bhil artists from Bhopal. Both of them were employed at IGRMS and was assigned two weeks for completion of the wall-to-wall painting. The size of the drawing space was approximately 14 feet X 4 feet. They had their independent ways of working, narrative pattern, art style and yet practiced under the same umbrella of Bhil community art.

[34] Gangu Bai had introduced the contemporary Bhil art and trained Subhash in the field. Hence, she was also his teacher apart from being his mother. According to Gangu Bai, Subhash took around 2 years to learn all the art when he was just 14. He was an inquisitive child and picked up the style instantly. When he came of age, he was also employed by IGRMS as a resident artist. Since then, they often take assignments and work together. They also help each other in their individual assignments. Recently, they published their first book together called 'Tree Matters' published by Tara Books.



Image 30: Gangu Bai and Subhash, at work at IGRMS, 2016

I felt that it was an ideal situation to shadow Gangu Bai and Subhash working together because they were expected to work professionally and over long hours within a deadline. Through participant observation I intended to observe and document the collaboration process, division of roles and responsibilities, work and personal relationship, working chemistry, the feedback system, similarities and differences of styles, level of participation and structure. I had a set of initial questions[35] for myself to observe and document. During the process, I too participated as an helper mixing colours, cleaning brushes and filling in paints within outlines to meet the given deadline. This association further nurtured our relationship. It led to multiple collaborations between me and the Bhil community of Bhopal.

Workshops and collaborations with artists also proved an important method of data collection as it helped to have an overview of the teaching practices, the socio-cultural roles, community inhibitions and need of the community to make the art popular. The artists from the community quite often got invitations from various museums, schools and art colleges for short workshops. At these workshops, they would not only demonstrate their work, but also teach interested

[35] Is the collaboration participatory, instructional or apprenticeship?
How is the work divided between the two; in respect to content, elements, colour or textures with dots?
Who is the expert versus learner?
What is their status and roles? Who leads conceptually? Who plans the production?
What is the level of participation?
What are the explicit structures, rules and norms that govern the situation?
Who gives the feedback and what is it like?
What are their behaviours, verbal or non-verbal?
Have they worked together before? What is their working chemistry like?
What are their similarities and differences in style?

participants, their indigenous art. IGRMS and Tribal Museum both organized art camps at the Museums and invited schools and independent artists to participate (Image 31a and 31b).



Image 31a: Sher Singh, Bhil artist, conducting a workshop at IGRMS for 'outside the community' people.



Image 31b: A non-Bhil participant at the workshop



Janbo Ta Pabo

IGRMS holds workshop for tribal artist employees

A workshop 'Janbo Ta Pabo' being organised for tribal and folk artists employees of IGRMS on Thursday.

OUR STAFF REPORTER
BHOPAL

Indira Gandhi Rashtriya Manav Sangrahalaya in collaboration with Tata Centre for Technology and Design, IIT Bombay, and Industrial Design Centre, IIT Bombay, commenced 'Janbo Ta Pabo' an introductory workshop on social media for tribal and folk artists employed with IGRMS. This workshop is part of six workshops series which will continue for next 6 months and each month a five day long workshop will be organised. In the workshop PhD scholar of IIT Bombay, Debjani Mukherjee is imparting training. She said "We are starting with basics of mobile phone like knowing one's mobile number, dialling number, receiving calls, opening and sending messages. Later we will give detailed information about social media tools Whatsapp, Facebook, Twitter, etc, so that in future using contemporary social media the tribal artists will be able to earn justified remuneration for their paintings and crafts.

Speaking on this occasion, Director, IGRMS, Prof Sarit Kumar Chaudhuri said "Manav Sangrahalaya is committed to preserve the tribal culture. IGRMS organised 'Janbo Ta Pabo' to provide technical training of social media for the tribal artisans so that they get the justified price for their unique artwork in the market". He further said "Social media is an excellent platform where individuals connect directly irrespective of social hierarchy and also artists can connect to major organisations and vice versa resulting into quick and effective transfer of knowledge.

Image 32:Media coverage of 'Jaanbo ta Paabo' workshop

I would shadow the Bhil artists in these camps, exhibitions and schools where they introduced the Bhil art form and the narratives to 'outside the community youth', through short workshops. These workshops were usually 1 day to 5 days art camps.

I would document the process of them teaching the art form to interested participants through photographs and short video recordings. This material was beneficial for the artists to pitch further workshops, for the museum as documentation material and for me, as data to reflect on their process of teaching, outside the community. Sometimes, I would represent the community to help them organize independent events in various schools and cultural centres. I initiated a social media marketing page for such workshops by the Bhil artists. However, soon there was a need of independence for them to grow on their own. Thus, I proposed some media literacy programs for the Bhil artists to the Museum (Image 32) such that they could use the social media platform to exhibit their work and get orders, rather than being dependant on the external agents for the

3.4 Summary: Sites, Sampling and Respondents

Sites

Since the research required documenting the art practices of the Bhil community over an evolving timeframe, in the traditional and the contemporary context, I choose multiple sites to observe and document their practices. Thus, the data was thus collected from multiple sites as depicted in the figure below and further elaborated (Image 33).

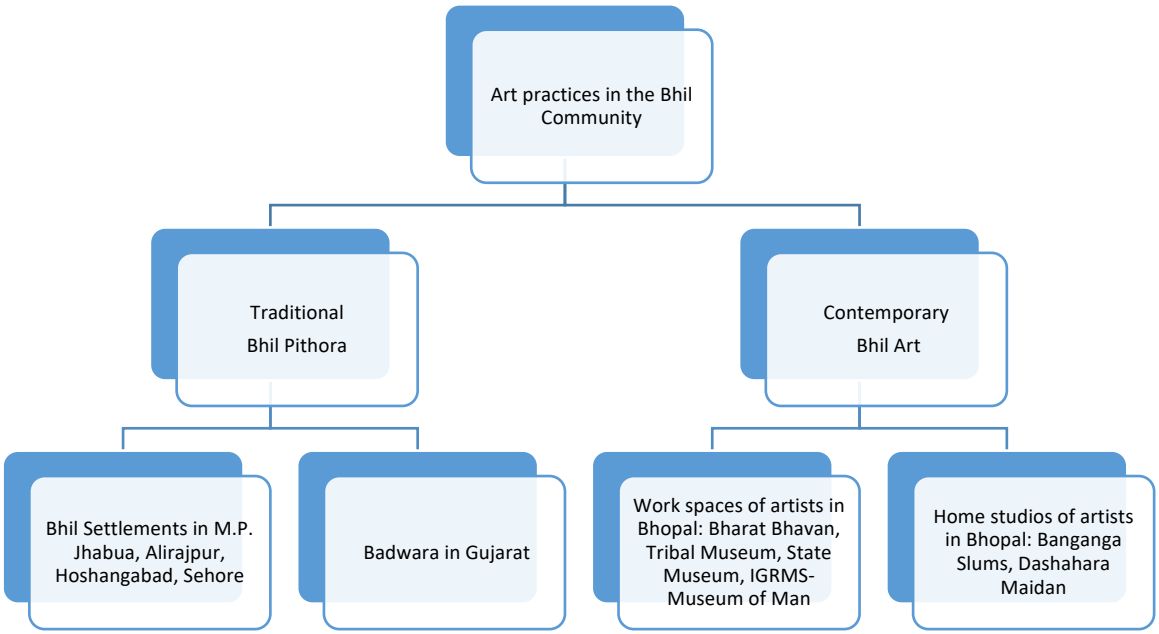


Image 33: Multiple sites in the field

Visiting the Traditional Habitats of the Artists

The Bhil artists in Bhopal are generally from Jhabua district, Ratlam, Dhar, Khargon and Khandwa in M.P. or from Badwara, Gujrat. Field Trips to Jhabua, Alirajpur District, Hoshangabad, Sehore in M.P. and Badwara in Gujarat were made at different times of the year. The field trips were made essentially to participate in their festivals and also to gaze the art learning practices in the schools of the tribal localities. I got further leads from traditional Pithora painters and practicing badwas from the community, who resided in their native villages, and were also associated with IGRMS, such as Prema Fatya and Thawar Singh from Gujarat. These respondents helped me understand the Pithora in its traditional essence.

Choosing a Practising Artist Community in Bhopal

The search for this ideal research site led us to the capital city of Madhya Pradesh, Bhopal. It

is a culturally thriving place, characterized by the establishment of many national government museums like Indira Gandhi Rashtriya Manav Sangrahalaya (IGRMS), popularly known as the Museum of Man, State Museum, Bharat Bhavan and Tribal Museum. They provided a nurturing ground for the Adivasis looking for employment. Some joined as daily wage labourers while others became associated as local artisans. In Bhopal, the Bhil Adivasis dwell in two distinct areas, together as a community. My main respondents of this study were Sher Singh[36], who lived near Banganga Slums, and Dubbu Baria and Bhuri Bai who stayed in New Dashera Maidan. Both these areas have an entire lane dedicated to the Bhil artists who later became my primary respondents. Most of them are related, distant cousins or from neighbouring villages. The dwellings near Dashera Maidan are more recent and mostly all the child artists belong to that area.

Sampling

For the sake of the present research, *cluster sampling* was initially done to identify the sample group from the Bhil population of Madhya Pradesh, by grouping it geographically. The cluster sampling data was collected from the archives of the IGRMS, Tribal Museum, State Museum and Bharat Bhavan library resources. Next, *a stratified sampling* method was chosen to colander the artist group. Finally, *convenience sampling* was done, based on the interaction with the artists and their willingness to share their experiences.

Respondents

I started by making a list of all the Bhil artists in Bhopal. I interviewed the Curators of Museum of Man (IGRMS), State Museum and Tribal Museum of Bhopal who worked closely with the artists there. Interviews of these museum curators, educators, government officials and artisans helped in identifying the Bhil artists and the Bhil daily wage labourers associated with these organizations. Further, children learning the Bhil art and officials to support the research we also noted.

I chose twenty-seven Bhil artists and nineteen children learning the contemporary Bhil art from their parents as the respondents. Further, museum curators, educators, government officials and artists from other Adivasi communities counted to as many as twenty people who were willing to share their knowledge with me through detailed interview. A list of all the primary

[36] I was initially introduced to the Bhil artists Sher Singh and Subhash Bhil through a project supported by IDC, IIT Bombay in 2014. Sher Singh was the initial contact who introduced me to the Bhil community, especially Bhuri Bai and the child artists in Bhopal.

respondents is documented in (Annexure III). The total of 40 artists were divided into three distinct generations namely, 1st generation (aged 40+), 2nd generation (between 15 to 39) and the 3rd generation of young child artists (under 15). I planned to meet and interview the 40 artists, over a period of one year, through regular field trips. This is because multiple meetings were required to build a rapport and then understand their art and their techniques. Narrative interviews were recorded with prior permission of the artists. Once the data was collected at the initial stage, we compared the results between the first-generation teachers and the second-generation learners & the second-generation teachers and the third-generation learners. We had additional information of the learning process from the first-generation on their art learning process, based on memory. The three generations of artists had some distinct characteristics that reflected in their style of art. The first-generation artists born in the Bhil community living in the villages, had migrated to Bhopal from Jhabua as daily laborers, carrying the community art in the 1980's. The second-generation artists were born in the city of Bhopal and were introduced to the Bhil art in an urban environment. However, they were not exposed to the art taught in schools or to the urban concepts of graphic designs in their initial stages. Whereas, the third generation of artists are presently learning the Bhil art and alongside exposed to all the other tribal art forms and commercial art. The questionnaire for the first two generations, as attached in annexure 4, covered the learning-teaching methods of the Bhil art through discussions, interviews, recollection of memories of learning/teaching and interpretation of narratives of their paintings. On the other hand, a workshop was devised for the third-generation artists, the present learners, to simply observe them work on an illustrated book [37] on one of the origin stories of the Bhils.

This approach helped in collecting data based on the experiences of the artists with art practices in the traditional and the contemporary context. It helped identify a pattern and further analyse the data. However, we found discrepancies between the answers of a teacher and a student when the first-generation was asked '*how did they teach the art'* vs. the second-generation '*how did they learn the art'*. After some self-reflection on the process and study of the data led me to conclude that it was difficult for the participants to reflect and then articulate in words the intangible and subtle answer of 'the learning process' of art that was practiced as a way of their life. Much was transferred through observation and imitation that was practiced

[37] The process was documented through a documentary film titled 'Our Expressions, Their Art'. Link shared below: (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MzkZSwQTybg). Based on the study, a Paper and presented at the Society of Animation Studies Annual Conference in June 2016 at Nanyang Technological University, Singapore titled, "Narrative Illustrations: A comparative study of illustrations from children from different art education backgrounds". The picture book is titled 'The Origin of the Bhils', to be published soon.

unselfconsciously by the artists. I also became aware that these interviews might be harmful if it disturbed their 'organic and unselfconscious' way of learning as part of their life. Thus, the need for further improvisation of the research methodology was felt.

3.5 Tools

Interviews (Structured, Unstructured and Group Interviews)

Different interview methods were adopted based on the requirements that arose during the various phases of data collection. I could broadly categorize my interviews as structured or formal interviews, and unstructured or informal interviews.

For data on the 'process of art making', I adopted the formal or structured interview, where I had a standardized format to a set of questions asked in the same order. There were little deviations and least probing. These interviews were recorded and later the data was written down as transcripts for further analysis. However, analysis showed discrepancies in answers of artists for the same question collected at two different times. For example, how they remember learning the art or who taught the art to them. Also, inconsistencies existed in generic answers between artists. For example, the role of women in Pithora painting or the narrative of the Pithora festival. I concluded that it might be due to the artists becoming overly conscious during structured interviews or feeling the pressure to answer in spite of not knowing it or not getting enough time to comprehend before answering. Also, it was difficult for the artists to articulate the answer for questions that were reflective and an integral part of their 'daily life'. Also, it lacked flexibility, details and scope for personalization. Thus, the structured interview method was not suitable for study of the 'process of teaching' and learning and understanding their 'levels of growth in art education'.

Henceforth, I conducted unstructured or informal interviews. They were more of a 'guided conversation' with some probing, encouragement and active discussions. I also used a mixed method interview where I had guidelines as in a formal interview but kept the discussions open ended and informal. Thus, *narrative interviews* and *group interviews* were chosen over structured and semi-structured interviews. There were around eight senior Bhil artists with the knowledge of the traditional Pithora painting, nineteen young artists who are presently practicing the commercial Bhil art on canvases and twelve children presently learning the Bhil art within the community. Group interviews (Image 34, 35) were also effective when working with children. Children generally have limited attention span for lengthy interviews so I had to

design various methods for them to become comfortable to share information. Long walks, participant learning methods and triggering them through situations helped me with knowing their experiences and stories. However, since these interviews often lasted for hours, it was difficult to document through audio recordings. Thus, I had to entirely rely on field notes and reflective research methodology.



Image 34: Group Interviews during practicing art together.



Image 35: Narrative and Group Interviews with Dubbu Baria and his extended family while preparing for an exhibition

Biographies and The Family Tree

In order to colander the data and to analyse the existing information, I choose to plot the family tree of the artists through group interviews. This process successfully broke the ice within groups and they freely mentioned styles, nuances and art practices of their ancestors. A natural process forward was to group the artists into generations and further enquire about their art practices. It helped in identifying a pattern, understanding their motivations to learn the art and reflecting on their ways of art making.

I intended to document the family history of the artists to have an approximation of the number of people in a family who chose to be artists professionally or even as a hobby. I interviewed two artists, both working at IGRMS and also independently. They both taught children from the community and also conducted workshops with school children. Both had learnt the art from their elders in the family. The names of the artists in the families are marked in 'yellow', in the graph below. The graph helped me build a structure and identify the senior artists and the child artists from the community.

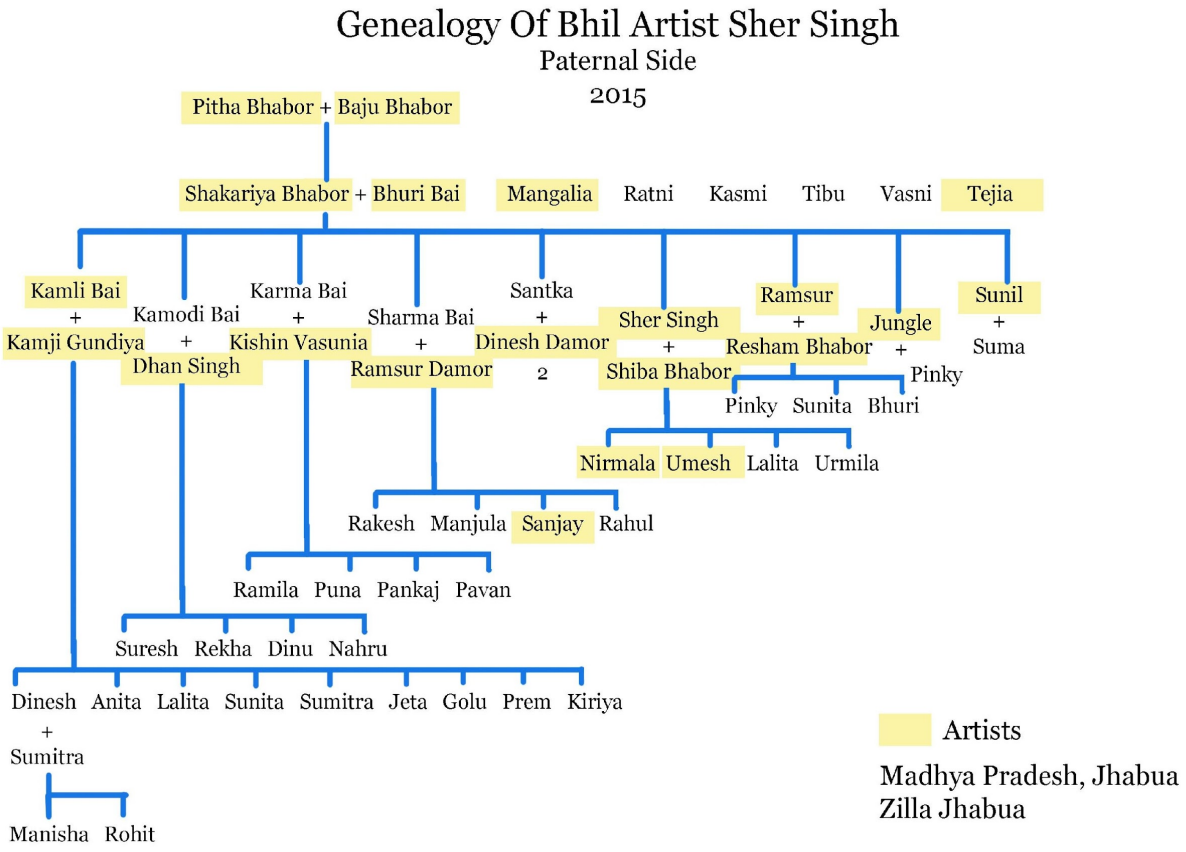


Image 36: Family tree of Sher Singh

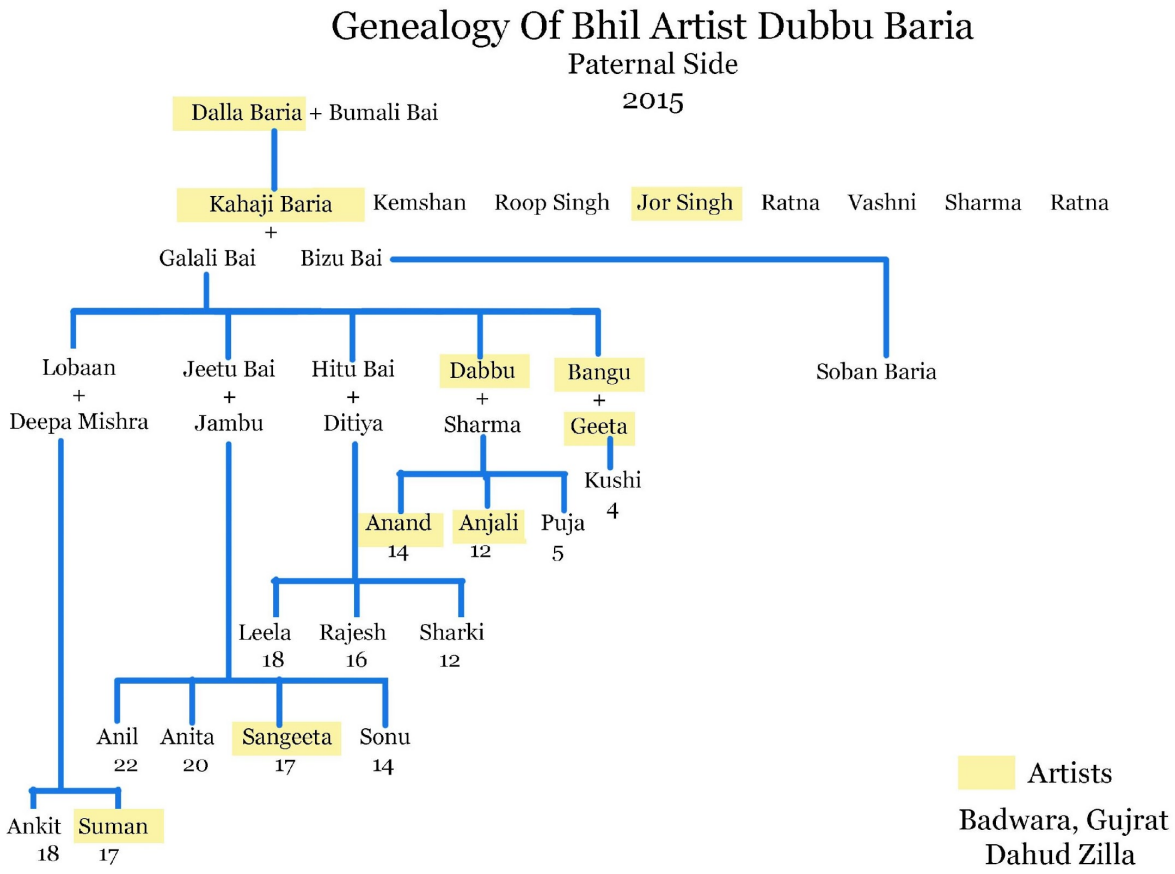


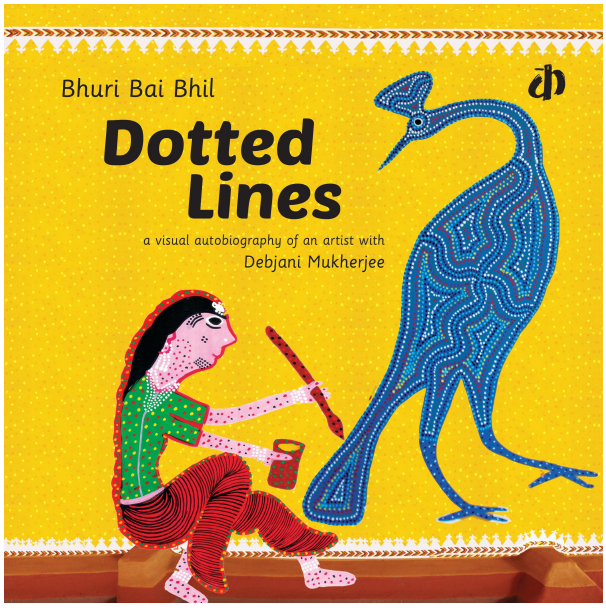
Image 37: Family tree of Bhuri Bai of Pitol

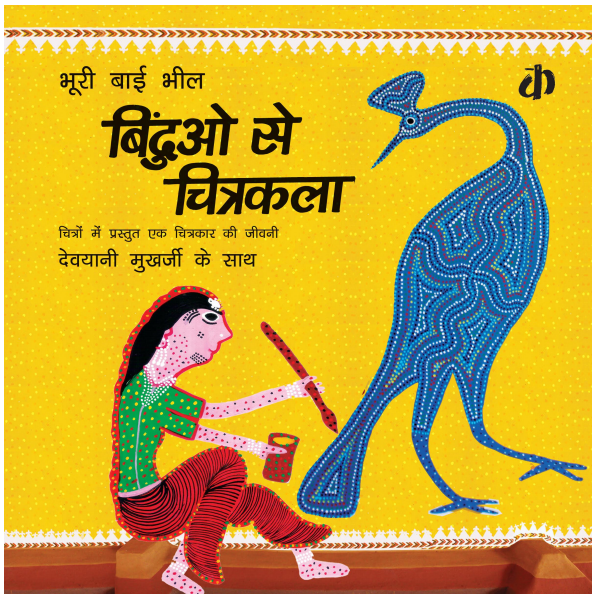
Such participant observation of the mother-son (Image 30), peer-learning (Image 29) and teacher-learner (Image 31) duo in the community gave a lot of insight into the Bhil art practice, work relationship, collaboration process, status quo and chemistry. However, since they hardly spoke to each other while their process of painting, little information was collated on the teaching and learning process; specific to the pedagogy. I realized even though the participant observation process was helpful in documenting the subtle relationship between the practitioners and the work process, it was impossible to gauge the nuances of abstract concepts of learning and teaching an art form that they believed to heal, cure and nurture.

Hence, the methodological framework was modified and developed over time based on the feedback of each round of data collected. Ethnography paved a way to participant observation where I studied the contemporary artists at work in their work environment. This led me to explore another approach, that of **visual ethnography**[38] that involved documenting the process

[38] Sarah Pink (2013) introduced digital or visual ethnography. She argues that as our present environment is immersed in digital technology, the researcher trading the notebook to the laptop to document the process, taking audio and video recordings of interviews instead of paper questionnaires, he/she is resorting to digital technology.

of making the Bhil Art of various contemporary Bhil artists, through a photo journal (Annexure I), and documentary film[39]. Visual ethnography also entailed video documentation of the narratives of contemporary Bhil paintings of one particular artist, Bhuri Bai[40] created over a period of 35 years of her practice. I further published a book on her visual autobiography, called *Dotted Lines*[41]. Visual ethnography plays an important role in my research methodology since my study involves artists, the art itself, and the process. I applied visual documentation through sketches, photographs, documentary films, animation and illustrations. Visual documentation was done in two levels; one from the point of view of a researcher and film-maker, and the other by the artists themselves. The representation of the same element from two different perspectives, helped in the comparative analysis of the different ways of seeing, interpretation and representation. I conceptualized and facilitated three projects with the Bhil community during the process of my field engagement. These were guided solely through visual ethnography and contributed towards documentation and consolidating 'art as a way of life' in the community. A photo journal to document the processes and visual narratives of contemporary Bhil artists (Annexure I), a visual autobiography of paintings (Dotted Lines, 2018), (Image 38) and an animated documentary (in production) were born out of this process.





Hence, if not the subjects', the ethnographer's environment is mostly digital. Thus, visual ethnography tools have unconsciously seeped into the documentation process and today plays an important role in credentials.

[39] Documentary Film, Our Expressions, Their Art: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MzkZSwQTybg

[40] Bhuri Bai is a celebrated Bhil artist presently associated with the Tribal Museum of Bhopal, India. She was one of the first few people to be identified by the then curator of Bharat Bhavan, J. Swaminathan who was instrumental in motivating them to start painting on canvas, using brushes and paints. A generation of such artists explored their traditional artform further to give birth to the new 'Bhil Art'.

[41] Book, Dotted Lines: https://www.amazon.in/Dotted-Lines-Bhuri-Bai-Bhil/dp/B07RLZK63S

Image 38: Book Covers of the picture book 'Dotted Lines' in English and Hindi.



Image 39: Children from the Bhil community seeing a prototype of their book, The Origin of the Bhils.

Intensive fieldwork and spending time with the artists and the community during participant observation and visual ethnography, led to understanding their beliefs associated with art, the process, art practices, lifestyle, the rituals and their reflection on their art. Delving deeper into my research studies, I felt the need to design a methodology framework that was specific to my research and aided in-depth and unbiased data collection. Thus, based on participant research methodologies and visual ethnography, **experiential ethnography** as a research methodology was developed where the researcher learned and practiced the art from an indigenous artist in their learning environment. As a part of the collaborative practice with Bhuri Bai in her work space (Image 40) and **experiential ethnography,** I started learning the Bhil art from Bhuri Bai along with her grandchildren at her home (Image 41). Further, I documented her teaching practices, learning environment and my reflections on the learning process through fieldnotes (Image 43, 44, 45), as detailed in appendix 2 and to be analysed in chapter 6 of the thesis.



Image 40: Collaboration: Working with Bhuri Bai on the book, Dotted Lines.



Image 41: Experiential ethnography: Learning Bhil art Bhuri Bai at her house.



Image 42: Experiential ethnography: Learning Bhil art from Dubbu Baria along with the children of the community.

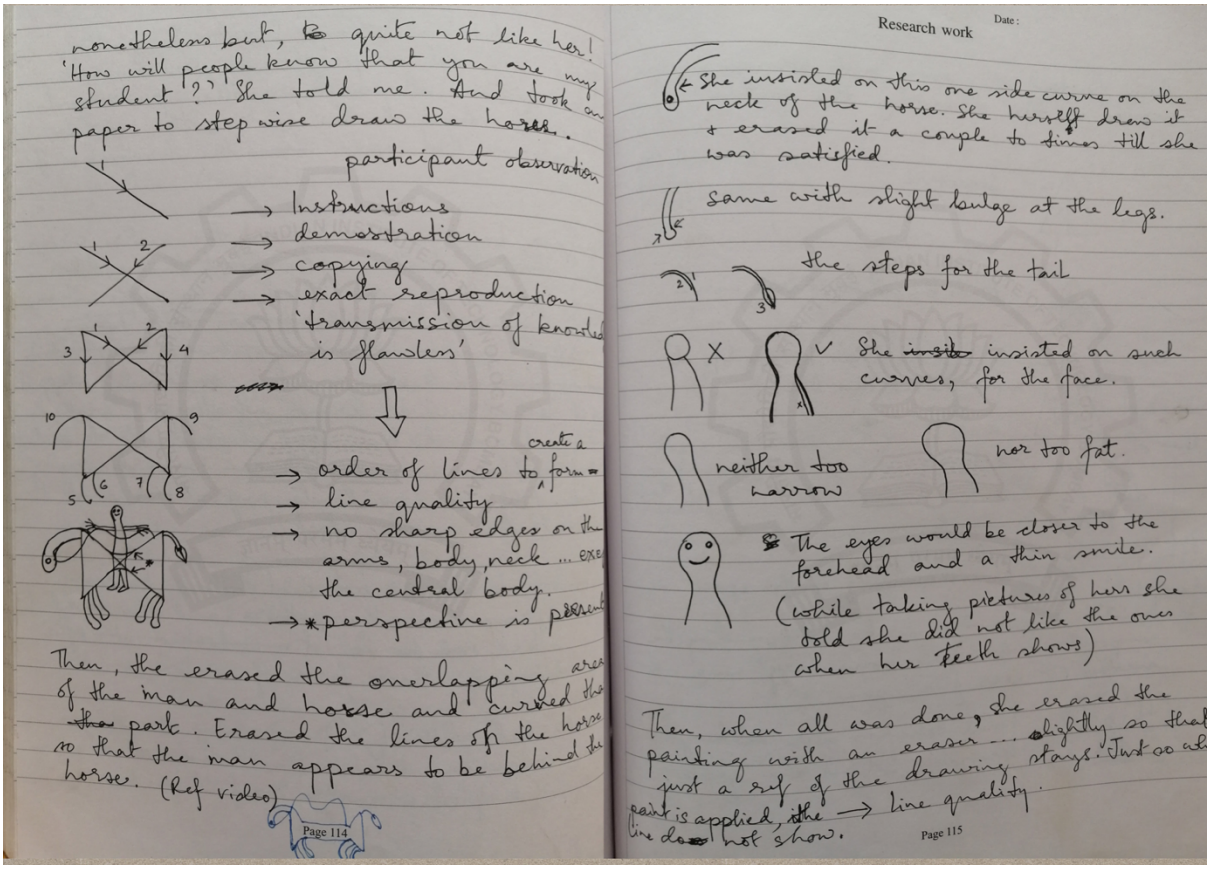


Image 43: Notes from my fieldnotes on Bhuri Bai's art teaching practices; The sacred Pithora Horse

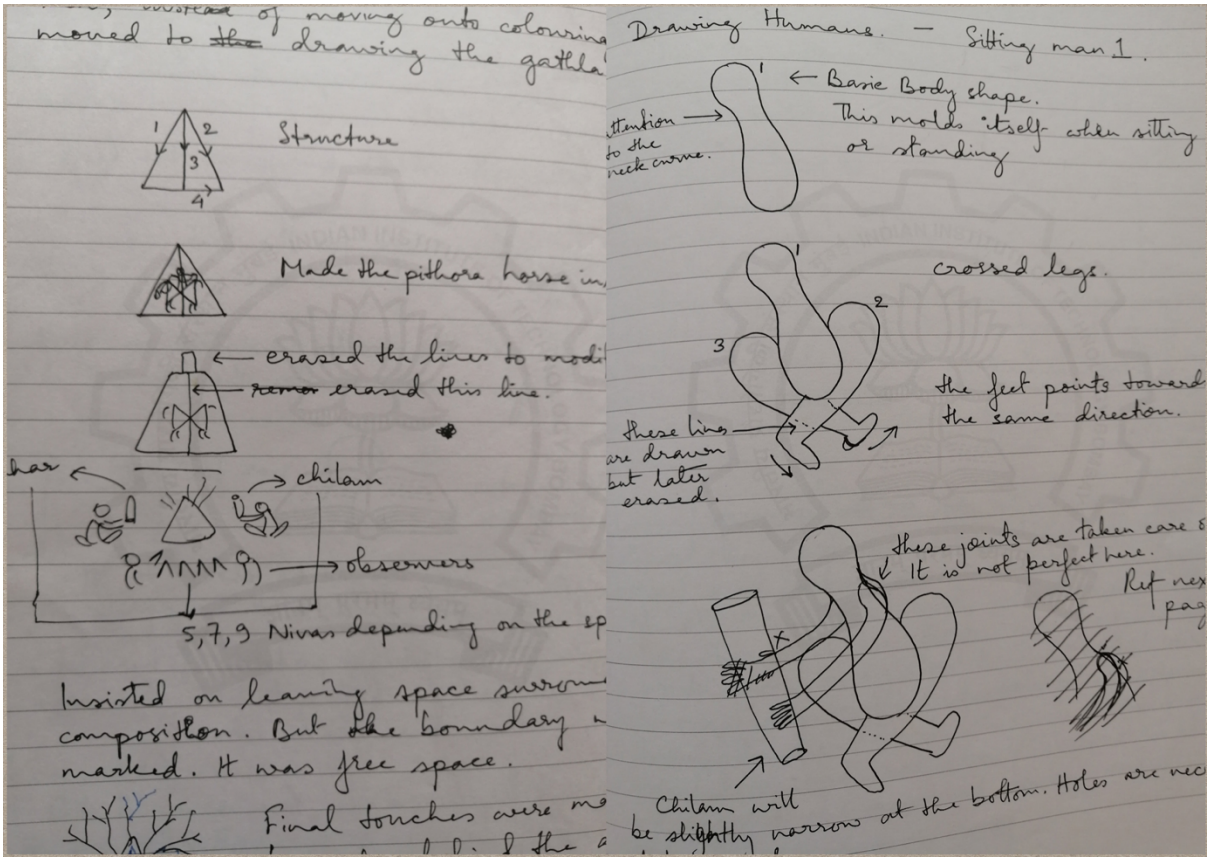


Image 44: Notes from my fieldnotes on Bhuri Bai's introduction to Bhil festival, Gathla

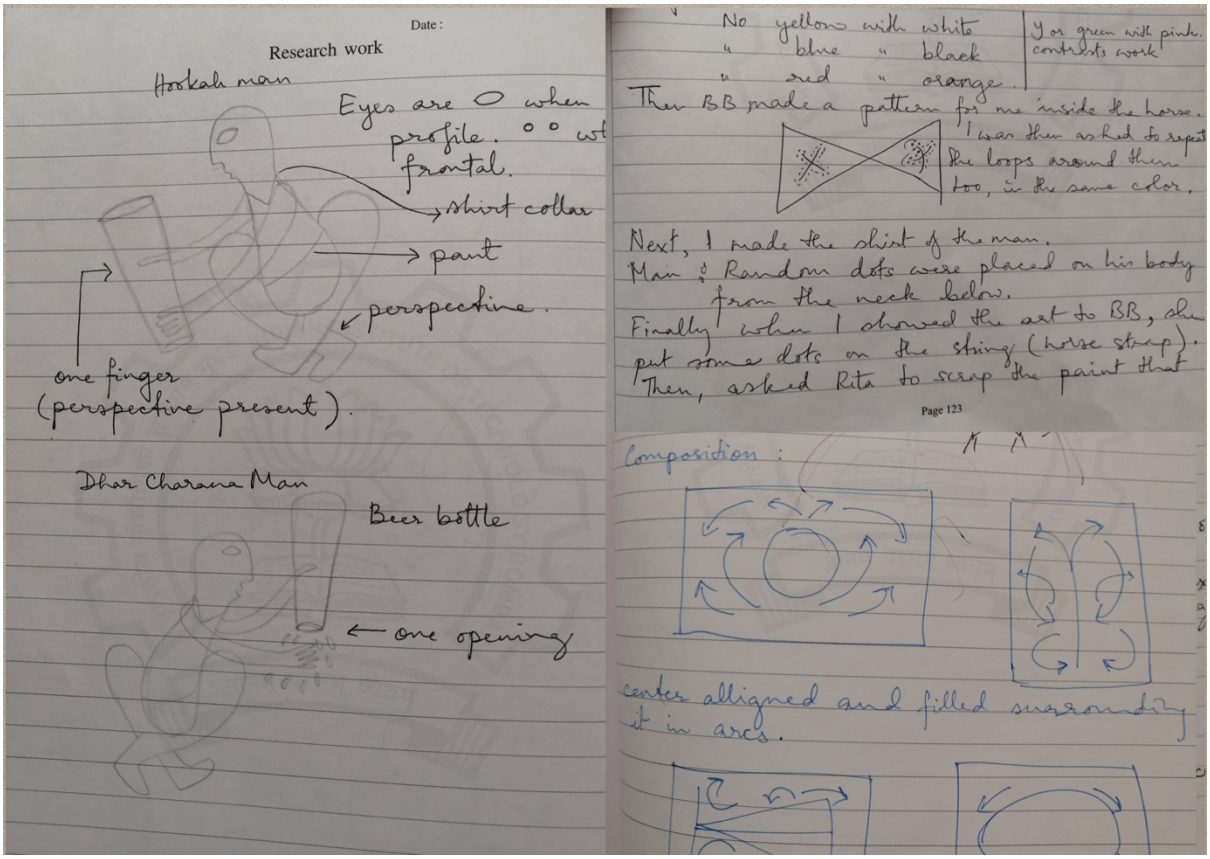


Image 45: Notes from my fieldnotes on Bhuri Bai's compositions

As we can perceive, the above information was impossible to procure from being a participant observation alone, and hence required experiential ethnography to interpret elements specific to an art practice.

3.6 Adapting Research Methods Further: Design as Research and Research as Design

Over the three years of engagement with the Bhil artist community, I explored various avenues, approaches and tools within the scope of traditional ethnography to understand the socio-economic and cultural nuances of the Bhil Adivasis. Being a film maker myself, I also used the concept of visual ethnography to document the various practices that I witnessed. These methods proved very helpful to understand the beliefs and practices of the community and the larger processes and principles of art. My first research question, that deals primarily with the art-human-nature relationships, could be satisfactorily addressed through these methods.

However, when it came to understanding the intricacies of teaching-learning process of an art form that is so organically embedded within the beliefs and practices of the community, I realized that these nuances were often invisible to the outsider. The process seemed mostly silent, veiled in obscurity and full of non-verbal cues that revealed itself only to the teacher and the learner involved in the immediate activity. As a person outside the artist fraternity, it was almost impossible to gauge how the dissemination of knowledge was taking place between them, let alone understanding the dissemination of art over generations. Thus, it soon became clear to me within a few months of my field work, that understanding art dissemination would require a more direct and involved approach where I could interact and engage through their language and medium of art. This prompted me to look at ethnography from another perspective and harness- a more experiential approach for this study.

Design as Research and Research as Design

Addressing the conventional focus of ethnography and realizing the tools of observation, listening, writing and reading as insufficient when practiced in isolation, Sarah Pink (2015) introduces the concept of sensory ethnography. She takes the participant observation approach forward by going beyond ‘watching, listening and asking questions’. It focuses on the sensory approach across disciplines that have produced the understanding of experience, practice and knowledge as multisensory, involving all the senses, and understanding the senses as interconnected.

Advancements in methodology have led to innovations through which the gap between the

ethnographer and the subject can diminish. If one reflects on the above, sensory ethnography as an approach, one notices the presence of the researcher in the study. It further acknowledges the senses of the ethnographer in the process of documentation. However, we still differentiate between the 'ethnographer' and the 'study of the other' as the subject. The ethnographer tries to fit into the shoes of the subject triggering all her senses to document the experience.

In the present research, the need for a methodology was felt that could take sensory ethnography a step forward, to experiencing the process as an individual and also a part of the community. Analysing the intricacies of the art and its process demanded approaching the study as a design experience. To elaborate the above, the research question was approached as a '*design problem'*[42] and various design solutions were attempted. Initially, off-the-shelf research methodology practices were adopted like *structured and semi structured interviews*. Initial discrepancies led to replacing it with *narrative and group interviews*. Even though it partly solved the problem, breaking down the research question (problem) to its basic ingredients helped in approaching it from a different viewpoint. Participant Observation furthered the way to consider the unspoken chemistry, hierarchy, practices and actions between artists in a professional environment. However, participant observation failed to throw up answers of the integral beliefs linked to art, their philosophy and its pedagogy. Traditional ethnographic tools proved inadequate in documenting the process. Further exploration revealed that the language of collaboration and communication between artists, needed to be 'art' itself. Many particulars were impossible to express in words and much was lost in translation of the visual medium to the verbal language.

Thus, a methodology that encouraged an outsider's internal view and analysis of the community was required. A natural step forward seemed to participate and practice the art with the community. I started learning the contemporary Bhil art from Dubbu Baria (Image 42) and later from Bhuri Bai (Image 41). In the process I documented the process of teaching and reflected on the pedagogy, philosophy and practices of the community art, deeply soaked in their nature and lifestyle. The study of this indigenous art pedagogy is approached through experiential ethnography methodology as an application.

Experiential ethnography in this research helped to enquire the indigenous art learning process through an improvised research methodology framework with a foundation in experiential learning (Kolb, 1984). While the world moves towards innovative and newer ways of the ethnographer to engage with the subject, one may take the commitment forward from 're-

[42] Conference Proceedings: *Research as Design and Design as Research.* Paper Presentation at INSIGHT 2018, NID Ahmedabad, India.

representing' the experiences of the subject, to self-experience it. This could be addressed with the change in the role and perspective of the ethnographer/researcher. Instead of the researcher *'being in the shoes'* of the subject (Pink, 2015) and using all their '*interconnected senses*' to experience the same, one may look at 'becoming the subject' and self-reflect to collect data and compare it with other existing data, to produce the required knowledge. We will now further discuss research tools, principles, ethics and challenges of the experiential ethnography research methodology.

Experiential Ethnography

For the scope of this research, the process of 'art teaching' was documented as a research activity and 'art-learning' as a reflective research. Thus, research and design fed into one another where research was approached as a design activity and design was approached as a research activity. The proposed 'experiential ethnography' takes sensory ethnography a step further by referring to the 'ethnographer as one of the subjects' during the course of data collection, by being 'situated consciously' in the new environment and 'experiencing' it. It thus invites innovative methods to identify an environment, the subjects and then 'experience' their lives by actively participating in the community by 'learning', 'doing' and 'adapting' in the new space. It acknowledges the presence of the ethnographer, the past environment of the ethnographer, the new environment and also the implications of the ethnographers' interaction in the new space. Experiential ethnography is essentially not re-inventing ethnography but rather reasoning and re-thinking of traditional ethnographic methods. It is an extension of participant observation that explores new innovative approaches to engage with the participants.

The methodology thus lends itself to further studies in art practices where writing may not be the only way of ethnographic data collection and representation. The approach of the ethnographer as one of the 'subjects' would help in documentation of the unspoken, non-textual experiences and further compared with the experiences of the other participants. Even though there would be differences in the experiences of the two, the approach would help the ethnographer realize the non-textual implications through shared experiences. Self-reflection would be another powerful tool in this methodology that could guide the ethnographer to frame questionnaires, understand the intricacies of the art practices and communicate with the participants in a common language that need not be verbal. This methodology would mostly involve applications in the field of art and art practices, especially when the researcher is an artist himself/herself, or attempts to approach the study from the point of view of a practitioner.

Principles of Experiential Ethnography

Experiential ethnographic research challenges the idea of traditional ethnography methods being essentially about watching, listening and writing. With experiential ethnographic research, we situate ourselves in the context to experience it ourselves by becoming a learner, encouraging sharing of knowledge and collaborations to later reflect during analysis. Thus, elaborating the five experiential ethnographic research principles, we have the following principles.

Situatedness: By situatedness we mean that the ethnographer is not only present in the field physically, in mind and body but also sharing the consciousness of the community. We do not make the ethnographer 'invisible' but rather acknowledge his/her presence as a learner and active member of the growing community.

Experiential: In experiential ethnographic research the perspective of the ethnographer changes from the intention of observing the 'other' to 'experiencing *with* the other' and then reflecting on the experiences of the community as a whole. It should be further noted that the ethnographer experiences '*with* the other' and not '*as* the other'. This further breaks the 'ethnographer-other' paradox by switching roles through a self-immersive and self-reflective approach of the researcher.

Learner: One important criteria of experiential ethnographic research methodology is that it requires active participation from the researcher to the extent that they internalize the 'act' as their own, situate oneself within the context along with the subject and lend oneself to all the experiences that the 'act' offers. Thus, the ethnographer needs to go beyond being a participant observer to actively learn and practice the new-earned knowledge as an apprentice within the community. He/she thus undergoes the holistic experience including the challenges and the responsibilities similar to that of the subject.

The age-old dynamics of hierarchy between the ethnographer and the subject is reversed when the ethnographer takes the role of a 'learner' within the community. This could potentially release the subjects from the burden of being studied, constantly watched and judged and enables transfer of knowledge with less reservations and assumptions Instead, they could enjoy a higher status of transmitting the knowledge to the ethnographer, without any preconceived constraints.

Transfer of Knowledge

The transfer of knowledge happens in two stages, from the community to the ethnographer and

then the ethnographer to academia. In experiential ethnography, shared experiences help in realization of what the subject often finds difficult to translate in words. Thus, it aims to bridge the gap during transfer of knowledge from the community to the ethnographer, when the data is mostly non-textual. It minimizes the differences caused by translations from one vocabulary to the other and back again.

In the second case, the creation and transfer of the new knowledge by the ethnographer is mostly confined to academia. However, it is time we engage the non-academics and share the knowledge with a wider audience, especially the contributors or the subjects, if we may call them so. This approach would not only justify the ethical considerations but also generate dialogues between the academia and wider public. When the research field is media studies, the findings of ethnographic research lends itself to multiple outputs such as books, photographs, documentary films and other artworks taking the outcomes beyond conventional written articles, papers and reports. In such cases, experiential ethnographic research justifies the methodology by encouraging new approaches to engage with participatory arts, data collection and also innovative ways of representing ethnographic data.

Collaboration: Collaboration is an essential ingredient in experiential ethnography and should not be looked at as mere intervention alone. The idea of intervention and contamination by an external agent could be argued upon where the subject is an object, in the fields of sciences mostly. However, when we collaborate and work with people as in the field of ethnography, we need to acknowledge the concept of 'sharing of knowledge' within communities and cultures. Collaboration could be introduced in more than one area namely collaboration as sharing of knowledge, collaboration as a data collection tool and collaboration as data representation. The community could also be involved in data collection, validity and ethical checks. Innovative ways of non-textual data collection may portray the perspective of the subjects to look at their own world and thus add a different dimension to the study. Collaboration as a data representation tool may lead to multiple outcomes of knowledge representation and thus, find a wider audience and initiate dialogues.

Ethical Considerations and Challenges

As multidisciplinary and cross-national studies have given way to unconventional research methodologies, the ethical considerations of these should also be taken into consideration. In experiential ethnographic research where on one hand, the ethnographer eventually becomes one of the subjects of study and on the other, the subject plays an important role in validity and creation of new knowledge, ethical consideration needs special attention. It has to be noted that

experiential ethnography is a research methodology for data collection. The immersive nature of the ethnographer during data collection needs to be replaced by an unbiased, neutral and third-perspective approach during reflection and analysis of the data.

A practical application of this methodology of experiential ethnography is discussed in the present context at the end of the chapter. Annexed to this chapter is a reflection on my personal experience of learning the contemporary Bhil Art from Bhuri Bai[i].

3.7 Conclusion

This chapter becomes the backbone of the research as I detail and discuss the plan for approaching the field, identify the multiple sites along with the rationale, adopt a methodological framework to collect data and adapt the methodology further to suit the requirements of data collection. Since, the study entailed collecting data from multiple sites (tribal schools, villages, urban work environments, new settlements), each site had a relevant method of collecting data from their specific respondents. We further identified the tools and the respondents in each scenario. The chapter further introduces the multiple theoretical lens used to view the data and the rationale for each.

The research design and methodology as illustrated above has evolved over the course of my field work. The designing of experiential ethnography as a research methodology and the combined application of research tools led to meaningful interactions and collaborations, design exchanges and transfer of knowledge of art and art practices. I particularly appreciated the possibility of dialogue between the two artists – Bhuri Bai, a Bhil Adivasi by birth who migrated to Bhopal as a child labour carrying the community art, and myself the researcher and filmmaker by profession. It informed my research by helping me to situate the study in the present context of a dynamic indigenous community in transition.

Now that the tone of the study, its academic basis and design considerations have been established, I will move on to elaborate on my diverse experiences and findings from my nearly five years of deep involvement with the Bhil Adivasi community in the subsequent chapters.

I have divided my data into two broad thematic chapters; chapter 4 and chapter 5. In the first one, I discuss the Bhil Art practices in a traditional context and how these ritualistic practices have survived and evolved over time. The chapter 4 attempts to look at the characteristics of the traditional artform and its relevance in the present context of a dynamic Adivasi community. The next data chapter 5, is on the transitions of the artform and the various interventions that have

contributed to the evolution of a new contemporary artform that meets the needs of a commercial market economy while at once upholding their cultural identity. In both these chapters, we touch upon the transmission of knowledge of the traditional and contemporary Bhil artform and later, its co-existence in the present context. Chapter 6 discusses the transmission of ancient art practices and their knowledge system in further depth, looking at the purpose of art, its practices, what does the community think worthy to be passed on, the pedagogic approach and the feedback system.

Practicing Experiential Ethnography in Context – A reflection on my personal experience of learning under Bhuri Bai

When I first started my field work for this research, I was a participant observer to the process of art making and the narrative involved in selling the Bhil artwork to prospective clients, for around two years. During this period, I interacted and shadowed multiple artists, both traditional and contemporary, of different gender and age groups ranging from seven-year-old child artists to 75-year-old *lekhindras*. However, being an artist myself, I longed to practice the artform to understand and experience its intricacies and meanings beyond the purpose of this research. Besides, my field observations made me realize that the teaching learning process involved mostly non-verbal communications and cues that could best be perceived by the teacher and the taught. This was both an excuse and an opportunity for me to learn the Bhil artform from one of the senior practitioners that I had encountered during my field work. Thus, even though the decision to start learning the Bhil art was intuitive, the choice of the teacher within the community was conscious to a great extent. Historically, if we look at the practice and dissemination of traditional artforms (music, art, dance and other practices) in ancient India, it is customary for the teacher and the student to choose each other. If I reflect back, I think Bhuri Bai recognized this urge during our long conversations that often drifted from research relevant questions to personal life, dreams and aspirations. I was in awe of her journey from a child labour to an established Bhil artist travelling the world with her paintings. As the community belief goes, the woman of the community were forbidden to paint the sacred Pithora horse (two headed white horse that carries Baba Dev to the homes of the people). It was believed that the practice would bring bad luck to the community if drawn by any woman. However, Bhuri Bai was never too convinced with this rule. Over a period of five years she painted the forbidden horse initially symbolically, then, adding one organ at a time, to finally painting herself riding the horse (Image 46). Later when I asked her if she faced any ill luck, she simply replied that it wasn't the Pithora horse but rather, an image of the Pithora, much like Rene's famous painting, 'This is not a pipe'.



Image 46: Bhuri Bai, with her horses; Inset: Rene's painting 'This is not a pipe'.

Thus, when I approached her with *gurudakshina*[43] after shadowing her for over two years, she readily agreed to teach me, and it formally initiated my process of learning the Bhil artform.



Image 47: Handing a Gurudakshina to Bhuri Bai, in 2015

However, this action seemed to break norms and therefore, raised a few eyebrows in my immediate research circle who were believers of traditional ethnography. My introduction of practices and rituals, not belonging to the community, seemed to contaminate the field. My argument to the above was that the contemporary Bhil artist community dwelled in a city, were associated with Museums and hence exposed to acts, traditions and rituals

[43] An offering made to the teacher in return of the knowledge granted by him/her.

commonly practiced by the larger community. Further, they were exposed to them through television, advertisement, in work places and in schools. They were very well aware of the customs pertaining to other traditional artforms that were given a higher status as compared to tribal arts. For the community members, my intention and approach towards learning the Bhil art was perceived not as an intrusion but more as an acknowledgement of their artist identity in a contemporary context. Thus, I was welcomed into the community as one of the artists like themselves, and at the same time, as an outsider keen on understanding their artform.

I continued to learn and practice the Bhil art with Bhuri Bai through periodic fieldtrips over a course of three years. I would follow her closely and practice with her at her workplace, Tribal Museum and home. At her workplace, she would often dedicate and distribute work to other Bhil artists for group projects. She would also be assigned independent projects by present curators, that we would discuss together. Further, when she participated in design workshops, I would help the conductors translate and document her work. At home, I would practice Bhil art along with her grandchildren, especially Reeta who was in grade 10 at that time. Even though, Reeta was in an advanced stage of learning as compared to me, this process helped me experience the learning process with her and then reflect on our experiences as a whole. It would help me internalize the 'act of learning' as part of the community, situate myself within the context along with a co-learner and lend myself to all the experiences that the act could offer. I realised that the indigenous art practice was seamlessly organic, embedded in nature and a culturally inclusive model that was preserved through its narratives. Thus, the practice helped me undergo the holistic experience including the challenges and the responsibilities similar to that of my co-learner, Reeta and other children I learnt with. Below in (Image 48), Pooja, then 5 years old, and me both learn making an elephant in the Bhil style. While mine, seems similar to the technique of Bhil art, the five year old successfully captured the narrative in the painting.



Image 48: Me and Pooja, displaying our elephants!

As mentioned earlier, our involvement with art was mostly non-verbal. We would practice our art without any conversations. Some days, we would only speak during tea breaks and not particularly on the subject of art. Other days, we would discuss a particular artwork of some other artist and their style. There would often be an exchange

of knowledge with her trying to understand techniques of digital drawing (Image 49) and me, intricacies of Bhil *Adivasi* beliefs and narratives. In the process, the age-old dynamics of hierarchy between the ethnographer and the subject was reversed where I, the ethnographer took the role of a learner and Bhuri Bai, a teacher, within the community.



Image 49: Bhuri Bai working on the laptop for the first time. Inset: Us working together.

During this period Bhuri Bai and I also worked on a book (Dotted Lines, 2018) together and made many video recordings of her work and exhibitions (Image 50). Collaboration between us became an essential tool in making the relationship stronger. It gave us both a sense of purpose, redefined our roles and made us interdependent. There was a certain trust and responsibility during such collaborations that naturally led to sharing of knowledge between us, despite belonging to different communities and cultures. Presently, we are working on another book, to be published (Image 51) and we continue to work on an animated documentary.



THE HINDU
MADURAI • Friday • March 20, 2020
METROPLUS
metroplus.thehindu.com
facebook.com/thehindumetroplus
twitter.com/thmetroplus

The unusual things chefs discover on research trips
page 2

Make hand washing fun during times of Corona
page 3

Sobhita Dhulipala on working across industries
page 4

SOMA BASU

On the DOT

Bhuri Bai, a tribal woman from Madhya Pradesh, whose paintings are compiled in the book *Dotted Lines*, saw a soft launch in the city. Today being World Storytelling Day, sample her story of resilience

Bhuri Bai is not an unfamiliar name in the field of arts. She is the first tribal woman artist who dared to take the traditional Pithora paintings beyond the walls of the huts in her village in Jhabua, Madhya Pradesh. Albeit with a minor improvisation. She transferred the folk art form from the mud walls to huge canvasses and sheets of paper. It fetched her recognition, fame, awards and money.

Yet, a small book that she has co-authored with Debjani Mukherjee, research scholar with IDC School of Design at IIT Bombay, is giving Bhuri Bai the happiness she always yearned for during her years of struggle. "*Main aage badh paa rahi hoon* (I am able to progress)," she says over the phone from Bhopal, where her vibrant art works influenced by the original Pithora paintings and tweaked as contemporary Bhil art, find a permanent place of pride in the Tribal Museum.

One of Katha's recent publications, the book titled *Dotted Lines* is not just a compilation of 20 themed paintings that take you through a visual autobiography of Bhuri Bai. "It is a learning about the traditional Pithora art that hides a tale of empowerment, illustrates a unique culture and reveals how art can both be saved and be a saviour," says Debjani.

The journey of the book started when she went to Bhopal as part of her research on indigenous art forms. During a soft launch of the book in Madurai (which was followed by the official release in Bhopal recently), Debjani narrated the story of Bhuri Bai who broke the gender barrier in her Bhil community (a migratory tribe from Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Gujarat) to transform herself from an indigenous local painter to a contemporary folk artist.

The typical dotted paintings in the book tell Bhuri's story, of her childhood days and family, village life and surroundings, how art and Nature intertwined in their lives, and yet, the culture and customs followed by the Bhil people kept women away from painting their houses. The men believed girls, after attaining puberty, become 'impure', and hence the ritual of painting to receive blessings of their deity, Dev Pithora, was only the man's prerogative.

Bhuri Bai says she would sit in a corner and watch the village priest and the male members in the family, make natural colours with flowers, clay, and seeds and then paint with them on the walls. The painting style would follow elaborate patterns and coiling designs. There was a calculation for dots based on seeds of maize (corn) that was grown in that belt, she adds, and has a striking resemblance to works of the Australian aboriginals.

Through her paintings, Bhuri highlights how art attracted her but she continued to till the land till she moved to Bhopal as a daily wager at the Bharat Bhavan cultural centre. This proved to be a turning point because she met well-known Indian artist Jagdish Swaminathan who suggested she paint the traditional pithora art on a sheet of paper.

Bhuri Bai recalls she was nervous to start as she had never used paint brushes and acrylic colours but she soon conquered her fears and started painting her village life from memory.

The bright colours of her village festivities, the scenes of daily life, village architecture, the forests, flora and fauna, traditional attires and ornaments, the dances.... Soon she began incorporating elements of urban and industrial life and painted everything she saw around her and her contemporary themes converted the traditional and ritualistic Bhil pithora paintings into contemporary Bhil.

Says Debjani, "This is a classic case of art flowing towards commercialisation not to kill it, but for its evolution." In the traditional pithora art, one single wall of painting would depict series of scenes from a story, while in Bhil art every scene became an individual piece of work retaining the dotted style, she explains. When Debjani started her research on pedagogy of indigenous art education in 2014, she spent two years interviewing and documenting the work of 70-odd Bhil artists and studying their works displayed at the State Museum, Bharat Bhavan, Tribal Museum and Indira Gandhi Rashtriya Manav Sanghralay. That is when she met Bhuri and got to know her story. "I trained under her for another two years learning to make the dotted paintings. My objective was to create awareness about indigenous artists and highlight their pur-

Once Bhuri Bai's contemporary works began to receive global acceptance, she went back to her village to train the girls in the art form and encourage them to paint. "Our art is therapeutic and meditative," says Bhuri Bai and today she trains about two-dozen women.

Debjani strongly feels indigenous art is shared heritage. "There is a need to support artists like Bhuri Bai who are keeping the art alive by teaching it to a wider section of people and trying to prevent careless copying of their hard-worked images," she says.

Working with tribal artists through collaborations in order to guard against appropriation of indigenous art, Debjani came up with the idea of Dotted *Lines*. "It is Bhuri Bai's first book aimed at defining her role as a teacher and artist within the community and outside as well and to tell the modern world

She also conducts therapy workshops for students using art as an effective tool for self-discovery and social change. "Such efforts help to bridge the gap between the modern industrialised world and the unique lifestyles of adivasis and save ancestral knowledge and wisdom," she adds. "It helps you grow beyond."

Breaking barriers (Clockwise): The tribal museum; Paintings by Bhuri Bai and with her co-author Debjani Mukherjee
• SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT AND R ASHOK

Bhuri Bai presently works as an artist with Adivasi Lok Kala Academy in Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh
Her works have been displayed in galleries and museums of Europe, Australia and the US.
Her painting Story of the Jungle sold at Sotheby's auction in 2007
She has been awarded with Shikhar Samman and Ahalya Samman by Madhya Pradesh government
She was invited on presidential delegation to Australia for a workshop with Australian aboriginals and Indian tribal artists.

Image 50: Media coverage of the book, Dotted Lines, along with works of Bhuri Bai



Image 51: Cover design of our second book compiling the origin stories of the Bhils

There were also many ethical considerations and challenges during the process of learning art and collaborations. One of them was selling the artworks done by me, under the umbrella of *Adivasi* Bhil art. As an artist myself and

a researcher, I had made it clear to myself and Bhuri Bai about my purpose of learning the Bhil art. It was solely to experience the non-verbal process of learning *Adivasi* art and to learn something new. As an artist, it helped me to look at forms as a holistic entity and beyond the science of perspective and angle. Hence, at the end of my fieldtrips, I would leave behind my artworks with Bhuri Bai to be sold by her, just like the other learners would do. Later, during the end of the term, when I was unable to travel due to childbirth, Bhuri Bai frequently travelled to my home to complete the projects in hand and finish my learning of the Bhil art. I documented our interactions as a journal and later retrieved notes from them.

All this experience helped to bridge the gap during transfer of knowledge from the community to the ethnographer, when the data was mostly non-textual. It minimized the differences caused by translations from one vocabulary to the other, in this case, from art to text, and back again. I further verified my reflection with my co-learners, contributors and teachers to validate the data and generate further dialogues, keeping in mind the ethical considerations. This process of experiential ethnography not just informed and enriched my thesis, but also led me to form interpersonal connections with the people and the artform that will perhaps continue well beyond my research.

Chapter 4

The Traditional *Bhil Pithora*

4.1 Introduction

As a result of ethnographic research and experiencing and practicing the Bhil Art, with the community, over the last five years, I realised that 'art' as we understand in the urban context is not the same as it is in an Adivasis life. It acquires an entirely different meaning by being deeply embedded in the lives of the Adivasis – in both the special and everyday occasions; such as rituals from child birth, marriage, death to making tattoos and decorating the walls of the houses. Hence, it seems impossible to extricate art from their context. The relationship of art with special events such as birth of a child, marriage and death is deep and complex. Each event has a motif signifying itself so much so that even a cursory look at the motif will indicate the event being talked about. In addition to that, each such relationship is accompanied by a story, which usually dates back to an origin story[44]. It is also similar for various Bhil festivals. For example, during the Pithora Festival, one of the biggest and most celebrated Bhil Festivals, unique images representing scenes from origin stories are drawn on the walls of the houses by village priest (*badwa*, *lekhindra*-painter) such that they form the guiding principles of the Bhil community. Hence, unconsciously, it shapes the community practice, behaviour and the belief system. It is usually a multi-sensorial ritual involving music, dance, painting the walls, preparation of food and offerings of maize, *ganja* and *mahua*. Thus, such an event has to be experienced, observed and reflected as a whole and in all its context and complexities to understand the meaning of 'art' in an artist community. Further, 'art', even though it is an integral part of the lives of the community, does not have a nomenclature for itself in their language, which makes its existence and differentiation extremely subtle[45].

[44] As documented in the 'to be published' book, The Origin of the Bhils.
[45] In this thesis, we will use the term 'art' to represent art in all its complexities; for purposes of convenience.

In this chapter, I try to describe and narrate the multi-layered and nuanced nature of art, its role as a mediator and their evolving relationship between the Adivasis and their art. The mention of tribal or indigenous art almost instantaneously takes us to the labyrinth of the past and the primitive and in some ways, persuades us to delve in the traditions of the past. However, the art is very much situated in the present, visualized amongst us and created alongside us. It is thus important to understand that even though the art may have an ancient history, it has evolved alongside time to exist today, in the present. This chapter situates the Bhil artist community and their artform in the present. It introduces the traditional *Pithora* painting in the present contemporary context and analyses the transformation in the traditional art practice over time. Further, it discusses the practice and purpose of the traditional art, the patronage and the role of practitioners. The process of *Pithora* art making is elaborated through its tools, preparation and preservation of the ritualistic art. This chapter also delves deeper into the oral and visual narratives through interpreting images and attempting to make sense of their world from their perspectives. I further attempt to understand the process of dissemination of knowledge over generations and its effect on the social structure.

4.2 The Traditional Ritual Performative Practice of Bhil *Pithora*

The Bhil Adivasi is the second largest indigenous community of India and *Pithora* is one of the biggest and most popular festivals of the Bhils. The *Rakhi Pithora* festival is celebrated annually, ten days prior to Rakhi Purnima, held in the month of March. During the festival, an elaborate painting named after the festival, is made on the outer wall of their houses. The *Pithora* painting is created by the Bhils to situate their gods and ancestors in the sacred enclosure of their walls through a multi-sensual ritualistic performance that entails chanting, oral narratives, festivities, painting and music. Thus, the *Pithora* painting is incomplete in isolation. *Pithora* painting stands for the Bhils, just as *Mithila* for the *Madhubani* Brahmins of Bihar (Mishra & Owens, 1978) (Singh, 2000) (Brown, 1996) (K. Jain, 2007), *Gond* for Gond Adivasi of Madhya Pradesh, *Pattachitra* for Raghurajpur of Orissa (Bundgaard, 1996 & 1999), *Patua* for Santhal of Bengal (Hauser, 2002) (Chatterjee, 2015) and *Sora* paintings for Sora Adivasi of Orissa (Cecile, 2017). The account in this section is based on my experience of spending time with the community *lekhindras*[46] and documenting the process through observation and interviews.

[46] The quest to observe a Pithora painting in the traditional context led me to a small village called Bhabra, to meet a senior Bhil artist, 85-year-old Prema Fatya. Bhabra is a village in the Alirajpur district, formerly a princely state, located in western Madhya Pradesh. It is home to many Adivasi Bhils. Prema Fatya is one of the oldest surviving Bhil *lekhindra* (traditional painter) and the first man to transpose *Pithora* on canvas. J. Swaminathan, an artist and curator at Bharat Bhavan, identified him in early 1970's in Bhopal where he

4.2.1 Practice

The sacred enclosure of Pithora Festival

From the time a house is constructed, a wall is dedicated to the installation of the gods and ancestors. Among most of the Adivasi communities of central India, the main wall at the entrance that divides the room from the kitchen is considered sacred (Jain, 2007). During the *Rakhi Pithora* festival, a sacred enclosure is made on this wall to invoke the ancestors and deities. This ceremony of invocation is usually led by the patron and the village priests[47] and invites are sent to the ancestors and deities to descend and reside into the paintings. The village priests are usually a duo of a *badwa*, who chants the origin narratives and a *lekhindra* who illustrated the images on the walls.

It is important here to note the iconography of the words locally associated with the Bhils in the context of traditional *Pithora* ritual. The ritual act of 'installing' the *Pithora* on the wall of the houses is known as '*Pithoro behadvo'* literally meaning to 'make the god seated' inside a sacred enclosure. Again, the *lekhindra* 'writes' (local word '*lakhvo'* for painting the Pithora) the paintings while the *badwa* 'chants' (local word '*nam padvo'* meaning reads or chants*)* the praises of the god and identifies each character and connects the mythical past to the present by giving meaning and life to each member. The complete ritual act of installing the *Pithora* is called '*Pithora vacvo*'. The use of the words '*behavo', 'vacvo', 'lakhvo*' and '*padvo'* all hint towards the transformation and co-existence of the oral legend to text and painting over the years. The *Pithora* that serves as an invitation during the *Pithora* festival, converts to a 'seat' or 'house' of the gods after the invitation ritual. Thus, the Bhil Adivasi people are in continuous interaction with their gods and ancestors such that they believe in co-dwelling spaces engaging themselves and their ancestors and deities, through oral legends, living myths and symbolic elements. This practice of 'co-dwelling space' in the Bhil community is also seen in other Adivasi communities of India. For example, it is similar to Mithila from Bihar where there appears a motive referring to a 'seat' (Singh 2000), inviting the gods to inhabit the picture. We see a similar co-dwelling in other Adivasi communities where the concept of 'house' is established by the sacred enclosed space. The Sora's of Orissa have a practice of co-dwelling with their gods and ancestors by inviting them to reside in the sacred enclosure that comprises the whole universe (Cecile, 2017). Also, in the Sora community, the gestures of the local priests imitate the construction of the sacred space (Mallebrein, 2001) or leading to doorways. These

recreated the *Pithora* painting in a non-ritualistic context at the museums. After a massive cerebral attack that paralyzed the right side of his body, he went back to Bhabra, to stay with his nephew, Thawar Singh, whom he later taught the art.

[47] Lekhindras and Badwas

geometric sacred spaces are also described as ‘icon’ by Verrier Elwin (1964) and they symbolically represent a house when drawn as a rectangle, as by the Rathwa and Bhil communities and a square with a triangle at the top among the Sora’s. In Bhil or Rathwa *Pithora*, these images serve as dwelling for the gods, complete with a sacred boundary that marks the sacred space and houses their God, *Pithoro.* There is a doorway at the bottom of the painting as a sign of the entrance through which the deities are invited through chants and hand gestures, to inhabit the image. Below are two images of the Pithora painting; the first a picture from a house in the village and the latter a commissioned painting of the same festival, situated at the museum.

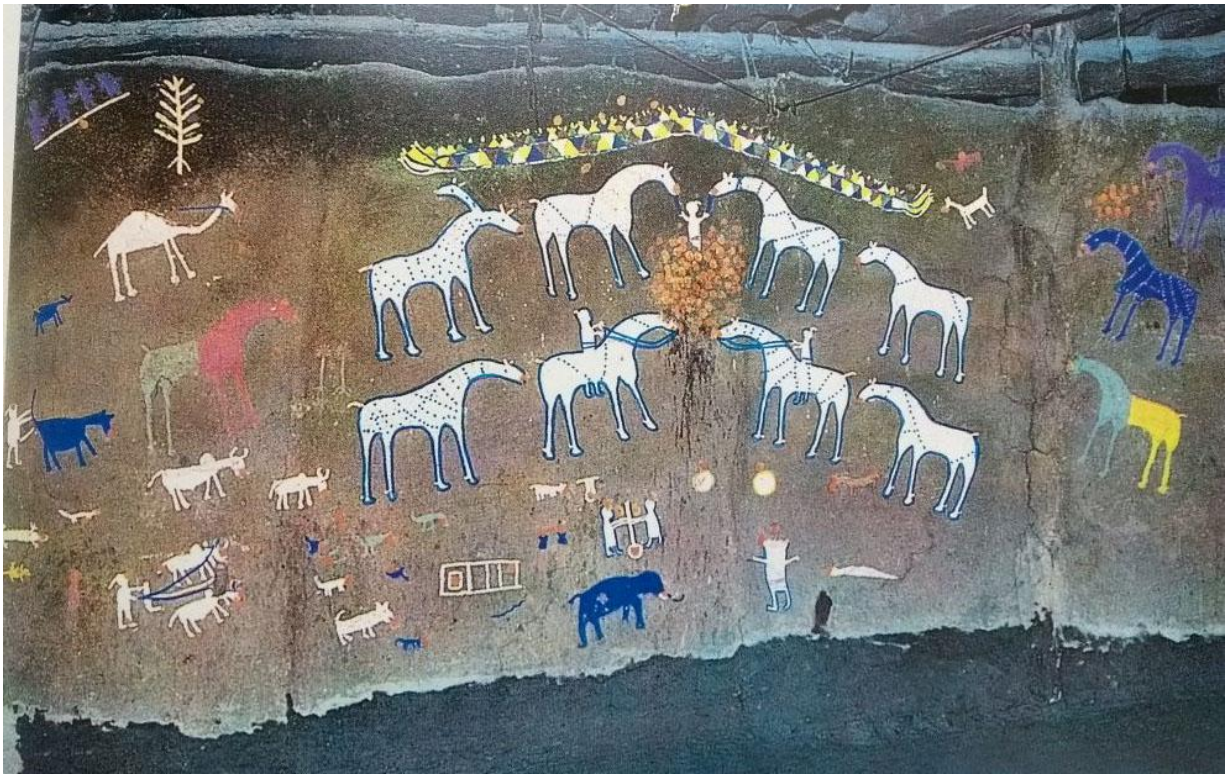


Image 52: Traditional Bhil Pithora painting from 1984. Source: Painted myths of creation. Jyotindra Jain



Image 53: Bhil Akho Pithora painting at IGRMS, showcasing the doorway and the sacred enclosure, by Prema Fatya (archive. Dated 2007).

One would also note the differences in the style and colour of the two paintings. The reason being that the patron commissions the priests to conduct the festival at their homes, and based on the budget the details are incorporated. Hence, there is a *ardho Pithora* (half *Pithora*) and a *akkho Pithora* (full *Pithora*).



Image 54: Ardho Pithora by Pema Fatya

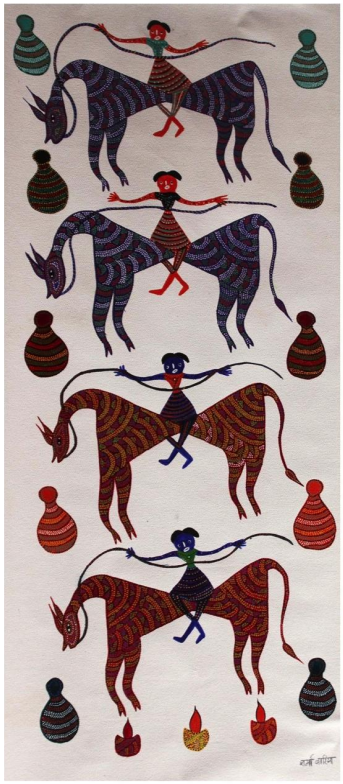
Other Traditional Art Practices among the Bhils

Art in the traditional context forms an integral element of the many fairs, festivals and ceremonies in the Bhil community, and in most cases they are experienced as a multi-sensorial celebration. For example, the practice of visual art is accompanied by music, dance and food during the *Pithora* festival or during the wedding celebration. Similarly, every ritual celebrated in the community, as a significant importance in their lives and is hence, associated with a definitive meaning, relevance, narrative, belief system and motif. Further, each motif is unique to the festival and with it, the process and the practice of the art. Since, art does not have a separate isolated identify in the community, these motifs and paintings practiced during the festivals are often named after it.

Over the years, the traditional artists within a community create a vocabulary of images associated for each of these festivals. For example, the *Godhna*[48] designs (Image 19) associated with body art, two-headed *Pithora* horses drawn during the *Pithora* Festival *(Image 54),* the peacock and aamba drawn during the wedding (Image 9) and the human riding the horse, during the *Gathla* ceremony (Image 11), as depicted in images shared before.

These ritual art are practiced on the ground, sand, stone blocks, walls and on cattle based on the festival. Both painting and relief mud work is practiced. Talking of the permanency of the art, some are meant to stay for a fortnight, some for a week and some for a year. Referring to the Festivals there is the *Bhagoriya Mela*[49]*, Gal Bapsi*[50]*, Diwali*[51]*, Gohari*[52]*, Pithora* and *Gathla* where we notice 'visual art' in a specific form. In each of these festivals, the visual art is accompanied with music, oral narratives and sometimes, elaborate performance. The ritual practices also include preparation of food, burning fire and animal sacrifices. Thus, these rituals are a holistic experience only complete when all five senses are triggered and they work in unison. Below, we list Bhil Festivals and the annual timeline.

[48] Tattoo art
[49] A festival inviting young Bhils to meet their partners and elope; hence the name.
[50] A festival where wishes are fulfilled and mannat (promises) are made to deities.
[51] Festival of Lights
[52] Cattle festival



Holi
Amli Egyaras
Jatar
Akha Teej
Khatrij
Bhutta Pujan
Gouri Geholo or Devo Pujan
Rakhadi or Rakhi Doura
Rakhi Pithora
Dewali
Gouhori Puja
Diwaho



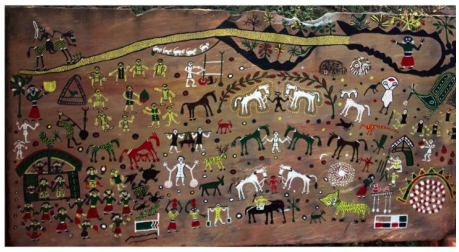


Image 55: The Bhil festivals



Baba Ram Dev Ka Mela



Bhagoria Mela

Gal Dev

Chul Charana

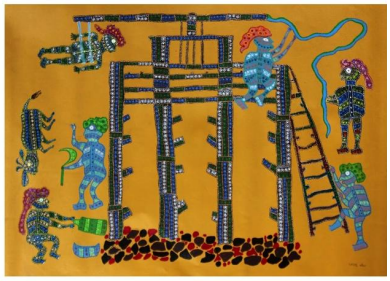


Image 56: The fairs of the Bhils



Sagai
Peethi or Haldi Dena
Tel Chadhana
Marat
Been Notra
Jan Chandhana
Toran
Phera
Halaili Noojana
Bat Rukai
Pandilana









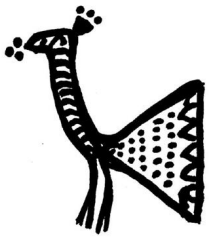




Image 57: Art associated in marriage rituals: The wedding place



Birth Rites and Ceremonies
Disposal of Placenta
Chhoya
Nak Kan Bindhana
Dangana





Death Rites and Ceremonies
Teeja
Mourning Rites
Katta or Barma
Gathla



Image 58: Art associated in birth rites, self-embellishment and death rituals

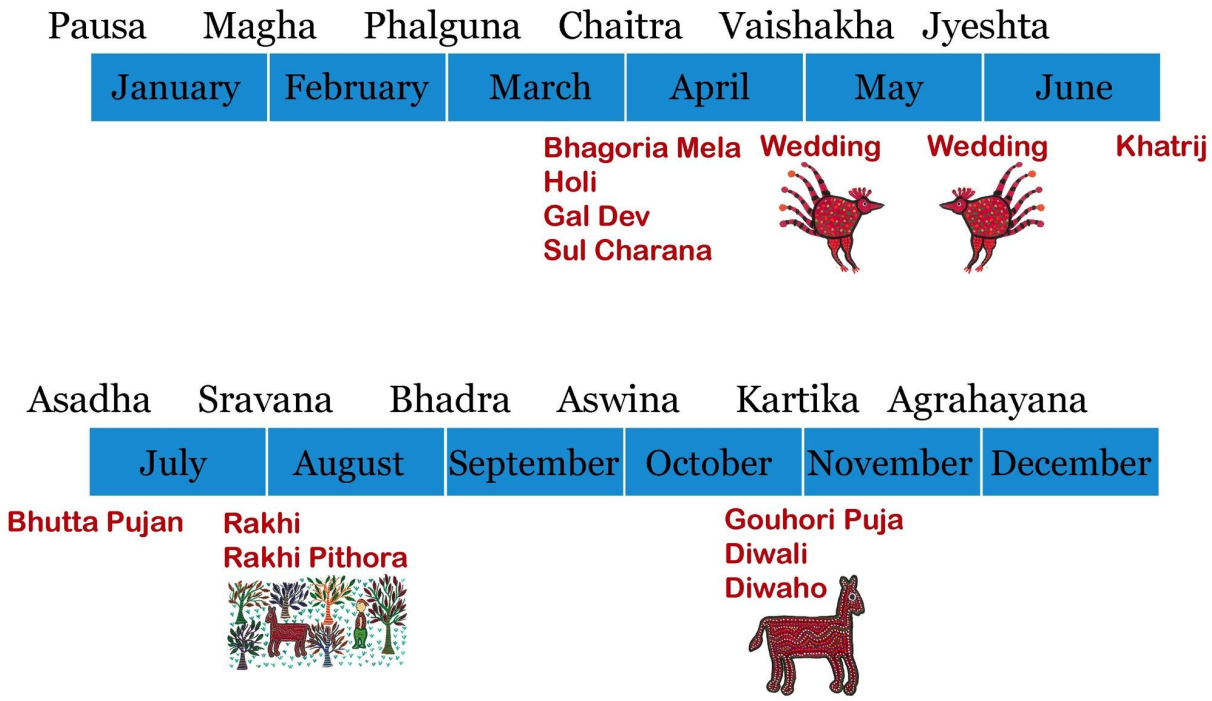


Image 59: The festival and fairs of the Bhils on a yearly timeline

4.2.2 Purpose

Each of the Bhil fair and the festivals are associated with a strong purpose of practice, often deeply embedded in their belief systems. For example, the *Pithora* painting, named after their god of grains *Pithoro*, are believed to flatter the spirits so that they accept the house, choose to reside in it and watch over the residents. *Pithoro* is believed to fulfil their earthy needs and favours such as rains for their arid lands, good harvest or cure for illness. It is also believed to represent the welcoming or wedding booth[53] of Raja *Pithoro*. The *Pithora* painting also depicts origin stories, folklore of local deities and rulers[54] based on their region and hence, celebrating their rulers and in a way serving the patrons. Similarly, the human riding the horse, during the *Gathla* ceremony is believed to represent their deceased ancestors journey to heaven. The peacock drawn during marriage, is a symbolic representation of wealth and promises a shower of blessings to the new couple. Thus, each of the festivals and fairs play an important role in their lives of the Bhils and have a specific purpose to its celebrations. Further, the purpose of each of the fairs and festivals are kept alive, practiced, remembered and further transferred to

[53] The story goes — once, during the rule of Dharmi Raja, the land was hit with drought. The forest died, the cattle perished and the sea went dry. The hungry people including their Prince, Pithoro, forgot to sing, dance or laugh. On the advice of Dharmi Raja, Pithora set to meet Goddess Himali, on a white horse. Goddess Himali blessed prince Pithoro with rainfall, songs, dance and laughter. She also said, that any house where he resides, will be blessed with the same. Prince Pithoro comes back to his village and visits every house to bring their happiness back. The villagers in turn, decorated their houses with the Pithora painting, depicting his journey. They also cooked a sumptuous meal for him and offered him the local liquor mahua.

[54] Rulers – Usually kings and chiefs who are acknowledged in their paintings along with their traditional Gods and Goddesses.

the next generation through oral narratives, folklores and music. Specific to the *Pithora* festival, these oral narratives are performed by the *badwas* (village priest), visually depicted by the *lekhindras* (painters) and made to order by the patrons. As the *lekhindras* paint (write) the elements on the walls, the *badwa* identifies each character and connects the mythical past to the present by giving meaning and life to each member. Thus, they work in unison with each other and are dependent on the patron for their commissioned work.

4.2.3 Patronage and Practitioners

The performative ritual practice of *Pithora* is brought together by the local priest called the *badwa*, who recites the chants while the *lekhindras* illustrate the images. The other community members are the patrons who invite the *lekhindras* and the *badwas* to perform the sacred ritual at their homes after which an auspicious time is fixed to install the *Pithora* in their houses. The individual elements in the *Pithora* painting are embellished with dots where each of the dots pays homage to the patron's ancestors, gods and goddesses. The *badwa* is also believed to convey the wishes of his patrons to their ancestors and Gods. Thus, the *badwa* holds an important position in Bhil society. Though he necessarily belongs to a specific lineage of priests in the community, every member of his family may not be a *badwa*. The position of the *lekhindra* too is a hereditary one.

The patron family chooses to do an '*ardho'* (half) or '*akkho'* (complete) *Pithora* (Images below) based on their economic status and viability. A *dakshina*[55], payment for the services of the priest is fixed based on it. The *akkho Pithora* is complete with celestial horses, gods and ancestors as riders. The number of origin stories illustrated and the drawing of gods depends on the payment agreement made with the *badwa*. When the patron is unable to pay for the detailed work, the *lekhindra* accommodates by making an *ardho Pithora* by just applying the dots for each of the origin narratives. When the priests want to install a similar Pithora at their houses, they too have to go through a similar expenditure. Thus, during a year of low financial saving, the priests perform a ritualistic *Pithora* festival through application and installation of 'dots' on their walls instead of an elaborate painting, as in the image below. Thus, in the *ardho Pithora* all the deities and characters are not present. However, Baba Ganesh is established in both the cases, as he is the first god to be installed in the sacred enclosure.

[55] Payment made for the prayer services



Image 60a and b: Prema Fatya and his wife: installed 'dots' during the last Rakhi Pithora, in his own house.

While the *Pithora* painting is essentially to please the invisible deities and the ancestors, the *lekhindras* are subject to evaluation of the mortals too. The *badwa*, who is often believed to be a medium between the people and the gods and is possessed by the gods, has the sole power during the performance of the ritual to decide the gods' willingness to reside in the family homes. The success of the *Pithora* festival is based on the *Badwa's* expectations being met by the family's offerings and his contentment from the participation of the musicians and *lekhindras*. The *lekhindra* however, does not enjoy an equal status with the *badwa* in the ritual.



Image 61: Bhil Akho Pithora painting from IGRMS by Prema Fatya (archive. Dated 2007).

4.2.4 Process: Tools, Preparation and Preservation

Tools

Tools[56] are the raw materials used for the practice of the *Pithora* painting. The *Pithora* painting requires simple and basic materials like strings, green bamboo twigs for brushes, kitchen knives for relief and incised drawings, natural colours, milk and *mahua* (local liquor produced by the community) to mix the colours. Traditionally, cups are made from green leaves of the *khakra* tree that is sometimes replaced with clay cups or coconut shells. The natural colours are made from turmeric, *geru*, red clay, indigo, soot and cow dung. The red clay is usually collected from the crab's den. It is believed to give a very fine texture to the paint as it is rolled by the saliva of the crab and dried for days.

[56] Tools stands for *Samagri*. I use it for convenience as used in the language of design/art practice in the urban context.



Image 62: Preparation of mahua



In the present times, powdered commercial colours are mixed with *mahua* to make the traditional *Pithora* paintings.

Inset: The powder paint used for ritual Pithora

Preparation

The *Pithora* is usually painted overnight on the tenth or fourteenth day of the *Pithora* festival. The process entails sending an invitation to God *Pithoro* and the ancestors of the Bhils, through the medium of *Pithora* painting, to reside in the homes of the patrons and in return, guide and protect them. The painting process is accompanied with music and chants. Offerings are also made such as *mahua*, maize and an animal sacrifice (hen, goat) promising utmost care to the gods who are invited to be 'seated' in their homes. The *lekhindra* and the *badwa*, in order to conduct the *Pithora* ritual, have to fast prior to the festival and are allowed to consume only *mahua* that is prepared to offer the gods. Further, women and menstruating girl-child are prompted to stay away from the paths of the gods (Mukherjee, 2018). However, the patron's wife or mother has to gather the offerings (maize, mahua) and the *naghnya (*young girl child) has to purify the place for the ritual. The *nav naghnya,* or nine girls before puberty, are chosen

to prepare the wall with a paste of mud and cow dung. They prepare the wall with multiple coatings for nine days. Then, on the ninth day, which is usually a Tuesday (*pandurio*), the *badwa* goes to the nearby mines to collect white clay. It is here that the first offering and sacrifice is made. It is believed that to collect the white clay from the mines, the belly of Mother Earth has to be torn open, and hence an appropriate offering[57] is necessary. The word *pandurio* means the day of the white lord, Tuesday and *panduraya* stands for the white clay (Jain, 1984). It is interesting to note that *pandu* means white in Sanskrit too. It is this white clay that is used to paint the auspicious *Pithora* horse. I was also told that white stands for divinity and the power to appear and disappear in nature. By painting the *Pithora* horses or the backgrounds in white, the Bhils distinguish between the celestial beings and the mortal beings in their ritual *Pithora* painting.

Bhuri Bai, a female Bhil contemporary artist, had shared her experience of being a *nav naghnya* as a child. She recounted to me the process of preparing the mixture for the wall and the act of making beautiful textures on it. Even though making textures were not necessary and mandatory in the traditional custom, she liked to improvise on the textures. The textures were made through movements of the artists hand dipped in paint, and moving with the rhythm of music on the walls. Thus, this 'action of painting' the wall by repeating certain movements to make patterns forms the textures. It is interesting to note that Bhuri Bai recently had an exhibition where she used the traditional mixture of cow-dung and clay on paper to recreate the similar texture, as a recollection from childhood experience.



Image 63: Bhuri Bai with a textured canvas, during her exhibition in 2017, Bharat Bhavan, Bhopal.

[57] In the form of animal sacrifice

Once the wall is ready by the *nav naghnya,* and before the ritual begins, the *badwa* prepares *nevas* or the offerings on leaves. These offerings are of rice, maize, hookah and mahua as depicted in the painting below. Soon, the *lekhindra* initiates working on the sacred enclosure with white clay, paints and twigs. As the *badwa* chants oral narratives and origin stories, the *lekhindras* paints (writes the oral narratives) the elements on the walls. Further, the *badwa* identifies each character symbolically representing the stories, and connects the mythical past to the present by giving meaning and life to each member. Thus, they work in unison with each other throughout the process of painting the *Pithora*.

Preservation

A household generally initiates a *Pithora* every year or alternative years based on their economic condition. Since the *Pithora* is an auspicious painting, the paint is not re-touched by anyone else in the household. Neither is the *Pithora* painting worshipped daily. However, the patron continues to mark it with blood from the animal sacrifices during festivals when offerings are made. If the patron does not have enough financial sources to conduct the *akkho Pithora* every year, he consults the *badwa* to establish a smaller, *ardho Pithora* instead. Thus, the Pithora functions as a 'living altar' housing their ancestors and deities and hence introducing the idea of co-dwelling with the gods.

4.2.5 Interpretation: Oral and Visual Narratives

The Sacred Enclosure

The sacred enclosure is a rectangular framework drawn on the walls inside which all the elements are made. However, this is not always a rigid rec framework and sometimes a fluid creeper marking the space. The sacred enclosure is usually measured by 'arms' (a full arm length usually measures 3 feet). A cotton string is used to make the enclosure. This string is called *hutar dori* where *hutar* means *sutra* or string in Sanskrit and *dori* also means string in Gujarati. It is interesting to note that the verb for drawing is *dorvu* which is the act of drawing lines following the thread (Jain, 1984). The act of marking the boundary of the sacred enclosure with the *dori* may also refer to strong ties, holding together their ancestors and gods in an act of co-dwelling in the mortal world. The sacred enclosure is believed to contain the entire universe and elements of creation. Thus, the borders of the enclosure are often elaborately decorated with geometric motifs and organic elements in bright colours. However, the borders are not a rigid rectangular enclosure as in the Rathwa *Pithora*. In some Bhil *Pithora* paintings,

only the top of the enclosure is decorated with organic patterns like creepers and flowers, and in the shape of a roof. In some others, the sides consist of tall trees, seeming to have a fluid enclosure framework. This border is sometimes seen in artworks of contemporary Bhil artists like Bhuri Bai's (Mukherjee, 2018) and in Lado Bai's wall art.



Image 64: Lado Bai and her painting

Characters in the sacred enclosure

The *Pithora* wall paintings are far from being isolated images or a collection of images. They are instead integrated in complex ritual structure to give meaning to the creation myth among the Bhils, translated through oral narratives and songs. The replication of the images on the walls is a medium through which the divine is represented through a tangible image and situated in the houses. There are around 30 to 33 elements and characters in the *akkho* (complete) Bhil *Pithora* that is painted on the walls in a ritual act. This section discusses each of these individual characters and elements and the myths associated with it as depicted in the traditional *akkho Pithora* paintings, shown below.



Image 65a: Pithora paintings by Prema Fatya in a contemporary context, at Bharat Bhavan. Source: Hacker, 2014



Image 65b: Thawar Singh and Prema Fatya making a Traditional Bhil Pithora painting. Source: Prema's personal collection.



Ganeh or Ganesh is the first to be created and seated within the sacred enclosure. He is placed usually at the entrance or on the left-side of the canvas. It is interesting to note that Ganesh is often represented smoking a hookah and does not bear any resemblance to the elephant headed Hindu god, Ganesh. Also, he does not appear in any oral scripts and chants. The fact that *Ganesh,* a predominantly Hindu deity, finds revered space in the ritual, is representative of the Hindu influences in Adivasi art. Detailing the *Rathwa Pithora* art of the Bhils in Gujarat, Alice Tilche [1] addresses the underlying religious movement that engulfs the minority religious beliefs of many Adivasi rituals under one homogeneous umbrella of Hinduism in Gujarat.



Once Baba Ganesh is established by the senior *lekhindra*, other painters join hands to work on other characters of creation. The second in line is the black horse called the ***Kathiya Ghoda*****,** who invites everyone for the ritual and ceremony. In the top left corner, we often see a man riding the horse along with musicians walking ahead of him. Known as ***Hadhol or Notral*****,** he is the messenger of god, inviting all the gods to the ceremony. *Notral* in Gujarati means the 'one who carries an invitation'.



Then, the ***eight white horses*** are drawn, four on each side, facing the other. ***Dev Pithoro***[1] stands prominent in the centre of the image. ***Rani Pithori*** rides one of the horses, and ***Rani Kajal*** is represented by the fourth drawn horse. *Rani Pithori* is *Pithoro's* bride and she is often seen riding a horse behind *Pithoro* or standing below *Pithoro*, between two white horses. She usually has a comb or flower in her hair. She is believed to be the sister-in-law of the sun and the moon.

Rani Kajal**,** the foster mother of *Pithoro* is not always depicted in the painting but the fourth horse is dedicated to her. During the process of invocation and identification of characters, the *badwa* gets possessed by Rani Kajal and listens to the problems of the families. Sometimes, the *badwa* also enacts the process of rescuing baby *Pithoro* from the river.



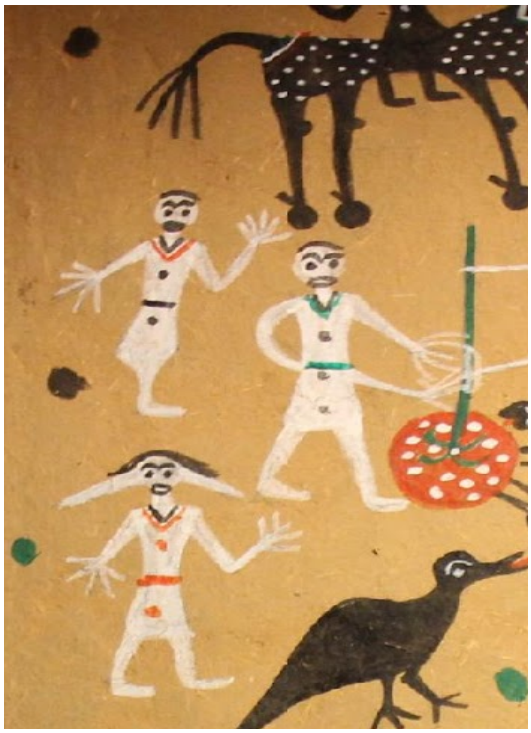
Kali Koyal, the birth mother of *Pithoro* often represented as a black bird in the *Pithora*.



Indi Raja is associated with welfare and agriculture. He is often represented riding an elephant at the gateway of the *Pithora*. Sometimes, the elephant also pays homage to Raja Bhoj[1]. He is represented in silhouette by the Bhils in M.P., situated between the white horses, usually at the centre of the composition. Sometimes he is also shown riding a horse with bows and arrows, also in silhouette.

Just below the *Pithoro*, the family places red dots during each annual and biannual worship. Each of these dots represents their ancestors and gods. By counting these sets of dots, a date can be given to the painting.

It should also be noted that in the former days, the *badwas and lekhindras* were invited to the royal palace to paint the *Pithora* painting on their walls, on the full moon day of the Hindu month, Sravan, also known as Rakhi Purnima. It is for this reason the ceremony came to be known as Rakhi *Pithora* among the Bhils. Thus, incorporating the image of Raja Bhoj in the *Pithora* as the royal elephant and associating with it a symbol of power and prosperity, reflects the sincerity and homage of the Bhils towards their local rulers. This reflects the long existing patronage of the Bhils within the princely states that acknowledged the Adivasis and encouraged their art. Sometimes one or two riders are seen on the elephant, smoking a hookah. It represents *Pithoro* and Indi Raja.



Ektangyo means the 'one legged man' and he is mostly seen on the leftmost corner of the paintings.

Supadkanno or the 'fan-eared man', is also seen on the left of the above painting. *Ektangyo* and *Supadkanno* together represent the 'broken continent'[58].

[58] Myth mentions that the continent was broken after the 'great flood' that left human incomplete. After that, it is *Dhani-Dhanaini* or the first couple that continued our race.



The painting would also show ***Dhani-Dhanaini*** or the first couple in the creation of the Bhil myth. They were the first farmers and also the first to perform the *Pithora* ritual to improve their farming. They were blessed with abundant harvest and thus the other villages soon followed them to celebrate the *Pithora*.



The farmer is also called ***Abh-kanbi*** meaning, 'farmer of the sky' and mythologically, he was the husband of the earth. He fertilized the earth during the ripe time of creation, monsoon. Thus, the farmer, sky and his wife, the earth were the first cosmic couple. In the painting, they are shown in the bottom left corner ploughing the fields with a pair of bullocks. In some paintings the wife is shown carrying food on her head and followed by the housedog.



A couple is also shown churning butter. They are considered to be the first shepherds.



There is sometimes the presence of a copulating couple called ***chinhal***, representing the birth of *Pithoro*, through the act of an extramarital relationship.



There is also the presence of a **twelve headed man**, (that appears like a headless man in paintings) with a snake and sword called ***Baar Matha no Dhani*** that protects their fields. He is believed to appear during the time of creation.



Dharti Rani or Mother Earth is shown as a rectangular plot of land, often divided in fields, forests and lakes. The different compartments are illustrated in different colours.

Sometimes the ***Badwa*** also finds his place in the painting, playing the drum.

The **two-headed mare**, believed to belong to Raja Ravan[59], is said to graze with one head and keep a watch with the other. Sometimes, the two-headed mare is also believed to be Rani Kajal, the god of rains and the foster mother of *Pithoro*.



A legend goes that the bull, also called the husband of the earth, carries seeds in its horns and pierces the horns into the belly of the earth to impregnate her with vegetation.



A bull and a calf drawn under it, represent this story. In some detailed *Pithora*, the bull carries seeds on its back or is shown having an erect phallus as in the Rathwa *Pithora* (Jain, 2007).

[59] Similar to Ravana of the Hindu epic, Ramayana.



Among the animals seen in the painting, the chameleon (***halhon***) is considered to be very auspicious as it predicts a rich farm yield.



The **camel** has an interesting role in the painting. It is said to represent the ***Rabari***, the traditional camel rearing community of Gujarat and Rajasthan who is believed to have provided information of the sacred teak wood required to make the musical instruments for Indi Raja. A *Rabari* is either shown riding the camel or walking beside it.



The horses are painted with or without riders depending on the chants of the *badwa* at the time painting of the emblem. According to the chants, the horses are on the way to fetch the gods if they are without any rider. A rider represents that the horses are returning back with the gods to attend the ceremony.



A **spider** is another auspicious element present in the paintings. It is believed that the ancestors reside in a higher dimension and visit us through the long web chains of the spider drawn in the *Pithora* painting.



To the right of the gate we often see a **tiger**, known as the *bagh*, attacking a deer or a goat. During the ceremony, after the goat is sacrificed, some blood is touched onto the tiger to appease it so that the wild animals may not attack the people and their livestock.



The Bhil tribe of Madhya Pradesh worships the ***peacock*** as a totem (Durkheim, 1986), a sacred object and a symbol of the tribe, much like other communities in India such as the Jat, Ahir and Khand tribes. It is often present in the *Pithora* ritual painting but practiced widely by the Bhil commercial artists and is an important character for them.



The **Mahua tree** is an important element in all *Pithora* paintings. The flowers of this tree are used to make alcohol and the seeds processed to make edible oil. It is shown by a straight-tree with spread out branches on both sides. Often a man (***vagol***) is shown climbing the tree to collect mahua and seeds for the *Pithora* festival, for Raja *Pithoro* and Indi Raja.





The **sun and the moon** can usually be seen at the centre of the image, towards the entrance of the *Pithora* gateway. They play a significant role in the creation myth of the Bhils. The sun is shown with radiating line of dots and the moon in a crescent shape.



Vavdi is a well that is often found on the left bottom corner of the paintings. Fishes, crabs, scorpions, frogs and turtles surround it. **Women** are also seen carrying water.



Bhalon is an element between a balloon, spider web and an airplane that carries the spirits of the ancestors to the houses.

The remaining space if left, is painted with animals (deer, dog, goat), birds (parrot), vegetation (*khajur* or date palm, creeper, mahua) and scenes of people from their daily lives.

Thus, each of these elements are symbolic representations of a narrative or an origin story of the Bhils, that further shapes the belief system, social structure and relationships.

4.2.6 Social Structure

Like in any other community, the Bhil Adivasis too have well defined social roles within which they operate. This societal structure and organization guide the choice of profession, marriage and other ritualistic practices. Art practices too are therefore guided by these social norms and values. For example, only male community members who are trained as *lekhindras* practice the art in the *Pithora* and *Gathla* Festival. Women on the other hand, partake in rituals associated with marriage, child-birth, fertility rites, harvest, and self-embellishments. Sometimes the art is commonly practiced by both the genders in festivals such as Diwali and *Gohari* Festival. Motifs like the *sarkla* and *amba* for marriages (Image 66) were made only by the women while the two-headed *Pithora* horse, by the men who were *lekhindras*.



Image 66: 'Sarkla' and 'amba' motifs for marriages, made by woman artists

The dissemination of knowledge within the community is also governed by these social structures. For example, all male members of the community cannot become *lekhindras* or *badwas*. It is a hereditary profession that one has to be born into and specially trained for. Thus, all Bhil men do not have the privilege of painting the *Pithora*. The visual narratives in the Bhil *Pithora* are believed to have a language in itself that can only be 'read and written' by a select few belonging to a certain lineage and exposed to specific training. The patrons on the other hand, are the other members of the Bhil community who invite the *badwa* and *lekhindra* to conduct the *Pithora* festival in their houses, and mediate their wishes to the Gods through this language best known to them. Depicted below is the interdependency and relationship model between the patrons, *lekhindras* and *badwas*. We also see the confinement of knowledge of the art of *Pithora*, within the traditional Bhil community. Even within the *badwas* and *lekhindras* we find a hierarchy where the *badwa* is accorded a more revered social status. The *badwa* has the freedom to also function as a *lekhindra*. However, the opposite is not the case.

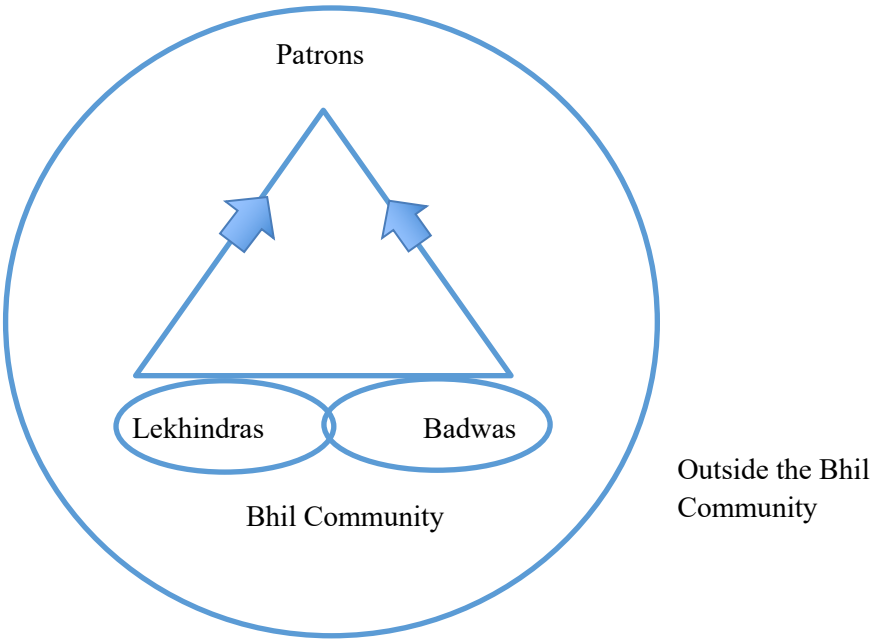


Image 67: Interdependency and Relationship Model within the Bhil community in the traditional context

We also see influences of the dominant state religion and practices on its inhabitant Adivasi communities. In a recent field trip to Alirajpur, I came upon a Rathwa *lekhindra* family where one brother chose to convert and adopt the path of a Hindu Guru, Swaminarayan, and in a way renounced the ways of Adivasi life and rituals that involved animal sacrifice, use, production and consumption of mahua and non-vegetarian food. The conversion thus affected the social arrangement where the family broke from a joint-family and discontinued believing and painting the *Pithora* art, in spite of being a well-known *Pithora lekhindra* within the community. However, he continues to paint the *Pithora* as a commercial practice once in a while.

4.2.7 Dissemination of Knowledge of Bhil Pithora

For the purpose of this research, I have tried to understand the process of knowledge dissemination and its components in the traditional context. Since art practices play a central role in the lives of the Bhil community, it has a clearly defined purpose and rationale for preservation over generations. The practices are introduced to individual members through an organic process of socialization. It is introduced to the community in the form of paying homage to ancestors through murals, celebration of nature and life events through participation in art, music, dance, food and other rituals. The essentially community-initiated and community-led art practice is accompanied with oral chants and narratives of the community elders. These

narratives mostly talk of origin stories binding human, nature and the universe in the same context. An indigenous community also believes that they are constantly surrounded by their ancestors who guide them through their journey. These ancestors are often worshiped at par with their gods and goddesses. Many indigenous oral narratives also show a direct lineage of the indigenous communities from the gods. There exist conversations, pacts and negotiations between the gods and human.

In the present traditional Bhil context, the teacher is the *badwa or lekhindra*, the learner (students) is a young companion following them, and their relationship is based on the teachers conscious motive of training the next generation to preserve the traditional art form, along with its beliefs and practices.

The purpose of practice therefore, directly influences the learning environment. Art is never taught in isolation of the context. For example, one does not practice the *Pithora* art during non-festival days and similarly, an indigenous art teacher (in this context, *badwa*) does not introduce the art to the children on a blackboard in a classroom. Rather, it is introduced in the real context, while the teacher (*badwa)* is practicing the art himself. This ensures that the teacher is an active practitioner of the art. Thus, it implies that in a traditional artist community, the art practice enjoys a higher position as compared to the art object. The practice is driven by faith and belief and the art-output is merely the tangible remains of the faith that we see on the walls of the tribal community.

The teacher sets up the target by himself following the example of the stepwise process of performing the *Pithora* painting to utmost perfection. Thus, he naturally inculcates in the student the need and the importance of following the process, giving utmost importance to the practice of the art as in the age-old tradition. For the similar reason, the teacher often attributes the credits of oral narratives and art to their ancestors and withdraws from attesting their names to the paintings. He creates an environment for the learner to follow him through observation and imitation. Thus, the focus of the teacher in a traditional context is on the practice of his/her art, as well as the teaching of the art. The teacher takes pride in the student performing the ritual in exact replication of his master (his teacher). The highest benchmark is set up in remembering all the verses of the narrative or song, the narrative-image relationship and the position of the image in the *Pithora* painting. Thus, improvisation is confined to the oral narrative and visual narrative keeping in mind the structure. In other words, an artist is free to explore the rendition

techniques for oral narrative and the individual styles of visual rendition under the given structural identity umbrella of the particular indigenous tribe.

The learning of the traditional artform occurs in broadly three stages of growth. It usually starts with tasks to gather ingredients and arrange the ingredients in the specific order during the festival. It could also entail small odd jobs of cleaning and running errands. The second stage leads to preparing the colour and mixing it in the right consistency. It would also entail preparing the initial wall of the *Pithora* after the young females have freshly painted it with dung and mud. In the final stage, one would be expected to paint alongside the *lekhindra*, helping him in filling up the colours, making boundaries and painting the secondary *Pithora* characters. Usually, the final stage continues over a period of time to eventually blend into collaboration where both get equally paid. Since the *lekhindra* usually does not earn from the student but, gets him to help in exchange of a favour given to someone, he does not have any initiative to teach or transfer his knowledge consciously. However, his intention and interest may differ in case the student is related to him or if he sees a genuine interest in the student to learn the form. Sometimes the student stays at the house of the teacher helping him in his fields and running errands for a few years. Since it is a community practice, one is often guided by the teachers based on his belief in the practice and festival. Thus, in the traditional context, the learner needs to be a proactive initiator to acquire all the required skills, through their powerful tools of observation and imitation. It is interesting to note that the initiation of the student by the master happens only after the latter is convinced of the learner's passion and interest, thus leading to natural selection of his successor.

4.3 Concluding Inferences: Traditional Bhil Pithora Art Practices

The act of painting in the Bhil community never existed in isolation, neither it is interpreted or is similar to our understanding of painting in the urban context. It is only in the recent time and context that the English words, like *painting, drawing, art and artist* have found its place in the Bhil language in their process of making contemporary Bhil Art. Painting has a larger purpose in the lives of the Bhil Adivasis, and continues to be a mediator between them and their Gods, and is a *way of life* deeply rooted in the Bhil rituals. It is believed that the gods themselves introduced the act of painting[60] and hence painting continues to be a mediator to connect with

[60] In a myth collected from the artists of Bhopal, the gods were once pleased by the nurturing acts of a Bhil couple. So, before the 'great flood' could set in, the couple was warned by the Gods and gifted a 'horse' to take them to the forest. The floods destroyed everything except the two couples, two hens and two goats. However, since the man could not take care of the horse (the gift of the god), he left it in the forest. This angered the gods and they cursed the couple with a drought soon after. However, they soon fell pity on the couple and asked them to 'write'

their Gods and ancestors. This belief imparts a higher status to the *Pithora* painting in the lives of the Bhils such that it is believed to be sacred as compared other practices of art (Durkheim, 1915). This further explains why the *Pithora* is *written* and *read* as a way to remember and recall the deities and invite their ancestors to their homes. In the traditional Bhil society, the act of painting is a religious act in itself (Durkheim, 1915). Since the Bhil *Pithora* is 'written' and 'read' simultaneously, we should not fragment and study it in isolation the world of images as separate from the chants, the gestures of the *badwas* and the sounds of drums, and the desires of the community and the beliefs of the patrons. It is similar in nature for *Patua* from Bengal (Chatterjee, 2015), *sora* of Orissa (Cecile, 2017) and Maithili from Bihar (Singh, 2000) where the oral narratives accompany the images. According to artist Adam Brown[61] (2021), the images can suggest sound. Similarly, music and sounds can also trigger mental images, often perceived like dreams. As mentioned by Jain (2007), the *badwas* and the patrons often report a dream coaxing them to establish the *Pithora* in their homes. It then becomes the responsibility of the *lekhindra* to realize the dream and give it a concrete form. Often the *lekhindra* is guided by the *badwas* and they account the 'daydream', guided by the chants. As mentioned by Cecile (2017), the painters in the Sora community often report to be possessed by the spirits who guide them to paint.

Reflecting on my field trip, where I have interviewed the contemporary Bhil artists on their paintings, there have been a couple of instances where the artist has shared that they dream of a particular narrative or concept before they are actually realized on canvas. This is reflective of the deep involvement of the artists and *badwas* where they possess sincerity and passion towards their art and the eagerness to practice it. The community and the artists believe in the healing power of the art and according to them, nature lives up to their expectations.

The use of the words *behadvo, vacvo, lakhvo* and *padvo* all hint towards the transformation and co-existence of the oral legend to text and painting over the years. Thus, the Bhil Adivasis are in continuous interaction with their gods and ancestors and manifest co-dwelling spaces through oral legends, living myths and symbolic elements. The *Pithora* elements not only show deities in human forms (*Pithoro*, *Pithori*, *Indi* Raja) but also characters depicting an unperceived/invisible stage (spider webs connecting the two worlds, ancestors, *Baar-matha* no

the Pithora myth on their walls to invite the gods and ancestors to their abode, who would also carry the rains with them. Since that day, every year the Bhils celebrate the Rakhi Pithora festival to welcome the rains and also, never ride the Pithora horse (Mukherjee, 2019).

[61] https://content.lifeisgood.com/what-if-you-could-hear-a-photo/#:~:text=Adam%20Brown%2C%20an%20artist%2C%20recently,connection%20between%20image%20and%20sound.&text=The%20sounds%20that%20go%20along,white%20noise%20type%20of%20deal.

Dhani, the two-headed mare) and symbolic representation of myths (*Dhani-Dhanaini*, the bull, *Dharti* Mata, *Kaali Koyal*, Indi Raja as elephant, the green chameleon). When these elements are painted, along with the oral chants that speak of its myths, the characters are immediately situated in the minds of the attendees and in the abode of the patrons. The images capture the symbolic representation of the entire legend or myth in a single image with the help of the oral narrative.

Similarly, in the Sora community, the gestures of the local priests imitate the construction of a house (*Mallebrein* 2001) or leading to doorways. These geometric sacred spaces are also described as 'icon' by Verrier Elwin (Subba, 2020) and they symbolically represent a house when drawn as a rectangle, as by the *Rathwa* and Bhil communities and a square with a triangle at the top among the Sora's. In some Bhil *Pithora* paintings, only the top of the enclosure is decorated with organic patterns like creepers and flowers, and in the shape of a roof. The replication of these images on the walls is a medium through which the divine is materialized and situated in the houses. We may thus conclude that the images, myths and oral chants not only accompany and complement each other, but also guide and inspire the patrons and the observers' imagination and belief.

4.4 Conclusion

This data chapter, based on my observation as well as interviews and discussions with the artists, curators, researchers etc. points towards the bigger picture of how art practices are linked to the lives of the Bhils, what it means to them and what it continues to remain for them in the present times. Art, apart from being a mediator, also works as a binding agent for the community, keeping the community together and shaping its unique identity. The community further believes that the traditional art practices heal the ailing, as mentioned by Sher Singh on his mother, Bhuri Bai[62]'s recovery. In the present times, even though the members consult professional doctors, it doesn't stop themselves to pray for the quick recovery of the ailing, and hence the subsequent success is shared by the doctors and their deities. Similarly, Dubbu Baria believes that situating the Pithora in his ancestral home, helped him to be more established in his commercial ventures in the city. Here again, Durkheim's (1918) concept of religion and belief system stand strong, such that it explains the higher status of the act of painting and its practice.

[62] Bhuri Bai of Zher is the mother of Sher Singh

As already discussed earlier, the Bhil community is a dynamic Adivasi community situated in the present. While we see how traditional art practices and experiences of the Bhil community have been organized, shaped, preserved and disseminated over generations, we also have to ponder on the present forms of art practices that co-exist with the traditional practices. Therefore, it is equally important to look into the transitions led by modernization and commercialization, and its effects on the art practices and the community over time. In the next chapter we further attempt to discuss the features of a much younger contemporary artform and the objectives and processes that guide its practice and preservation.

Chapter 5

Art in Transition and the Contemporary Bhil Art

5.1 Introduction

Situating the Bhil Adivasis in the Present Socio-Economic Context

For indigenous communities, land is often the primary source of livelihood and looked at as a social, economic and cultural resource. Centuries of co-existence and co-habitation of the Adivasi alongside nature has led to a way of life that is interwoven with their surroundings and embedded in their immediate ecology, with an approach towards sustainability. Over time, continued developmental policies of the government such as economic expansion, modernization and urbanization have resulted in massive land encroachment that has affected these nature-dwellers. This has resulted in the migration and displacement of indigenous communities in large numbers for the search of better livelihood. The people who lived off their land farming, hunting, fishing and rearing animals had to move to urban areas as daily wage laborers, thereby starting work in unfamiliar environments.

With forced migration, a large number of Bhils moved to Bhopal in search of better livelihood and employment. Since 1980's many cultural centres have been commissioned in Bhopal such as the *Manav Sangrahalaya* IGRMS (1977), Bharat Bhavan (1982), State Museum (2005) and Tribal Museum (2013). They employed daily wage workers in large numbers from the surrounding areas. Some of the Museum curators and researchers who were aware of the state's rich and ancient tribal cultural heritage, identified a few workers with an interest in their traditional art and craft. Continued encouragement and training over a few decades eventually built a large artist community in Bhopal and gave birth to a contemporary art form called the Bhil Art. At present, there are around 60-75 Bhil families in Bhopal alone, who are practicing a new-found profession within the community. They are called 'Bhil artists' of the contemporary Bhil Art. In the last three decades they have acquired small lands in the city and have access to basic education and healthcare. However, like most Adivasi communities, the Bhil community too continues to face discrimination through non-inclusive systems of development and non-recognition of their traditional knowledge and language.

Migration led by modernization and museumization brought about a considerable change in the livelihood, living practices and worldview of the Bhil Adivasis. The sacred images in front of which offerings were made, prayers were fulfilled and sacrifices performed, started to be viewed in isolation and disconnected from their original context and purpose. The elements of the *Pithora* painting were reproduced in isolation or as a group, on papers and canvas, to find a place in the museums, art galleries and exhibition space in contemporary society. Through the process of 'artification' (Heinich & Shapiro, 2012) considerable changes occurred in the process, production, patronage and the meaning of Bhil art.

With time and exposure to the modern world therefore, the needs, aspirations and expectations of the members of indigenous communities have attuned to the forces of modernization, hence, industrialization and commercialisation. From an overarching community identity, the needs, aspirations and expectations of individual members have emerged, leading to a natural transition of an individual's employment scope, education, entertainment and lifestyle. This individual-centric shift towards adaptation to their socio-economic environment could have also influenced a natural transition in the artform from traditional to contemporary practices.

Thus, the dynamism of the living art and its role in the present art scenario needs to be acknowledged. This argument leads one to question, how would we define 'tribal/Adivasi art'? Is it an art that is associated with a ritualistic context or made by artists with an indigenous tradition of painting? And what would we call the paintings when they represent the contemporary world, but are created by the indigenous artists? The chapter thus focuses on the living and palpable dynamism of the indigenous art, created by the indigenous artists, with changing circumstances.

This chapter traces the interventions responsible for the recent journey of the Bhil art from its traditional abode and practice, to the present-day expressions of the Bhil artists; a transition from the ritual art to a commercial art form that later, appears to co-exist with one another in different contexts. Thus, along with the practice and purpose of art, the roles of the patrons and practitioners have also changed. I also attempt to illustrate the adaptation by the community and its effects on the artform. The study further raises important questions on the influences, assertion of identity and authorship of the Bhil art within the community of artists.

5.2 External Interventions and Organic Progression

External Interventions: Kinds and Causes

In present times, folklorization[63] (Hafstein, 2018) and commodification have triggered transition of the ritual *Pithora* art to commercial Bhil art that has shifted from the walls to canvas and from the use of natural colours to packaged colours. This transition that is an outcome of influences and interventions of the modern-world as well as the intuitive adaptation by the community, is fairly recent, staring in the 1980s with the establishment of the Museums in Bhopal. On one hand, the ritual painting practices became disconnected from their original context but continued to be practiced during festivals in closed communities. On the other hand, the commercial art that was born due to the organic progression and external interventions, began to be promoted as a cultural emblem of indigenous artists. The form and content of the Bhil art both underwent a change and with it. For example, the Bhil *Pithora* painting that was celebrated and practices as a multi-sensorial experience along with music, oral chants, dance, food and drinks, now came to be practiced as a visual art, in isolation with the others. Thus, there was a visible disconnection between visual and oral narratives. Further changes were seen in the purpose, practitioners and gender practices, and with it, changed the patrons, authorship and function. This transition was triggered by interventions that, for the sake of simplicity and clarity in understanding, I have largely categorized as design, urban, commercial, collaborative and training interventions.

Urban Intervention in Arts

Urban intervention in an indigenous community implies the influences that the urban society has, on the employment, lifestyle, education, entertainment and ways of living life, as a whole (Chatterji, 2012). In Andersson's paper titled, *Urban Interventionism and Local Knowledge* he mentions the relationship and the fine balance of interdependence between them (Andersson, 2006). Over the years, as the means of livelihood in the villages became more challenging, more and more Bhils migrated to the city and found employment in museums. With the jobs becoming more permanent in nature, the Bhils settled down in communities around their newly found workplace. As the families grew, they sought jobs at the museums irrespective of gender such as laborers, plumbers, caretakers, watchmen and other odd jobs. The children started

[63] Egas, José, "Rawla: The Gaddika Ritual: Religion, Communism, and Folklore", in: *Brill's Encyclopedia of the Religions of the Indigenous People of South Asia Online*, Marine Carrin (Editor-in-Chief), Michel Boivin, Gérard Toffin, Paul Hockings, Raphaël Rousseleau, Tanka Subba, Harald Lambs-Tyche (Section Editors). Consulted online on 17 September 2021 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/2665-9093_BERO_COM_031955>
First published online: 2019

attending the government schools and in a short time, they seemed to be adapting well to the arrangements. These interventions followed by quick adaptations further led to commercializing the art in a way the Bhils had never previously imagined. For the first time they realized that 'art' existed as an individual entity which they had otherwise experienced holistically, as a part of their rituals, for a time unknown. With urbanization came the realization that art just didn't exist, but it also paved the way for monetary benefits and recognition. This provided scope for further commercial intervention.

Commercial Intervention

Commercial intervention takes place when a community caters to the demands of the new patrons and adapts their art to serve the commercial needs of the society. On one hand it creates employment for the community, but on the other, has the fear of extinction and dilution of the traditional form (Chatterji, 2012). In Bhopal, a group of Bhil artists emerged with an indigenous, Adivasi art background to meet the needs of the commercial market. Thus, catering to their preferences and needs, the subjectivity of the traditional Bhil art underwent an inevitable transition. The community of artists newly formed within the Bhils, started depicting their village lifestyle, festivals and nature in their art. The art was based on the demands of the new patrons, art collectors and exhibitors. It also required the artists to ponder on factors like introducing colours that complimented the wall décor, framing the artwork, the packaging, portability and its preservation. Thus, the new 'Bhil art' was painted on canvas sheets of standard sizes and commercial paints were used instead of the traditional organic colours. These commercial paints were more vibrant, had greater variety and most importantly, had longer shelf-life. One design intervention led to another. The artists who usually practiced their art only during the festivals in the traditional context, now practiced irrespective of the time and festivals. Women artists too started practicing the artform outside its traditional context.

Design Intervention

Commercial intervention came alongside the design interventions or more popularly addressed as art interventions in the commercial products (Antal & Woodilla & Sköldberg, 2015). The museums organised workshops and training camps for the indigenous artists where they were taught the basics of commercializing their art. They were taught to leave adequate space surrounding their artwork, remove frames, isolate elements, simplify the content and were also encouraged to incorporate the present surroundings in their paintings. Since these workshops were for all artist communities practicing different art forms, it provided them with a common ground to share, across different forms. The Bhil artists from Bhopal found an opportunity to

interact with other artists from more commercially established communities such as Gond and Rahwa's. Interaction with other artists from more commercially established communities helped them to polish and improvise the form and content, and learn the tricks of the trade. The camps also exhibited the artworks of the artists and introduced the artists to the new patrons directly. Exposure to various art camps, exhibitions, training, workshops and introduction to the other artists and patrons, motivated the Bhil artists to take up painting as a serious profession.

Training

Apart from art-based training, other modes of training could also count as interventions. The museums often encourage introducing the artists to the modern banking system, give them basic adult education classes and introduce them to technology. Recently, a program was initiated by Tata Trusts, IIT Bombay and IGRMS to introduce social media training to the artists. As part of the program, I conducted a series of workshops on training them with basic knowledge of social media for promoting their work on mobile phones. Social media opened a whole new world for the Bhil artists where they could now share their artworks with individual patrons over WhatsApp, Instagram and Facebook. They could further interact with their clients, courier the artworks and operate bank accounts for transactions. In October 2019, IGRMS collaborated with Amazon and opened a platform for the artists to directly share and sell their work online. Though this started as an experiment, it was quickly adopted by the young artists and with the easy availability of mobile phones and online payment options like Google Pay and Paytm, the artists take their first step towards self-marketing, self-promotion and entrepreneurship. It also led to practicing the commercial art form more often and teaching the other family members in the community.

Collaborative Intervention

The newfound patrons consisted of the museums, art houses, government fairs and individual art buyers. There were direct patrons giving assignments to the artists and purchasing their work. The interactions further led to collaborations with researchers, other artists and publishers. This opened a new field of art exploration where usually the artists and researchers would work together for a project. They together created illustrated storybooks, interior designs, café decors and animations. Kalista Sherbaniuk (Simpkins, 2010) talks about the importance of a collaborative approach to ensure that the indigenous groups have control on the research, design and outcome, without which the collaboration would be tokenistic. There are researchers like Tara Douglas, Geeta Wolf, Nina Sabnani, including myself and publishers such as Tulika,

Eklavya, Tara, Ektara and Katha who work in collaboration with artists to produce creative artworks, such as films and books. The collaboration varies in degrees ranging from the publisher or the filmmaker supervising the artist to giving them project briefs. It finally depends on the control the indigenous artists are left with on their final work. Very few works entail equal involvement of the urban artist and the indigenous artists. Roma Chatterji (Chatterji, 2012) (Singh, 2015) has mentioned the importance of the process of re-contextualization of indigenous art and the need for collaborations and further research on the market influences on the artform.

Appropriation, Commercialization and Commodification of Arts

Commercialization encourages appropriation and machine-made cheap alternatives of handmade products. This proves detrimental, not only to the practitioners but also to the artform in the long run. Cheap alternatives, poorly finished items and mass production of designs fill stores and are experimented on daily products at random. Thus, the art tends to lose its value, context, function and meaning. To state an example is Warli Art of Maharashtra where it is often found appropriated on products (Chatterji, 2012) ranging from mobile phone covers, saris, shoes, umbrellas and also printed on cheap plastic products of daily use. Moreover, the art is taught and practiced by any non-community artist who earns commercially through workshops in the city schools and homes, thus affecting the art as well as the practitioners of the art.

In another instance, some Bhil artists complain of appropriation of their motifs and styles both within and between communities. Some claim to have explored the form earlier. However, this also challenges the artists to create their own unique styles and also sign their artworks. A book titled 'Signature: Patterns in Gond Art' by Gita Wolf[1] compiles the signatures of the Gond artists. Much like the Bhils, the Gond artists use their carefully chosen signs, usually a pattern, as his or her identifying signature. It is not just an aesthetic sign, but a valued symbol of memories and stories that an artist cherishes within their artist community.

Commercial and collaborative interventions with the Bhil community further led to replication of the artwork on products of daily use like mugs, mats, coasters, T-shirts and mouse pads. They were further extended to indoor games and educational toys. However, even though the project started with a good intention of familiarizing the Bhil art to the world, it had its downfalls of plagiarism, copyright issues, appropriation and over-familiarizing the art through its visibility in daily utility products. In recent years, if not protected by the government through

quality restoration measures, the artwork stands to lose its handmade quality and is at the mercy of cheap replication of their work.

Conclusion

It may be argued from an alternative perspective, that the commercialization of Adivasi art practices has also initiated a transition of art forms, that has helped preserve the traditional art form in a new corpus. If not exposed, a traditional ritual form would perhaps cease to exist and die its natural death even without being acknowledged as an art form in itself. To state an example is *Mayuranrityam*, a temple dance form from Kerala where the few performers can hardly survive pursuing it and hence take up odd jobs as an alternate profession. Another lesser-known art is the *Manjusha* painting from modern day Bihar. Traditionally it was painted only during the *Bishahari* festival dedicated to the snake god in Bhagalpur. However, since this art form was not identified or exposed as *Mithila Art* from the same region, it ceases to be practiced even in the traditional ritual form in the present day. Also, the practitioners of the traditional ritual form dwindled with the onset of migration, shifting of the traditional modes of employment and government policies. While Brown[1] (Brown, 2006), in the context of Mithila Art has expressed the view that the power of ritual art is seriously compromised on paper, I would still contest her views with the note that the 'power of the ritual art' has evolved naturally, to its present form. As for the arts, it did not die either. It too transitioned in its form, function and patronage giving rise to a new commercial art form, the *Mithila Art* that is popularly known today.

5.3 Effects of Intervention on the Arts

The effects of transition, both external interventions and organic progression, have influenced the artform, the people, and the community practices. Interventions have directly resulted in replacing the traditional tools in the contemporary context. This has had an immediate effect on the artform. It has affected tangible elements like the texture, scale and preservation techniques. Moreover, it has also enhanced some unique elements of the traditional artform that have eventually become an identity of the specific artform and is promoted as an emblem and identity of the community people. For the Bhil community, the identifying element was the use of 'dots' in the painting. In this section, we discuss the change in tools and its effects on the texture, scale, portability, preservation techniques, form, content and the 'dots' that bring in the signature style of the Bhil artform.

Tools: Canvas, Brush, Colours

The tools used for making Bhil art are essentially the painting medium; a canvas or paper, the brush and the colours. All three play an important role in the texture and scale of the painting. With the change of place and the context, the change of materials was most inevitable and evident. Traditional Bhil Art, associated with rituals and festivals, mainly uses natural colours, made from the pigments of flowers, clay and oil. The twigs are chewed at the ends to make the brushes. The walls of the houses are the canvas. However, with the change of context, the artists are no longer restricted to the use of the same elements. Also, availability of the natural ingredients in an urban context proved to be a challenge. Thus, they adapted the medium and started to explore the available commercial materials such canvas, paints and paper.

Canvas

During the *Pithora* Festival, the wall is usually prepared with a mixture of mud and cow-dung, mixed in equal quantities for the right consistency. This gives it the grey-brown texture dependent on the colour of the mud. The swift half-circle movements of their palms, in a consistent movement, gives the base texture. In the cities, the wall canvas has been replaced by canvas sheets and paper that are both sparkling white with an inbuilt texture of its own. The paper base lacks the organic texture of the wall and instead has the machine finish as its current look.



Image 68: The base texture on the wall and the complete Pithora Painting. L: Wall at IGRMS, R: Painting by Bhil lekhindra, Ramesh Katara.



Image 69: The difference in the texture of the Pithora painting on the wall and on canvas. L: Source Internet. R: Painting by Bhuri Bai

Brushes

In the traditional context, the brushes are made with chewed up ends of neem twigs. They are customised according to the needs of the artist. The length of the bristles and the length of the holding stick both make a difference in the painting. The artist controls the fineness of the bristles by the chewing on the twigs. All of the above adds texture to the paintings. Sometimes, fingertips are also used to apply colour on the walls, especially the dots. For some motifs, such as the s*arkl*a, the palm is folded in a certain fashion to imprint the motif in the same size. Again, the use of hands and fingers add their own organic quality to the paintings. These form the man-made stencils that the artists take pride in. In the painting below, we see Bhuri Bai using her hand to give the base texture on the canvas and also the motif using a hand print. In the contemporary context, the artists find it more convenient to simply order the round or flat brushes of specific numbers. Bhuri Bai generally uses round brush sizes 0,2,4,5,6,7 and 10. They also show preferences of certain brands compared to the others based on their requirement. However, she, like many other contemporary Bhil artists, continue to explore the traditional textures on the walls of their homes, onto their canvas.



Image 70: Artist Bhuri Bai (of Pitol) explaining the base texture of the canvas and the motifs, in her painting representation the Bhil Pithora.

Colours

Traditional artists prepare their own colours for painting from their natural surroundings. They prepare natural dyes of white, red, yellow, black and green. Mostly they use white and red from the colour of the mud found in different regions of M.P. Black is prepared from soot and oil. Yellow is made from turmeric and oil. Other colours are made from the flowers and leaves of that season. The natural colours proved to be difficult to prepare in the new place since the availability of the particular fauna, flora and mud (binding agent) to make the natural colours were scarce or even unavailable. Thus, the artists began to opt for commercial colours that were easily available in the markets. The commercial colours added a plethora of different shades and tones to the artist's canvas. Sharing some examples, as above, Bhuri Bai of Pitol has added a texture to the canvas by using the traditional base of cow-dung and mud, before painting with

the contemporary colour palette. Similarly, Bhuri Bai of Zher, has painted a relief art with a monochrome layer of base made with cow-dung and mud (Image 71), on a wall of the museum.



Image 71: Artist Bhuri Bai (of Zher) with her monochromatic relief work made with mud and clay, at IGRMS.

With the advent of colours, the artists adapted and explored the new and the old media to engage with their own individual expressions through the art, and hence develop a unique style. However, there are mixed opinions and responses among the artists. Some of the senior artists miss the original medium. Bhuri Bai of Pitol is upset that her children have no interest in knowing the process of preparing the natural colours. Whereas, Ramesh Katara is keen to explore the new colours on the palette. On the other hand, Bhuri Bai of Zher still enjoys painting in monochrome white or the mud colour. Some of the explorations of the Bhil contemporary artists, with the colour, texture and content, are shared below (Image 73 to 76).

Tools and its Effects on the Artform

The change in the material of the canvas, brush and colours have further affected the texture, dots, scale, portability and preservation techniques of the paintings.

The Base Texture

As discussed in the previous section, the texture of a painting is entirely dependent on the base media, application brush and the colour used. The traditional base of the wall prepared with mud and cow-dung has a rough and organic texture to it whereas, the present base of a paper or canvas has a completely different texture. In both the cases the final output differs based on the difference of the canvas to absorb, radiate, reflect and contrast colours. The same holds true when the pigments of the commercial colours replace the natural colours. The application tool like the handmade brush and the palm itself, further introduced a layer of organic texture.

Scale

The artists were introduced to standardized paper sizes and quality, at the art camps. A2, A3 and A4 cartridge sheets of paper and 3 x 2 feet canvas were most common. This affected the scale of the paintings and also introduced the portability factor of the paintings. The standardized sizes became a measure for the artists to rate their paintings. The prices of the paintings of the artists slightly differed from one another based on their seniority and popularity, but they still shared a range based on these sizes.

Another important intervention was that the artists were asked to remove the borders predominant in the traditional *Pithora* painting. Instead, they were asked to leave an empty safe area for mounting and framing the images. According to many artists, they felt a space crunch in A3 and A4 size papers and thus restricted themselves to painting mostly individual elements and motifs instead of elaborate narratives in their paintings, when they were scaling down. Thus, visual narratives were constrained with a limited number of elements. However, we cannot say that these new commercial Bhil art lacked narratives altogether. The language readjusted itself to visual narratives keeping the canvas space in mind. Thus, the form and content were directly influenced and affected with the change in materials and the scale.

Preservation and Display

With the idea of scaling down the size and introducing a portable canvas, preservation and display of the paintings were also introduced to the artists. Portability of the paintings meant that now, the paintings could travel on their own, with the new patrons, to various exhibitions,

galleries and homes. Cheap and affordable packing materials were used by the artists for preservation and transportation, such as newspapers and paper rolls. With the present transition the paintings became portable, easier to store and came in an affordable size and hence reached a wider audience. It also increased durability, storage, packaging and transportation.

Dots: Becoming of the Bhil Art Identity

A signature style of Bhil Art, that differentiates it from the arts of other Adivasi artworks, is the presence of dots. Within the Bhil artist community, the members recognize an artist's work through the pattern of dots. However, in the traditional Bhil community, the dots in the *Pithora* painting stand for the gods, goddesses and their ancestors. Thus, these dots are finite and are representative of higher powers. It is my assumption that the dots in the *Pithora* painting were inspired by the kernels of corn being produced in the land. In the contemporary context, with the dots becoming the signature style of Bhil art, they were explored further and replicated in exact size and precision by the community artists to form patterns while making the commercial Bhil art. A Bhil artist uses these carefully chosen signs as individual style so that a pattern is his or her identifying signature. Thus, within the artist community, this pattern of signature is well versed and acts as an identity of an artist.



Image 72: Close up of maize kernels alongside a Bhil art made by a Bhil child artist, Anand Baria.

It is interesting to note that while on one hand, IGRMS (Museum of Man) encourages authenticity of forms and narratives, the Tribal Museum on the other hand explores collaboration with different art forms, artists and designers. Thus, survival in the new scenario demands a community identity and also an individual language of expression through Bhil art. Illustrated below are the artworks of senior artists in the present times that reflect their individual style as well as their community identity. Each artist has a distinct style of painting

and pattern of dots. However, at the same time, all the Bhil artists follow the pattern of dots, making them fall under the wider umbrella of Bhil Art. Below are some Bhil artists along with their paintings.





Image 73: Ramesh Katara and his painting





Image 74: Gangu Bai and her painting



Image 75: Jambu (Source:Naidunia) and his painting



Image 76a: Bhuri Bai (from Zher)[64] and her painting

[64] Note: there are two Bhuri Bai's in Bhopal, who are both, famous Bhil artists. One comes from Zher village and the other from Pitol village. Bhuri Bai from Pitol has recently won the PadmaShri in 2021.





Image 76b: PadmaShri Bhuri Bai (from Pitol) and her painting

From the artists' work above, we can see how they all come under the umbrella of commercial Bhil art and yet, have a distinctive style that is unique for the artist. The style may differ due to exploration of the dots, composition and the visual narrative pattern, which is evident through visual interpretation of the above paintings.

Further, the contemporary Bhil artists explore content such as nature (flora and fauna), village life (making of mahua liquor, visiting fairs, marriages, child birth ceremony, daily life) and depiction of festivals (*Gal Bapsi, Pithora, Gol Gadera, Gohari Puja, Bhagoriya mela*). In the form, they explore working with various line patterns (inspired by other art forms, specially Gond) and incorporating them within the 'dots' of the Bhil art. For example, some artists tend to paint the tree bark in different stripes and lines, much as the Gond art work, but at the same time, introduce dots to make them belong to the Bhil Art. One might also notice a staunch competition between the contemporary artists and thus, they improvise and customize the inherited form to form their own styles, patterns and signatures. All together, they form the identity of a Bhil artist, within and outside their community.

Form

The form of an art, by definition is essentially decided by its shape. In the Bhil *Pithora* painting, we have the forms of characters and elements of nature, taking a free-flowing fluid shape. The traditional paintings are mostly drawn as a 2-dimensional solid shape without an outline. They are also complete in the sense that the elements are drawn in their full figures and not as

cinematic close-ups of the image. The composition follows a lateral perspective, which means that the elements at the back are placed on top of the elements in the foreground, and not behind them. Thus, there is no overlapping of images.

As explained earlier, the tools used in the process of painting play an important role in shaping the form. Thus, when a stem is chewed and used as a brush, outlines are not made. Rather, the form is painted directly as a 2-dimensional solid-form. Some contemporary artists who directly paint with brushes and avoid the pencil to trace their composition, still continue to paint in the same format. The form is painted as a whole and not the outline of the form. With the introduction of pencils, some artists make an outline of the form and then use the paint brush to fill in the form. Obviously, the end result is not the same. The use of brushes also introduced fineness or delicate and intricate work within the form. Earlier, when the dots were made with fingertips or the stems and for religious purpose, they were finite and larger in size in the traditional paintings. The forms were often left as a shape and not filled in with a rich texture of dots. In contemporary Bhil art, the artists use brush size 1 or 2 to make intricate dots of the same sizes to fill in the forms. This gives the artform a relief texture in itself and adds to the identity of the Bhil art.

In the traditional-ritual *Pithora* painting, we note the form of the characters as fluid and organic. The act of drawing the traditional *Pithora* starts with etching the wall to create the shape of the celestial horses. Then, the bamboo shoot or brushes are used to trace the marking. The technique of drawing itself becomes an important determinant of the form and style. The free hand, fluid texture of the drawings come from the fact that the drawings are made in large scale, on the walls, drawn with strokes where the hand is held vertical and without going back to retrace an arc to improvise the quality and character of the outline. Artists usually do not support their wrists on the walls while drawing. Instead, a right-handed painter would hold on to his wrist with his left hand to give support. This further adds on to the fluid nature of the strokes. In case a mistake happens, they erase with their thumb and fill it with white clay. The technique of drawing automatically differs when it comes to painting the same on a canvas much smaller in size and scale. This makes the art more defined, sharp and ‘clean’ taking away the fluid nature of *Pithora* Art. Some senior artists like Prema Fatya and Bhuri Bai of Zher, still continue drawing on the walls and on large canvas. With the shift from natural colours to acrylic paints, the imagination of the artists was triggered and a plethora of colours were explored in the new Bhil Art. This paved a way for the artists to explore the form and define a style for themselves based on the texture, colour and pattern of dots.

Content and Narratives

Now we discuss the content of the artworks of indigenous artists, in two different contexts, the traditional and contemporary environment. The content of the *Pithora* or any other motifs as part of the traditional festivals usually represent origin stories, mythology and celebration of nature and its elements. It revolves around specific motifs and illustrated images that are symbols connected to origin narratives of birth and death. These narratives have shaped the beliefs of the community and their ancestors. Even though the content of the traditional artform is confined to origin stories, we see a change in the visual narrative of contemporary Bhil Art. Contemporary Bhil Art elaborates the village lifestyle, practices and festivals from a viewer's point of view rather than of the practitioners themselves. Below are some of the contemporary Bhil paintings by various artists, exploring different content, inspired by the traditional Bhil art and other contemporary forms.



Image 77: Pithora by Bhuri Bai



Image 78: Drawings from village life by Dubbu Baria



Image 79: Festivity by Bhuri Bai



Image 80: Festivity by Bhuri Bai



Image 81: Individual elements by Jambu Baria

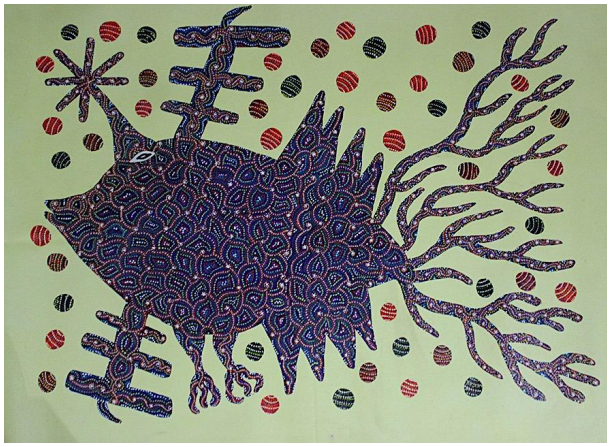


Image 82:Contemporary elements by Gangu Bai

We notice a tension within the artist to balance the community art and the individual artist styles, evident not only in the style but also in the content of the artworks. Bhuri Bai, one of the senior Bhil artists, took a step forward to explore the traditional art in a new content, in a series of autobiographical paintings of her life. Another artist, Jambu has made his own unique style in creating various plants and animals, both mystic and living. Sher Singh made a series of paintings on a Bhil wedding, English alphabets and numbers, the latter being a consignment work.

However, at the same time the community is closely knit and it consciously keeps the essence of the 'dots' in their artworks, such that it forms the signature of the Bhil painting and differentiates it from another popular Adivasi artforms of Madhya Pradesh, especially the Gond painting. Thus, we observe the Bhil artists to be conscious and aware of their community identity which is preserved by the 'dots' in the paintings and an individual identity by their choice of the form, content and narrative. Here we find differences in opinions and expressions in the artists themselves, relating to content and its scope in traditional and the contemporary Bhil art, while there exist certain commonalities. The elements from nature form an integral part in almost all the compositions. Now we move on to discuss this aspect in further detail.

Elements from Nature

Nature is an entity deeply ingrained in the customs, rituals and lifestyles of the Bhil community. Even though Bhil artists have migrated to the urban settlement a generation ago, we cannot overlook the empathy, role and connectedness of the community to their native roots, essentially in the form of origin stories and memories of village life as narrated by their parents and grandparents. This finds expression in their arts where nature finds an important role even in the depiction of an urban element. Much like the Gonds, who incorporate the branches of a

tree in the horns of an animal, the Bhil artists incorporate nature either directly or indirectly in the representation of an urban element. Also, since the paintings revolve around *nature, lifestyle elements, depiction of festivals, the present world and their personal experiences,* nature invariably finds a role in each of the above.

Visual and Oral Narratives

Narratives in the traditional environment of the Bhil community, was found mostly in the *Pithora* art where oral narratives complimented the paintings during the *Pithora* festival. Oral narratives were also practiced in the other festivals such as *Gathla*, weddings and *Gohari* puja. However, in other festivals specific motifs accompanying the occasion were drawn and even though each had a meaning within the community, the tales were not necessarily narrated. Over the years, with migration and dilution of lengthy customs, the narratives in traditional art practices started to change, evolve and adapt to changing surroundings.

With the introduction of the new materials and elements in the contemporary context, the artists started exploring individual narratives and expressions. From painting pure ritual art, they moved towards depiction of the festival itself, as if, through the eyes of a participant. For example, instead of depicting the elements of the *Pithora* on canvas, the artists elaborated on the topic of *Pithora* festival right from its beginning, preparation, people's activities, fairs and customs to elaborate and portray lifestyle suggestions to patrons. As in the traditional society, in the contemporary paintings, the community artists defined a set of elements to mark each festival or ritual. For example, instead of just painting the *Pithora* horse on the *Gathla*, the lens of the painter moved away wider, to incorporate the trees around it, the *nivas* (offerings) and people gathering around. The artists create narratives from their memories of the festivals and depict them through the new medium of art. Thus, the lens of the painter was widened and the subjectivity of the paintings kept changing with time.

In the present contemporary context, narratives and storytelling changed its form to regain its importance. Artist Subhash and his mother Gangu Bai, have dozens of their artworks on the standardized sheets which give a glimpse of their village life and nature, incorporating a couple of elements. The detailed narratives of the festivals and folk tales are painted on larger canvas. For these canvas arts or paintings on the wall, the artists usually take an extra step to narrate the paintings to the patrons, often recollecting their own experiences.

According to Bhuri Bai, she would paint the individual elements of a narrative on separate sheets to practice an art. This would be solely to encourage and introduce the artwork to new

patrons who do not wish to spend much. These paintings would often be artworks of her students and family members. Bhuri Bai also painted some sequential narratives (Image 83) in her paintings. She would practice the same with her autobiographical paintings from her exhibition. Bhuri Bai would explain what had happened a few seconds before the painter captured the particular frame and a few frames after what was about to happen. For example, she would draw a man climbing the *Khajur* tree with the pots, a tree already having the pots tied to it and another one where the man is sitting beneath the tree with the pots full of nectar. Sometimes all the elements would be combined in a single painting where there would be one tree and two people. Thus, it could be interpreted as a time-contraction and an expansion of time in the painting. Below is a painting of mine, that was taught to me by Bhuri Bai in one of our classes. Apart from Bhuri Bai, I have noticed this narrative technique in other Bhil artists like, Shanta and Dubbu's paintings.

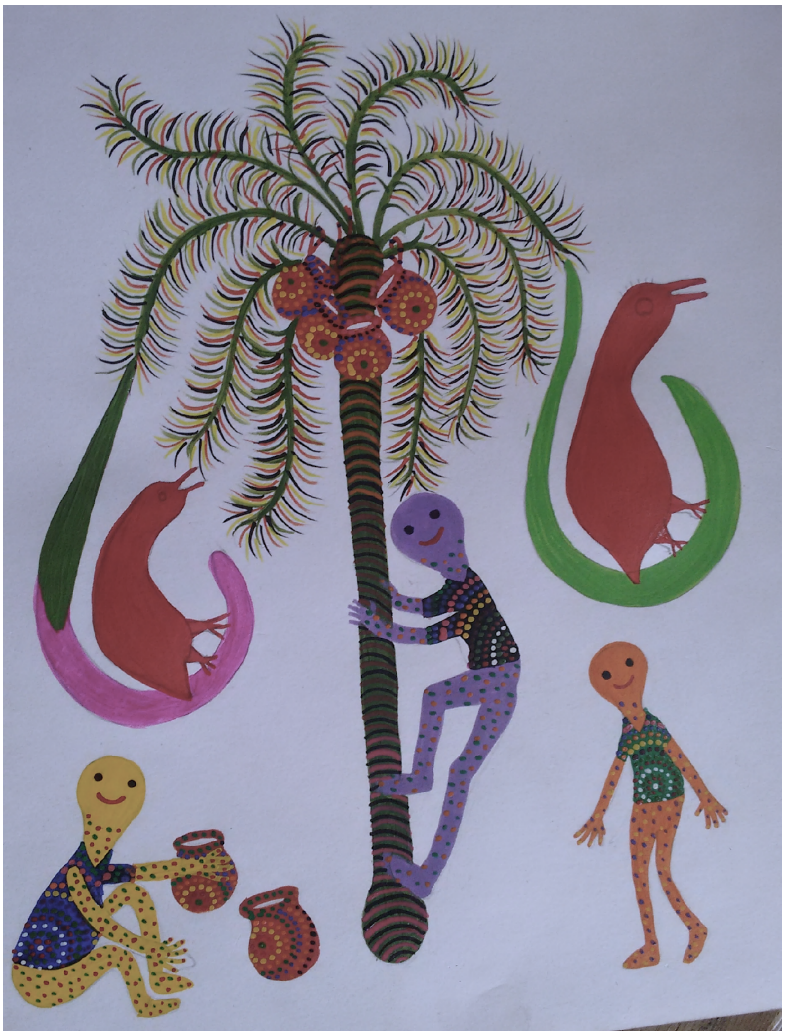


Image 83: Sequential narratives: Before and after narrative of a man climbing the khajur tree

Thus, with the evolution of the contemporary Bhil artform, the narrative becomes an essential entity in the painting, transitioning from oral narratives to visual narratives. Even though the

artists would sometimes paint just the individual elements on sheet or canvas, they personally preferred a detailed narrative painting and would often narrate the story of the paintings to their new patrons, thus reviving and redefining the art of oral narratives. A detailed study of the contemporary Bhil art through its stages of preparation, tools required, technique of artmaking and methods of preservation is annexed to the thesis (Annexure I).

5.4 Effects of Intervention on the People and the Community

The commercial and design interventions brought in some important transitions that widened the horizon of its practitioners and thus changed the perception of the art within the community. Interaction with other artists from other Adivasi communities helped in the healthy exchange of ideas and borrowing of motifs and styles. This aided innovation in the art form, developing the visual vocabulary of the artist as well as of the narratives. On one hand the artist explored narratives from their own lives that had never been visually depicted before, and on the other, they explored folk tales and origin myths that the neighbouring communities shared, exchanged and borrowed. The opening up of the contemporary art practice to women led to more competition within the group, assertion of identity and authorship of the Bhil art within the community artists.

The purposeful and conscious intervention of various government institutes and museums affected the outlook of the community artists towards their own art. The people belonging to these indigenous communities slowly learnt to ‘identify the art’ within their daily rituals and festivals. They eventually adapted and could consciously separate the ‘art’ from their traditional rituals leading to a co-existence of the traditional and the contemporary art form.

A criticism of this conscious design intervention is that it is limited to a few artist communities and to a few families within a specific artist community. Interventions are often unplanned, financially unsustainable, lack rigour in execution and potential prospects. Information that is collected through design interventions and workshops seldom reach the rural Bhil community or affect their long-term employment prospects. The training and exhibitions for artists depends on the decision of the existing directors and curators and their individual vision as per financial provisions. A tender is often short lived, with a maximum span of five years, and is often not carried over by the next board of directors. The growth of individual artists is quite slow as compared to that of designers or painters in training institutes. The wage is not competitive and often a daily wage equivalent to that of a labourer. However, in spite of all the above challenges,

migration to the cities and practice as commercial artists continue to be an aspiration for many members of the Bhil community.

Purpose of Practice

The Bhil artform in the traditional context is an integral part of the beliefs, rituals and festivals of the community, and believed to function as a mediator to fulfil their prayers and needs from nature and the immediate environment. In contrast, the practice of the commercial Bhil Art is driven by a more practical and economic stance. It provides them employment and generates revenue. The practice of the commercial Bhil art in the family extends to other members for the sake of employment. Thus, every member in the family is exposed to the artform. However, to continue practicing an art form and to excel in it, one would need more than just economic motivation (Prasad, 2003). The passionate continue to practice the contemporary form of art and continue to believe in the traditional form. In both the traditional and contemporary context, the practice is driven by a strong sense of purpose.

Patronage and Practitioners

With the growing scenario of the practitioners of the Bhil art, the patrons and its functions have also bloomed. Initially, the patrons were confined to the village folks who commissioned the *Pithora* art to be painted on their walls, once a year. Presently, with the growing number of practitioners practicing the Bhil art on paper sheets and canvas, and thus increasing the durability and portability of the artworks, the patrons have grown and in numbers and stature. The new patrons are the museums, art houses, government consignments, individual art buyers, art collectors, researchers and publishers who were either ready to pay a remuneration for the paintings or collaborate for promotion of the artists' works. The increase in the number of patrons and exhibits has also affected the functions of the present form of Bhil art.



Image 84: Bhuri Bai's recent explorations on pots

This commercial encouragement has further inspired the artists to explore the form and content of Bhil Art and adapt it to changing demands. To illustrate, Bhuri Bai has explored different mediums to paint on. Recently she explored Bhil Art on pots and further worked on the visual narrative to complement the circular form. She also explored the content in the form. In the above series, she represents the village lifestyle and especially the work done in the fields, the nature, fishes swimming in the sea, the twirling roads of the villages, their homes on hill tops and crops growing. It needs to be noted that in the traditional context, not only the females but, also the males who are not *lekhindra* in their community, do not participate as a painter in the ritualistic *Pithora* Festival. On the other hand, some *lekhindras* who paint the *Pithora* art also practice commercial Bhil Art. During the fieldtrips, I interacted with artists who were also *lekhindras* in their villages. Prema Fatya and Ramesh Katara are *lekhindras* who still visit their patron's house once a year, to paint the ritualistic *Pithora* painting along with another *badwa* who chants alongside them.



Image 85: Bhil lekhindra Ramesh Katara with the Pithora art in the background, drawn at IGRMS.

Presently, with the advent of the new, evolved style of commercial Bhil Art, the doors of practice and exploration have opened for all within the community, irrespective of gender and social status within the community. Thus, the practitioners of the Bhil art were becoming seasoned within the community. Not only that, but the art also opened its doors to teaching outsiders wedded into the community. These people could pick up the artform to assist their members in commercial work, or to satisfy their personal inclination to learn the art. Children are now being introduced to the art from an early age with the purpose of being future Bhil artists to ensure their livelihood. The artists also engage in taking workshops for other artists, school students and researchers outside the community. Thus, the number of practitioners of the art are in steady increase.

Assertion of Identity and Authorship

Another intervention in the art form was the introduction of signatures on paintings. Though the pattern of dots were enough for art connoisseurs, art collectors and even artists within communities to identify a painting, with the market opening up to all patrons, an identity as intricate as a pattern of dots was not sufficient. Hence, an age-old assertion of identity and authorship in the form of a signature was introduced. It sounds ironic, as the artists themselves are not literate and would sign their names as images that they would have memorised. Also, the concept of assertion of identity and authorship in Bhil Art, may be paradoxical and an antithesis to the very foundation of community practices. This is primarily because the art

practices are a shared resource within the community, practiced and worshipped for the community growth in the traditional context while in the contemporary context, it serves an individual growth. Hence, the artists are often conflicted between the co-existence of the two artforms as they continue to practice both, the traditional and the contemporary Bhil art forms, both for a different purpose, for different patrons, following different practices and beliefs.

Adaptation – coexistence of the traditional and contemporary artform

A community is alive and in transition when it constantly negotiates with the external interventions, by either resisting the influence or accepting it. Similarly, in the Bhil artist community of Bhopal, on one hand they can identify the commercial element in their traditional art practices and rituals and on the other, aware of the transition of their indigenous art forms to form the commercial Bhil art. It would be unjust to assume that the artists are completely unaware of the transition. There is a growing awareness and acknowledgement of this transition within the community that has emerged over three to four decades of migration. The transition and its adaptation by the community, situates the indigenous art in the present context by addressing the dynamism and evolution of the art itself.

The Bhil artists have now learnt to separate their religious sentiments associated with the *Pithora* art in contrast to the newly formed commercial Bhil art. The community respects both, one as the harbinger of faith and the other as the bearer of economic stability. In one of the interviews on *Pithora* art, Bhuri Bai mentioned that finding a better way to earn and survive through art would not harm faith. Maybe the art hidden in the faith of *Pithora* festival was to show a survival path to the community. This is reconfirmed by Clifford Geertz (Geertz, 1976) who mentions that,

"...members of a culture, at some point, themselves try to interpret what they are up to".

It has thus changed the perception of art within the community and brought about important changes in the social structure and beliefs. For example, Bhuri Bai explored the form as well as the content of traditional art to exhibit a series of autobiographical paintings (Image 86).



Image 86: A painting of Bhuri Bai where she is seen riding a horse, in the mountains of Kashmir.

Prema Fatya has replicated the Pithora in a contemporary form on large scale canvas and walls for the new patrons (Image 87, 88). Similarly, artists such as Sher Singh and Subhash conduct art classes and workshops for school students. Gangu Bai often takes consignments for wall art in museums and art galleries. Thus, along with the artform, the role of an artist has also transitioned over the years within the Bhil community.



Image 87: A picture of Prema Fatya painting, from his personal archive.



Image 88: Prema Fatya's painting of the Pithora at the Godrej Hospital, Mumbai.

5.5 Dissemination of Knowledge of Bhil Art

In the contemporary Bhil art practice, the purpose of art practice is more inclined to the economic need where the community practices the art as an emerging scope of employment. However, the individual practitioner continues to be a part of the community, still preserving his/her cultural identity and participating in the traditional rituals.

In the contemporary context too, the indigenous artform is introduced to the learners through a practice-based environment. The Bhil artist community of Bhopal is a close-knit group that often stay together or close to each other in a colony or area of the city. These houses, though tiny, are converted into working studios by the practitioners during the day. They also invite buyers to their homes to display and sell their paintings. Thus, this living and dynamic environment of the artists at work exposes the young members to the myriad aspects of art production, promotion, packaging, storage and distribution. During festivals, the young learners are unconsciously made acquainted to the holistic experience of art, music, dance, oral narratives. Hence, in both the traditional and contemporary context, the learning environment

is essentially practice-based. The learner is usually related to the teacher by blood, is an extended family member or could even be from another community, married into the family. Also, the learner does not become an apprentice initially. The initial stages of introduction to the arts to the new learner is informal, and involves familiarizing them to the work environment. It would involve some involuntary work just observing the process of painting, drying, packaging, narrating the context and sometimes, selling it to a prospective client. The second stage would involve practicing the contemporary art on separate sheets and the final stage would lead to individual paintings and collaborative practices.

5.6 The Social Structure

The commercialisation of Bhil Art led to a transition in the art practices and therefore in the roles of the community members who practiced the art. The figure below shows the interdependency and relationship model between the *lekhindras, badwas*, artists and the patrons within the Bhil community in the contemporary context. We can see that in case of contemporary art, a community of artists has grown instead of the closed group of *lekhindras* and *badwas* in traditional society. Bhil Art could now be practiced for non-ritualistic purposes and as a medium of self-expression, it was opening up. Thus, *non-lekhindra* males and women now had the freedom to paint images of the *Pithora* Art. Women and *non-lekhindra* males from within the community and people married into the community could train as artists and explore indigenous forms, narratives and motifs. Since contemporary Bhil art is for non-ritualistic purposes, the artists got the freedom to experiment with the content and style of the art form. Patrons too have now spread to outside the Adivasi community. Traditional Bhil patrons remain and continue to commission *Pithora* paintings for their houses, but at the same time artists serve patrons outside the community for economic purposes as well.

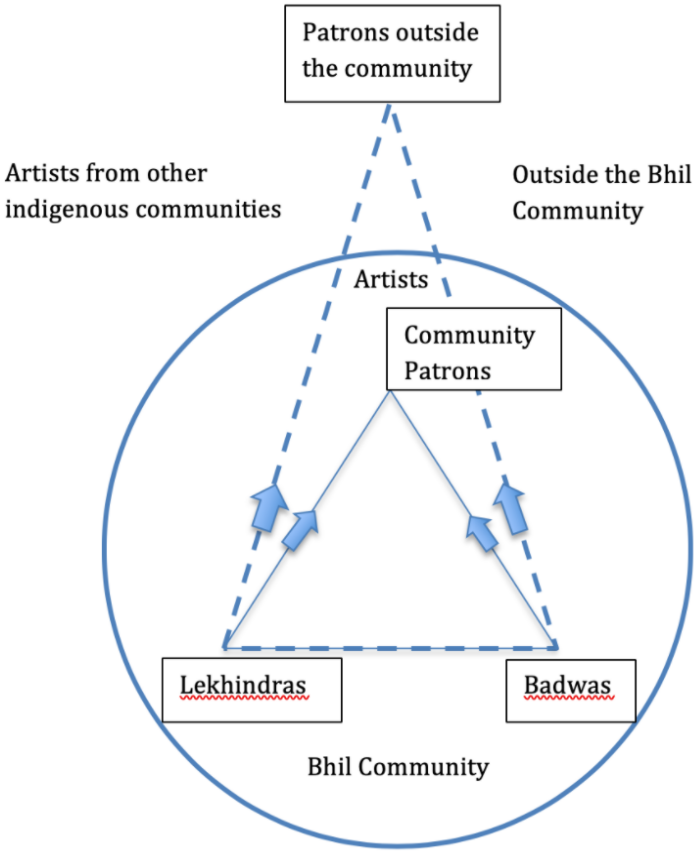


Image 89: Interdependency and Relationship Model within the Bhil community in the contemporary context

5.7 Concluding Inferences: Coexistence of Bhil Pithora and Bhil Art Practices

Today, the paintings of the Bhil artists are displayed in Tribal museum, State Museum and IGRMS as ethnographic images. IGRMS has a gallery dedicated to the Bhils of Madhya Pradesh where they display the ethnographic elements from the village life of the Bhils along with their traditional *Pithora* painting and also the contemporary artworks of the artists. The paintings are also available to purchase at the Museum store or directly from the artists. The Museums are also supportive of the artists for independent selling of art, exhibitions, workshops and collaborations for books and films. The artists are further commissioned by the government on projects like 'keep your city clean' and 'education for all' to paint the street walls to promote their art as well as the government slogan. The artists also explore the art on other materials, apart from paper and canvas (Image 84). These paintings have slowly found their place in hotel rooms, cafes, and homes. The internet searches are also flooded by Bhil paintings and some sites also provide affordable rates for shipping these paintings abroad. Eventually, Bhil art has become a cultural emblem of the state, Madhya Pradesh, along with the Gond Art. Thus, to

protect the art, some well-intended policies of the government support and encourage production and distribution of Bhil art, assuming to contribute towards its conservation. Training and workshops for the artists are organized so that they can better understand the requirements of the new patrons. Research projects on making animation films, picture books and merchandising are initiated to further promote the art. Thus, the government plays an important role in the transition of Bhil art from ritual practices to urban artefacts and cultural emblems. However, despite these initiatives by the government, it must also be remembered that the challenges faced by individual members of the Bhil community are no different from that of a migrant worker navigating the struggle of finding work and sustenance in a modern urban context. State-led initiatives are sporadic, one-off, untenable, and individual centric. Despite these initiatives, the Bhil community continues to uphold their identity of a marginalized Adivasi community dependent on natural resources.

The indigenous artform and related practices continue to thrive and occupy central place in the community's customs and practices even today. The Bhil artist community purposefully and consciously keeps the traditional *Pithora* art separate from that of their contemporary style. According to Sher Singh, it is not the painting alone but the ritualistic chants, the timing and offerings that are performed along with the painting, that make it sacred and auspicious. Bhuri Bai, who always wanted to paint the *Pithora* like the *lekhindra*, adapted the *Pithora* to represent it in her own style. Yet she continues to believe that her painting is a mere representation rather than the 'real *Pithora'*, much like Rene Margritte's painting of a pipe. For example, Bhuri Bai paints a horse in her image of the *Pithora* but avoids drawing the original two headed *Pithora* horse that is sacred to the community and that she accords highest spiritual status to. At the same time, an artist would commission a *lekhindra* to paint the *Pithora* in his own house in the village. It is similar to Durkheim's (1912) interpretation of the sacred and profane where we see the *Pithora* horse that represents the collective belief of the community being deliberately separated from the non-ritualistic paintings made for the market. It is also with this same understanding that contemporary Bhil artists refrain from operating beyond their designated social roles during traditional festivities and rituals. Thus, artists can consciously recognize and separate ritual art from commercial paintings, leading to coexistence of both the traditional and contemporary artforms with their respective nuances and practices in place.

In the table below, we plot the elements and characters of four different categories of Bhil Art that is based on the ethnographic study of the traditional Bhil Pithora and hundreds of paintings of the 27 contemporary Bhil artists, over the period of five years. The first column represents

the elements of an ancient *Pithora* dating back to several centuries. The next two columns plot the elements of the traditional ritualistic *Pithora* – both in *ardho* and *akkho* forms as practiced today. The final column talks about all contemporary forms of Bhil Art. A study of transition of characters from one context to the other would signify whether the Bhil art is a natural evolution and an artistic extension of the *Pithora* ritualistic painting or is it the 'conscious community wisdom' that separates the two.

Characters and Elements found in Bhil art	**Bhil Pithora (Ancient/ Traditional ritual context)**	**Akkho Pithora (Traditional context by *lekhindras*)**	**Ardho Pithora (Traditional context by *lekhindras*)**	**Contemporary Bhil Art (contemporary Bhil artists)**
Baba Ganeh or Ganesh	No	Yes	Yes	No
Kathiya Ghoda carrying Nothral	Nothral walking	Yes	Yes	No
Pithora horses	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Pithoro	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Pithori	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Rani Kajol	As the fourth horse	As the fourth horse	As the fourth horse	No
Kali Koyal	No	Yes	No	No
Indi Raja	Yes, but only the elephant	Indi Raja riding the elephant	Indi Raja riding the elephant	No
Dhani-Dhanaini	Yes	Yes	No	No
Dharti Rani	No	Yes	Yes	No
Ektangyo	No	Yes	Yes	No

First shephards	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Supadkanno	No	Yes	Yes	No
Chinhal	No	No	No	No
BaarMatha no Dhani	No	Not always	No	No
Badva	No	Yes	No	No or only if insisted by a patron
Bull	Yes	Yes	No	Artists choice of content
Chameleon (*halhon*)	Yes	Yes	No	Not so common
Camel	Yes	Yes	No	Artists choice of content
Two-headed Mare	Yes, as a part of Pithora horses	Yes	Yes	No
Horses	Yes	Yes	Yes	Artists choice of content
Spider	No	Sometimes	No	No
Bagh	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Peacock	No	Yes	Yes	Artists choice of content
Mahua tree	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Sun and the Moon	Yes (full-moon)	Yes (crescent mo on)	Yes (crescent mo on)	No
Vavdi	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Bhalon	No	Yes	No	No
Animals (deer, dog, goat, donkey, mule, monkey)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Artists choice of content

Birds (parrot, duck, hen)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Artists choice of content
Vegetation (khajur or date palm, creeper, mahua)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Artists choice of content
Village scenes of daily life (houses, people working)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Artists choice of content
Border	No (minimalist at the top)	Yes, elaborate	Yes, elaborate	No
Dots as a ritual form	Yes	No (Present only in the ritual context)	No (Present only in the ritual context)	-
Dots as a distinct art form	Minimalistic	Definite, detailed and conscience act	Definite, detailed and conscience act	Artists independent and unique style

Image 90: Table depicting the contents of the Bhil traditional and contemporary images

The above table shows that artists refrain from drawings elements that are of ritualistic importance to them. Also, in case they are drawn, it is often depicted from a wider perspective of that of an observer of the festival. Hence, it hints at the fact that the contemporary Bhil artists have created a different vocabulary in the form and content of art that is distinctly separate from their traditional visual narratives.

Also, we note that the traditional *Pithora* has not yet incorporated many 'modern elements' in their representation as in the Rathwa Pithora art of Gujarat (Image 87). Yet, these modern

elements are explored, practiced, and represented by the contemporary artists in the commercial Bhil art (Image 82).



Image 91: Contemporary elements find its place in Rathwa Pithora art

5.8 Conclusion

In this chapter, led by the data collected through experiential ethnography, multiple discussions and interviews with the practitioners of the Bhil Art and through the process of triangulation, I have made an attempt to consolidate the bigger picture. I have talked about interventions that have led to the transition of the traditional *Pithora* Art and the eventual birth of a new contemporary Bhil artform. The data is further illustrative of a transition and eventually a co-existence of the ritual performative practice (Bhil Pithora) and the commercial art form (Bhil Art). We see how the oral narratives, hidden in the traditional art, guides the belief system of the Adivasi Bhils, how the art becomes a mediator to the deities and how it paves a way to communicate with their ancestors. Multiple interviewees further confirm their belief of how Pithora art heals, and further, bless them through commercialisation of the Bhil Art. Bhuri Bai states how she believes that the Pithora not only brings rainfall to the community and contributes to the commercial gains of the community by yielding better crops, but also how it directly guides the 'new' painters, makes their art a success in the commercial space and thus, helps in increasing their monetary stability. In both the cases, Art and art practices have helped the community deal with the adversities in life. Thus, for Bhuri Bai the traditional art has not

dissolved or lost its status but rather evolved to suit the present needs; thus, reconfirming Clifford Geertz (Geertz, 1976) where members of the community are aware and "*at some point, themselves try to interpret what they are up to".* This was an interesting response coming from the community, while interpreting their own data[65], in contrast to perspectives of researchers who believe that evolution of an artform is essentially a dilution of the traditional form. According to Sher Singh, it cannot be expected of poor villagers to continue living in the barren conditions and practice their ancient forms, such as to uphold their ancient culture and traditions, while the world moves towards progress, comfort and success. On similar lines, Reeta, who addresses present concerns in her art, emphasises on the fact that transitions are necessary for any art to keep itself dynamic, living and acceptable to the wider community.

I also note a distinct clarity among the practitioners of the Bhil Art where as a community, they have consciously separated the characters/elements present in the Pithora painting from the elements drawn on the Bhil Art canvas. Many a times, when they do represent a traditional element that holds sacred value, on the Bhil Art canvas, they are also conscious of the fact, that it is a representation of the same and not the same. When Bhuri Bai, inspite of being a woman who is forbidden to draw the Pithora horse, practices the same on her Bhil Art canvas, feels that she is drawing a mere reflection of the real, and not the real. Sher Singh on the other hand, who is not a lekhindra and often draws the Pithora horse on canvas, explains that the Pithora is 'not alive' without the chants, drum beats and the offerings. Thus, both the cases highlight that the artists are not only aware of the transition in their art and art practices, but are also aware of its influence in their lives and has an acceptable reasoning that differences the two practices. It is interesting to note, that Art and art practices continue to remain a pleasurable activity in both, the traditional and commercial context, as contract to the general view that a practice loses its innocence when practiced for others. According to Gangu Bai, she prefers painting for her clients, rather than earning as a daily-wage labourer which is hard work, no respect and meagre payment.

Roshni, a young Gond artist who has grown up with the Bhil artists of Bhopal as neighbours, speaks of the multiple challenges of the contemporary Bhil artists. On one hand while the young Adivasi artists associated with the museums are easily acceptable as compared to urban artists, and find a footstone to the world of exhibitions at an early stage, they are also expected to have their unique style while staying within their umbrella style of the community. For example,

[65] During experiential ethnography, while I was a student of Bhuri Bai, I would often involve her in the process of data collection. Further, we would often have conversations on the analysis and my interpretation of the data. I often narrated to her different views and perspectives and let her explain her stand as an argument.

each Bhil artist is expected to have their unique style of applying dots and their pattern of dots, but at the same time, be limited to 'dots' and not move on to explore anything else in its place. This is so because 'dots' are the unique identifying elements of the Bhil Art, as arcs or curves are for the Gonds and triangles are for the Warli. The other challenges faced by the artist communities are that growing inequalities within them and their village counterparts, the middle-men who demand a high percentage for selling the canvas and the increase in the associated stifles and crime rates. Thus, there is a growing disturbance in the social dynamics that existed in the previous homogenous community. Thus, at this point, a government intervention and plan is required for transferring information, training, assistance and guidance to the new artists across the entire region and not in pockets of urban settlements.

These two data chapters (chapters 4 and 5) are essentially a summary of my observations based on my ethnographic observations of over five years of engagement with the Bhil people. With this, I conclude my field observations and now I move on to the next chapter of my thesis where I collate data with special focus on transmission and dissemination of knowledge specific to art practices. In chapter 6, I further consolidate the curricular components of the art practice and attempt to address the second research objective on pedagogy, through a detailed analysis of my findings.

Chapter 6:

Inference: The Curricular Components of Bhil Art Practices

6.1 Introduction

Now that I have tried to answer the question *'What is art?'* or in other words, the purpose of art in an indigenous community that is dynamic in nature and evolving with time, it is important to further delve into the question leading to '*what are the elements in the knowledge system and its associated skills that the society holds dear, and of worth to be transferred over generations*?' These are the curricular components of the artform. The Bhil artform is thriving, and it seems to have passed the test of time and changing contexts. In this section, I contemplate on how these experiences are organized and nurtured over generations, to ensure that the community knowledge and skills are disseminated. We note that the Adivasi system appears to be fluid and organic in nature through our exploration in the previous chapters. At the same time, this apparent flexibility has not diluted the artform or affected the process of knowledge transmission over generations, because the artform would not have survived otherwise. Further, the flexibility in the practice helped the form to be adapted over time and lend itself to creation of a new artform that provides for the community in many ways. Thus, the challenge in front of us is to understand the seemingly invisible yet highly holistic and interconnected structure in which Adivasi knowledge is organized and disseminated.

Based on my intensive fieldtrip and further reflection on the data collected, I realised that art and art practices in an artist community is not a singular experience in itself. It is rather a multi-dimensional entity that is interconnected with each other and all aspects of life. It is life itself. To explain further, the image that is drawn on the wall, does not end at being the image but rather becomes a symbolic representation of an oral narrative that shapes the belief system of the painter and its community. Hence, oral narratives or chants associated with the painting is of considerable importance. Further, the order is which the painter draws the elements decides the flow, pace and timing of the story. If an element is elevated or enlarged as compared to the

other elements, then that element becomes the central character or the protagonist of the story. It also decides the point of view of the protagonist. Lastly, the technique in which the element is drawn; the thickness of the line, shape, form, etc. reveals to the reader more about the character and style of the image. Similarly, the way in which two elements interact with each other; such as the composition, texture, contrast, balance, etc. also tell a lot about the characters at play and the story. If I reflect back on my process of art practice with the community, I remember being introduced to the practice through narratives. These narratives had its roots in their beliefs, rituals, festivals to an extent that it became their lived reality and a way of life as explained in the earlier section. These narratives also shaped the content of the artwork. A narrative differs from its form by its order of occurrence, order of telling and order of reading a form or image. Thus, a narrative is the mode in which a form is presented. In other words, the visual form becomes a tool for expression.

Thus, for the sake of simplicity and understanding, I broadly identified the curricular components of the Bhil artform as the oral narratives (the stories represented by the images), visual narratives (the depiction of the images) and the visual form (elements of art and the principles of art; the technique of drawing and the relationship between the elements). I believe an wholistic approach by addressing all the dimensions of image-making, would help in deeper understanding the Bhil artform and its practices. As a researcher I am cautiously aware of the terms and the categories that I have used to understand, interpret or structure my findings, and of its limitations in understanding an ancient Adivasi artform and its evolution in its entirety. However, I also feel that this knowledge if composed and structured, can add value to the present art education practices in an urban context. Hence, it needs to be analyzed and simplified for the sake of understanding, implementation and practice in a formal context, for which I borrow lenses and tools of the formal education system such as Paniker (2003) for oral narratives, Dehejia (1990) for visual narratives and Durkheim (1917) to understand the community's relationship with their art practice (as explained in the previous chapter). Further, I also tried to decipher the technicalities of the visual form based on commonly held principles such as balance, contrast, movement, rhythm, etc. and elements like line, shape, colour, texture and value. In this chapter, I would not differentiate the traditional and contemporary art practices of the Bhils, and perceive of them as co-exiting in the lives of the community members, in unison such that they play different roles and purpose.

6.2 Art Practice

6.2.1 Oral Narratives

Indigenous knowledge of ancient India has been preserved and passed through generations, essentially guided by their oral narratives in the form of spoken word such as word of mouth, stories, songs and religious chants. These stories are packaged in culture and tradition; and often act as a guiding light to a community. This maybe so because the stories could generate empathy, connect the past to the present, teach through examples, set a goal and also help one realise the purpose of life. Oral narratives could further adapt with the narrator and change through different contexts of time. In other words, stories can be compared to trees; where it has its roots deeply embedded to the ground, connecting the community through its culture, practices and traditions, and at the same time, its leaves grow into the sky of imagination. The Bhil oral narratives mostly revolve around insemination of the land, its conception, the germination and finally bearing fruit, which is often comparable to a woman giving birth to a child and nurturing it. Thus, from insemination of land to seeking rain, from healing to fulfilling wishes, almost every aspect of the lives of the Adivasi Bhils, are determined by these stories. Also, art serves as a way to keep alive these stories, remember them, adapt them to context and to preserve and disseminate.



Image 92: insemination of land

Of the various people groups residing in India, the indigenous Adivasis form 8.6% of the population till recent times, and they are fast dwindling (Nair, 2016). These indigenous communities still continue to record, preserve and transmit their knowledge through oral traditions often accompanied by the visual narratives. Strengthened by memory, they often take aid of rhyming words, rhythm in verses, stories and narratives. This orally transmitted tradition is recorded, preserved and transmitted and recalled through agencies of memory (Ong, 1988) and organised formulas (Lord, 1965, 1973). It is often codified and the responsibility to pass it

on rests on certain people in the community, for safekeeping. They are usually the shamans, priests, storytellers and singers, or in the case of the Bhil community, the *lekhindras* and *badwas*. It is interesting to note that the narratives differ in themes and versions, depending on the geographical location of the community, and each *badwa* has a unique narrative to offer. While the 33 elements of the *akkho Pithora* of traditional Bhil society remain largely similar, it is the oral narratives that continue to have multiple versions.

If we may recall Paniker's (2003) framework in chapter 3, it had proposed a *tribal model* and coined certain terms to analyse the basic features of oral narratives in Indian literature. As a researcher using Paniker's theoretical lens, I see elements from his model that can be used to understand the oral narratives in the Bhil community, better. Further, I tried to interpret and analyse traditional and contemporary Bhil narratives through his analytical framework, to make sense of the world around.

In the traditional context, the Bhil origin stories mostly revolve around insemination of the land, its conception, the germination and finally bearing fruit, often comparable to a woman giving birth to a child and nurturing it. I identified the characteristic of ***Interiorization*** where the stories are layered or have parallel meanings associated with it. Here, the underlying concept of the narrative structure was not complex or difficult to comprehend. Elements of ***Serialization*** could be identified in some of these characters like the Dev *Pithora,* who have multiple stories related to the birth of the community, the difficulties faced by the tribe during the great floods and the protection offered to the community by Dev *Pithora* often addressed as Baba Dev.



Image 93: Birth of the community: the farmer, sky and his wife, the earth were the first cosmic couple.



There are also different versions of the same story. We can point out ***Allegorisation*** in characters such as the spider that is a symbolic representation of the spirit world, where its cobwebs serve as the invisible thread to connect the two worlds.

Image 94: Spider

Fantasisation can be traced in almost all the characters and the stories revolving around the *Pithora* and its elements. Most of the stories unfold in allegories where the human characteristics are transposed and projected on animals and nature itself. Again, ***Anonymisation*** is a unique characteristic of Indian Folk narratives, that is still practiced in the traditional context, where the author chooses to stay anonymous. The Bhil community acknowledges the authorship to their unnamed ancestors. ***Elasticisation of Time*** is a unique characteristic identifiable in all the Bhil *Pithora* narratives as it revolves around the beginning of the world and the beginning of Time itself. It is impossible to trace the back historically to the authors and hence, further reconfirms Anonymisation. ***Cyclisation*** is also reconfirmed in an Adivasi community where the day is often understood as the time between two nights and also a year, as a cycle or repetition of seasons in a cycle.



Image 95a and b: Sun and Moon

Interestingly, the concept of 'Space' not only exists in the Bhil community but, it is considered sacred. Space continues to hold a sacred position for the community that establishes ***Spatialisation*** in the narrative. Sacred spaces such as the *Pithora* wall, the granary (which symbolizes the womb of the earth) and other physical spaces are decorated during festivals.

Stylisation and ***Improvisation*** co-exist and are nurtured through the festivals that are multi-sensory in nature. Even though the same narratives are performed year after year by the same *badwas* and *lekhindras*, they encourage a unique performance by complimenting each other in

the process. Thus, a performance can never be an exact replication of its previous or future performances. The representation continues to be unique each time. For example, in a festival where the Bhils draw motifs using their hand imprint, it remains to be an organic pattern distinct of the painter. The oral narratives are again not bound by structures so the artist is free to improvise around it and style it fed by their own interest and experience.

As for the contemporary Bhil artform, since the content of the contemporary Bhil Art form is so varied, it is difficult to categorise and comment on them as a group. However, they could be broadly understood in the light of Paniker's characterization. One of the most important transitions in the contemporary Bhil Art is that the paintings no longer have borders that enclose the traditional *Pithora* painting in the sacred space. This was mostly received as a client feedback and design intervention from the galleries, to leave safe-space for framing. Thus, according to Paniker, ***Spatialisation*** no longer exists in contemporary Bhil Art.



Image 96: Paintings with natural space as borders

Similarly, ***Elasticisation of Time*** depends on the narrative in the artwork. For example, when the artwork represents a festival or a myth associated with their origin stories, Time is unknown and hence, elastic. However, when the artist chooses to address a specific social cause or a political situation, it is time-bound. Thus, the content of the artwork decides the quality of *Elasticisation of Time* in the contemporary Bhil art. Again, contemporary Bhil art is neither a multi-sensory art form comprising the oral and visual forms, nor does it accompany the artist in person. It is enjoyed and experienced in isolation by members not belonging to the

community or knowing the visual narratives beforehand. It is rare that we get to meet the artist and hear from them the narrative behind his/her visual representation. Thus, the visual narrative of the painting have to speak for themselves and not be complimented by oral narratives, in the contemporary paintings.

The Bhil Art follows a community style that protects them under one umbrella of the community. For example, the 'dots' of the Bhil Art helps identify the artform as the Bhil community art form. Yet, the artist creates their unique style through improvisation of the patterns formed by the dots. Thus, ***Stylisation*** and ***Improvisation*** helps them build their community identity and yet channelize their individual identity through their paintings. Thus, ***Anonymisation*** no longer exists or is the need of the hour since the artist's visual narratives are representations of their individual experience and depiction of the world around. However, we often find that an entire family follows the style of the popular artist in the family and uses his/her signature, whose 'name' sells the most. This is solely for commercial reasons. Hence, we see a reverse anonymisation, where the real painters choose to be anonymous and instead quotes the popular artist.



Image 97: My Dots as a style

We can observe ***Fantasisation*** in the Bhil artworks that represent fantasy characters often entangled with nature elements. Sometimes these characters represent narratives from the Bhil Adivasi oral literature but mostly, they are creations of the artist's mind.



Image 98a and b: Bhil artist, Jambhu's work

We can also identify elements of ***Allegorisation*** when an element in the artwork represents an Adivasi narrative or a contemporary element. The most common example being a fish or a bird morphing into an airplane (Gangu Bai: Image 82), where both the characters share the similar characteristic of movement.



Image 99: Artist, Dubbu Baria's peacock

We note ***Interiorization*** when the artworks represent the community myths and beliefs through their narratives. Similarly, ***Serialization*** is identified when the artworks address the visual documentation of festivals or their lives. For example, Bhuri Bai recently had an exhibition where she displayed hundreds of paintings as a visual autobiography of her life. She continues to add more to the series by recollecting and creating more memories with time.



Image 100: Bhuri Bai's autobiographical paintings: fishing in the village

Paniker's lens helped in interpreting the oral narratives depicted in the paintings of both, the traditional *Pithora* and the Bhil Art. The narratives form the crux of their belief system where they are assured of their origin, existence and purpose of life. They are reminded of the birth of the universe (through the origin stories), their inheritance (from Gods who created the world - helping them stay connected and find roots), their responsibility (towards protection of their environment), their gratitude towards nature (that protects them and provides for them), their relationship with different animals around them and most importantly, their purpose of life (initiating reflection on their responsibilities). It even comforts them towards death (through stories that reveal an inevitable journey connecting them with their ancestors and Gods). These stories mediate and helps them communicate with their ancestors and Gods that psychologically makes the distance closer and situates them in a same blanket of space and time. To me, these symbolic stories appear to be a guide for a fruitful and happy life. Further, there are philosophies that teaches one to acknowledge that knowledge is an ancestral inheritance of a community.

For any community member, it is ones responsibility and duty to keep it alive, build upon it and pass it on to the next generation. This, it seems to teach one gratitude and selflessness. It is also intriguing to reflect on the symbolism that exists in these narratives and the way it is perceived and communicated by the community. These further trigger imagination and guide perception.

Indigenous artists also make use of other tactile and tangible elements to improvise and enhance their oral performance. Often, masks, puppets, picture scrolls and wall paintings accompany the narratives. Alternatively, it can also be argued that oral narratives gave way to visual narratives and eventually, to written narratives. Most Adivasi practices celebrate the co-existence of the oral narrative and visual narrative in their festivals, like the Bhils. Thus, a unique oral-image-language relationship emerges from these forms. In the section below, I make an attempt to interpret the visual narratives that often go with the oral narratives, during the festivals and rituals of the Bhil Adivasis.

6.2.2 Visual Narratives

Visual Narrative, also known as visual storytelling, is a story told through the use of visuals such as illustrations, paintings, graphics, photography and film. Visual narratives have been a part of Indian culture since time immemorable and observed in ritualistic paintings and ancient monuments. The three integral elements that I could identify in a visual narrative are the characters, depiction of space[66] and depiction of time[67]. However, the artist enjoys the freedom to depict the same or similar narrative in multiple ways. In order to interpret and analyse the visual narratives of the Bhil artists, I borrow the lens from Vidya Dehejia's visual narration (Dehejia, 1990), where she refers to the depiction of the visual narrative through scenes in a story (oral narrative), and has identified seven distinct modes of narration. Through this I make an attempt to understand how the stories are depicted in a visual form.

As discussed in the previous chapter, in the traditional *Pithora* painting, space is sacred and time is not defined. To elaborate further, the space is believed to be sacred as it situates the deities in the given area, that is often bordered. This boundary, depicted through a rectangular enclosure or a floral binding, separates the sacred from the ordinary (Durkheim, 1917). The Time is not marked and is often dependent on the priest *(badwa)* to give it a context. Sometimes it is addressed as 'the beginning of the universe' to 'when the land was beneath the water' and

[66] Space: The context represented through the geography of the place; indoor-outdoor and the elements in the background.
[67] Time: The historical or symbolic time the story is situated in.

so on. Sometimes, the *badwa* also situated the Pithora in the recent time of a ruler. Thus, it depends on the narrator to situate Time. The *Pithora* consists of multiple narratives or stories. These stories are referred and oft

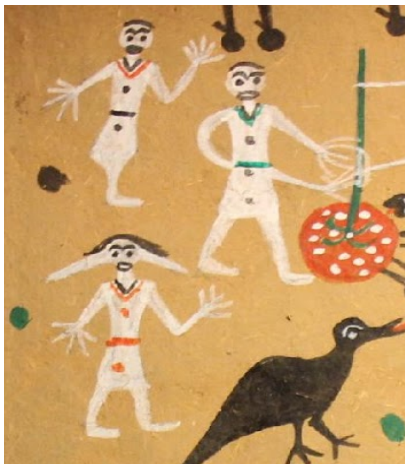


Image 101: ***monoscenic static state****: Ektangyo and Supadkanno,*

The protagonist may be in a ***monoscenic static state*** where it is 'in a state of neutral position', such as the *Ektangyo and Supadkanno,*



Image 102: ***monoscenic state of action,*** *Indi Raja*

or in a ***monoscenic state of action,*** where it is 'in a state of motion', such as *Dhani-Dhanaini or Indi-Raja.*



Image 103: Dharti Rani (a plot of land)

Sometimes, instead of characters, there is a symbolic element or object from the story that represents the narrative. An example of this is in *Dharti Rani* (a plot of land) and the peacock (totem).

In contemporary Bhil Art on the other hand, we essentially find ***monoscenic visual narratives***. These are single narratives or actions from daily life revolving around nature, work and lifestyle of the Adivasi community.



Image 104a: ***monoscenic visual narratives:*** *Sharma's painting, hunting in the village*



Image 104b: ***monoscenic visual narratives:*** *Bhuri Bai's painting, houses in America*

Sometimes, we also find ***synoptic narratives***, multiple scenes from a story are depicted in a single frame, such as the autobiographical paintings of Bhuri Bai depicting the day she was born. As she lay indoors, her mother went to clean the courtyard for the guests to arrive, her father prepared the *hookah*, an uncle going to the forest to get some *mahua* (shown as climbing the mahua tree) and some monkeys that he saw in the forest. All the scenes that occurred at different spaces and points of time, are depicted in the same painting.



Image 105: ***synoptic narratives****: Bhuri Bai's autobiographical paintings: The day she was born*

In the image below, oral narratives take the lead, at least in the mind of the artist, where he/she thinks of situations before and after the moment captured in the painting, and finds creative ways of incorporating it with or without repeating the protagonist. Thus, we find a ***conflated narrative*** in the image below, where we get a glimpse of villagers collecting sticks from the forest, then waiting at the station for the train, then boarding the train to go to the city and further, getting down, to leave the station. Thus, we get glimpses of the protagonists journey from before boarding the train, to after. Note that Bhuri Bai is depicted as an 'conflated' or enlarged character, boarding the train with sticks on her head. In image 107 Bhuri Bai depicts herself in an enlarged size as compared to the other artists at Delhi Haat Painting Fair, where she had participated.



Image 106: ***conflated narrative****: Bhuri Bai travelling to the city to sell the sticks*



Image 107: ***conflated narrative****: Bhuri Bai selling her paintings at Delhi haat*

We find both, ***continuous and linear narrative*** modes being practiced in Bhuri Bai's paintings. An example of continuous visual narrative is found in the wall painting depicting her life at the Tribal Museum, Bhopal, and an example of linear narrative is found in another mode, where multiple scenes are depicted in a painting, the scenes are divided but share the same space and time, is common in many contemporary Adivasi paintings and in the wall art below.



Image 108: ***continuous and linear narrative****: Bhuri Bai's painting on the wall of Tribal museum.*

While analysing the visual narratives in a traditional Adivasi Bhil Pithora context, I felt the need to introduce and identify an eighth mode of narrative. We can name it the ***multi-narrative multi-element*** of visual narrative, based on Dehejia's characteristics. This could refer to multiple narratives, scenes or perspectives of the same story visually presented through a protagonist, where the protagonist repeats itself. In the image 109 below, we see Bhuri Bai as a 'conflated' or enlarged person within the airplane, walking towards the car and also, inside the car in the same painting. However, Image 110 depicts Swaminathan from Bharat Bhawan being present at two instances in Bhuri Bai's home; once for lunch and another to buy a painting. At the same time, Image 111 depicts the award ceremony of Bhuri Bai from multiple perspectives of the audience, judge and herself.

This gives enough freedom to the painter to build upon and create further narratives. Examples of these are found in both *Rathwa* and Bhil *Pithora* Painting. Apart from Bhil *Pithora* painting, we find the m*ulti-narrative mono-element* in the *Phad* of Rajasthan, *Madhubani* of Bihar, *Gond* of Madhya Pradesh, *Rathwa Pithora* painting of Gujarat.



Image 109: ***multi-narrative multi-element****: Bhuri Bai's painting: travelling in an airplane*



Image 110: ***multi-narrative multi-element****: Bhuri Bai's painting: Visit of Swaminathan*



Image 111: ***multi-narrative multi-element****: Bhuri Bai's painting: Award ceremony*

Dehejia's lens helped me interpret the how the oral narratives are depicted in a visual form. One of the striking characteristics is that a narrative can be adapted and contextualised by the narrator or *badwa* in this case. We note it from the data where various different versions of the same story are repeated. Also, a visual narrative is free to be interpreted in various ways often pointing to a version of a story, guided by a narrative that the *badwa* associates with it. On the other hand, the *lekhindra* has the liberty to depict the narrative in a visual form based on his interpretation and understanding of the narrative. Hence, it is an interdependent model of the visual and oral narrative, guiding each other. However, we also need to acknowledge that in the contemporary context the two are being separated at times when the visual narrative speaks for itself, without being complemented by the oral narrative as in the traditional context. In this case, it is complemented by the visual form alone. Next, we look deeper into the visual form of the traditional and contemporary Bhil art and study its characteristics.

6.2.3 The Visual Form: Understanding the Elements and Principles of Bhil Art

The visual form, as an element of art, refers to a three-dimensional composition or object within a three-dimensional composition (Stewart & Mary 2006) that usually represents an emotion, is an expression or a visual representation of a narrative. The visual form can also be explained as the artist's way to represent, express or communicate, using the elements of art and the principles of art. If the *elements of art* are described as ingredients used by the artist, the *principles of art* would be the method and ways to use the ingredients.

Elements of Art

As an artist myself, I make an attempt to interpret the Bhil *Pithora* and Bhil Art through the widely acceptable and popular basic elements of art namely, line, shape and form, colour and value, texture and space. My understanding and interpretation of the Bhil visual form is not just based on the study of the paintings of artists collected over a period of five years but also, observations of the artists creating the art and further practicing them myself.

Line, Shape and Form in Pithora and Contemporary Bhil Art

In the traditional art practice, one needs to remember that forms were usually drawn with fingers dipped in natural colours of chewed up neem sticks. Thus, the tool and medium both guided the style of the form. These tools enabled the artist to draw in complete rounded forms rather than using line drawings to form outlines. To explain this further, a human figure or an animal would be created by paint directly, slowly taking the form of the human, rather than tracing the outline of the human and then filling its inside. In the first case, the process can be comparable to making a sculpture (where we sculpt the shape) while in the second, making a painting (where we draw with lines).

This prompts me to imagine that then, maybe the artist's eye does not *see* a three-dimensional object as a two-dimensional image. It experiences the object as a whole as it is reproduced on paper. Thus, it can be explained why most characters in indigenous art have both eyes and hands visible even when the artist attempts to represent a profile image of the woman. In my experience working with the Bhil artists for over four years, I have never encountered a painting where a Bhil artist has drawn a mid-shot or close up of a human or animal (unless instructed), and cut off their remaining part. For the Bhil sensitivity, a mid-shot, close up or foreground composition that does not show the entire body of the character, is believed to be an inaccurate

depiction of the character, often causing pain to the character. This idea of completeness in depiction and representation is pursued by the form-creation and not the boundary-outline of the character. Further, while drawing motifs like the *sarkla*, one uses the print of the hands. This again imprints a shape rather than a line. However, line is essentially used to tattoo motifs.



Image 112a: An early painting of Bhuri Bai depicting profile shots of people



Image 112b: Line drawing for tattoo motifs by Bhuri Bai

Presently, in the contemporary art practice, many artists have adapted to the concept of profile shots where one depicts only one side of the body towards the artist. Hence, here one would notice one eye in a profile shot of the character.



Image 113: Geeta Baria's painting of characters in profile shots

Recently artists have also started using pencils to make a rough sketch before applying the paint. However, in my experience the artists seem to understand, interpret and practice the form of a character is its completeness, even if they make a pencil line drawing of the same. It is believed to be a 2-diamentional representation of a 3-diamentional element in space. Shape and form define objects in space. However, unlike shape, which is two-dimensional, form also has depth. It is specifically an enclosed space, the boundaries of which are defined by the other elements. Like the shape, the form can be either geometric or free flowing. So, there are geometric shapes (circle, dot, square) and geometric forms (sphere, cube, cylinder) and also organic shapes (free form, unpredictable lines) and organic forms (suggesting natural world of plants, animals).

The Bhil indigenous art essentially consists of organic forms. However, we also find traces of organic shapes to create the boundaries of the painting or as motion-lines in water and wind. Interestingly, the geometric shape of the dot forms the Bhil identity in the Bhil art. In the Gond painting, the organic shape as an arc, forms the Gond identity. These repeated patterns are used abundantly to fill up the entire positive space[68] in the painting.

[68] Positive space refers to the area of interest, focus point or the character in the artwork.



Image 114: Organic shapes: Bhuri Bai's painting of snakes in the fields



Image 115: Organic shapes: Bhuri Bai's painting of land, water and wind

Colour in Pithora and Contemporary Bhil Art

As discussed earlier in the data chapters, there is a distinct difference in the preparation process, quality and medium of colours in the *Pithora* painting and Bhil Art. There is a sacred quality of each colour in the traditional context. For example, the red dots are synonymous with blood and life whereas white denotes the spiritual being such as the two-headed horses of the Dev *Pithora* and the moon. As we notice in the *Pithora* paintings made in the traditional and contemporary contexts, the colour palette drastically changes over time. The traditional colours were organic; red, orange, black, white, indigo and yellow made from mud, stone, soot, clay, indigo and turmeric respectively whereas, the contemporary paintings used existing colours purchased from the markets. In the present context, colours are also explored by contemporary artists to depict mood and exercise sharp contrasts. Some prefer complimentary colours while others choose from different shades of the same family. Some artists work with warm colours while others prefer pale and cool colours. This contributes to the unique style of the Bhil artists.

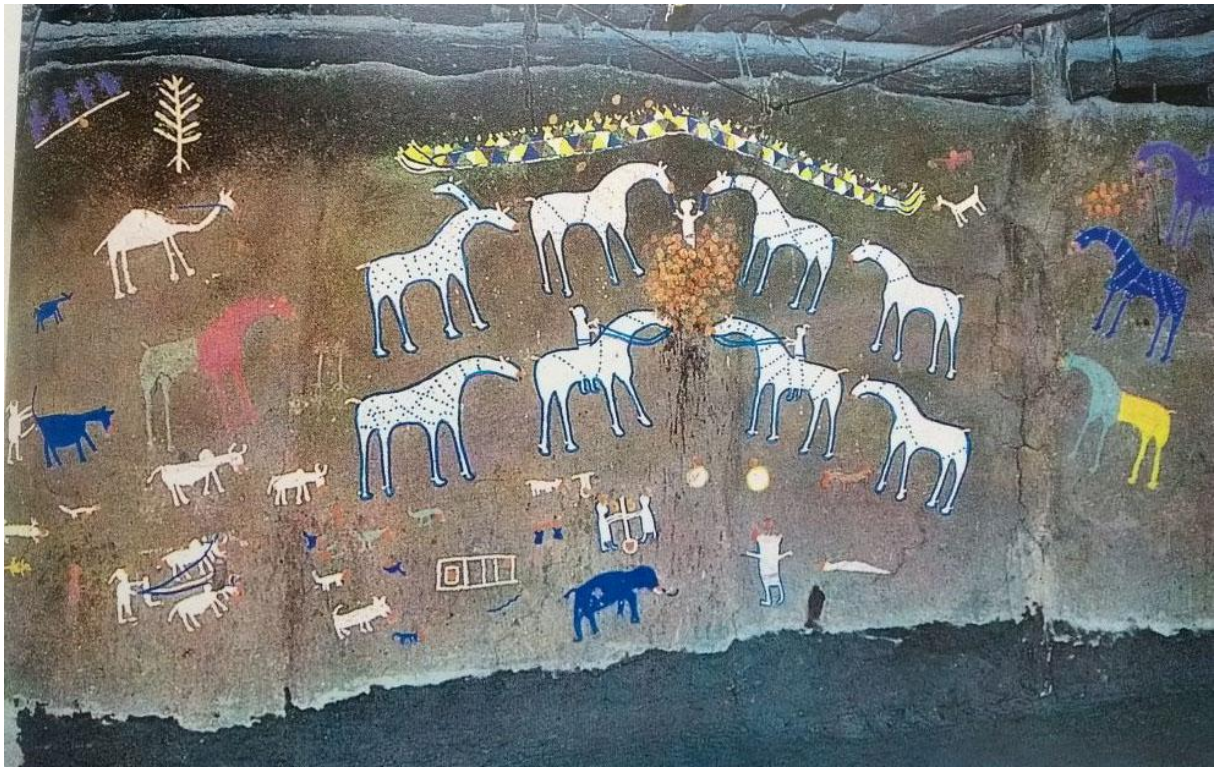


Image 116: Organic colours: The traditional Pithora painting

Texture in Pithora and Contemporary Bhil Art

Texture is an important element of indigenous art. In the traditional *Pithora* painting, the canvas, colours and even the brushes that were used, had a certain coarseness as a texture that added the organic touch to the paintings. The canvas was usually the walls, the colours were natural hand-grounded pigments and the brushes were chewed up twigs from plants. All of

them had their own integral textures that were added to the paintings. Further, the indigenous artists also used their fingers and palms to paint, which added their unique organic texture to the paintings. Even the base of the *Pithora* is created with repeated hand movements to apply a layer of cow-dung and mud, that adds a texture to the base. Even though the categories of texture in art were named much later than the indigenous art, the latter had all of the textures present in it. Ocvirk, Stinson, Wigg and Clayton (2008) propose four types of textures, namely, actual, simulated, abstract and invented texture. (Actual texture is a combination of how the artwork looks and feels where it aims to evoke multiple senses of the viewer through senses of touch and sight and hence, generates deeper emotional connect. Simulated texture involves painting the visual effect of a texture without actually adding it. For example, creating ripples in a painting of a river. Abstract texture is textural patterns added to painting which may not be linked to the object. Invented texture involves adding external elements to the painting to create a texture.) We can pinpoint all four in the traditional Pithora art. The actual texture is created by the use of walls as canvas, natural-pigment organic handmade colours, chewed up twigs for brushes and hand prints. The simulated texture is created by action lines drawn with the paint to represent water and wind. These paintings were also filled with repeated patterns of 'dots' that form the abstract texture. Also, other materials such as cow-dung-mud mixture, grains and flowers were applied on the painting to add the invented texture to the paintings (Image 116).

The contemporary Bhil art misses the above textures as all the elements of art practice, such as the canvas, colours and brushes have been replaced over time. The canvas has changed from the wall to the use of paper or machine processed canvas sheets, the colours and brushes are the packaged commercial colours and brushes available in the market. However, some artists continue to treat the canvas base in multiple ways to create a texture. Thus, from all the four categories we only find a few in the contemporary Bhil art form. The actual texture of machine-made canvas, paints and brushes are commonly found in all paintings, irrespective of the type of art. The simulated texture is also present as before. The abstract texture of 'dots' has increased manifold to form the contemporary Bhil art identity. However, the invented texture has gone completely missing in this contemporary art form. Lately some artists are experimenting with the medium. Bhuri Bai, added a layer of cow-dung on canvas to recreate the traditional texture.

Space in Pithora and Contemporary Bhil Art

Space refers to the distance between, the area around and within the form, shape, colour and line. It also includes the foreground, middle ground and background of the artwork. There are

two kinds of spaces namely, positive and negative spaces. The positive space consists of the main focus or subject area and the negative space refers to the space around it or the background. Both are equally important in art.

The space in Pithora art is considered sacred as it represents the abode of the God, within the household of mortals. It is often marked by an outline that is either a rectangle or a floral enclosure. The sacred space, when filled with forms of gods, ancestors and animals becomes the positive space. The negative space of the Pithora is also considered a sacred space. In the contemporary Bhil art, the forms are no longer enclosed within a boundary, mostly because of client feedback, so as to leave ample space in the boundary for framing. This practical feedback and incorporation in contemporary art leaves a painting with positive space forms, in a clean sheet.

Through the study of Bhil paintings, I further draw that the concept of foreground, middle ground and background is not practiced in indigenous art. The reason perhaps being that the point of view or lens of the painter is not unidirectional but rather omnidirectional. To elaborate further, in the western concept, an artist has a point of view while drawing. For example, he/she sits at a certain position, faces the object of study and then notes the angle of light and shadow. This situates the artist in a unidimensional vision. However, in most indigenous art practices, this point of view of the artist, is omnidirectional which means that the artists can 'see' the object of the painting from all different directions. This would also explain why an indigenous painter, paints animals/humans in their complete form, follows linear perspective and has an omnidirectional narrative composition. Here again, the concept of time is circular and the space is sacred where, in a composition, we see elements belonging to different times, share the same space. We see a similar 'omnidirectional point-of-view' of artists belonging to the Warli, Santhal, Gond, Phad and other indigenous artist forms practiced in India. This concept is also explained in the visual narrative section.

Principles of Art

The principles underlying art represent the guidelines that help the artist use the above elements of art to convey certain narrative or emotion through their art. In this section I make an attempt to read the *Pithora* and Bhil Art through the popularly accepted seven principles of art; namely, balance, contrast, emphasis, movement, pattern, rhythm, unity/variety.

Balance in Pithora and Contemporary Bhil Art

Balance refers to how the elements of art relate to each other, within a composition, with respect to their visual weight to create visual equilibrium. In other words, a composition is balanced when one side does not seem heavier than the other. The traditional *Pithora* painting is usually painted on the rectangular surface of the wall that separate the kitchen and living space. Hence, we may assume a rectangular composition of the same. The outer boundary which is either a free-hand line drawing or an organic floral creeper is effective in giving it a stable framework. The composition is centrally arranged around the *Pithora* horses (conflated, larger images painted in white) and hence radially[69] balanced. Visually, it stands heavier at the centre and lighter on the periphery. The dots are often placed at the centre that establishes the Gods and ancestors. The other narrative elements in the *Pithora* paintings are smaller in size and arranged around it. Thus, there is symmetry in the composition (Image 116).

The forms are usually filled with dots which adds a texture and thus, further increases the visual weight of the element. The dots placed consistently around the forms, in the negative area, brings in a sense of stability and establishment. Thus, over all the *Pithora* painting generates a feeling of harmony, balance, stability and order.

I attempted to interpret the content of the contemporary Bhil art into paintings of nature elements, the village life and the festivals. Firstly, the rectangular framework is missing in contemporary Bhil art. Hence, the balance is achieved by only the elements of form within the painting. The nature elements which consist of plants and animals are usually centrally composed, thus having a radial balance and harmony in the overall composition. The village life would consist of carts, men working, females on field etc. would achieve an asymmetrical balance on the invisible horizontal line. Finally, the festivals that are painted from a wider perspective of that on the audience, follows either symmetrical or asymmetrical balance. The choice of colours is dependent on the artist ranging from shade, value, hue and saturation and so does balance for contemporary artworks.

[69] In a spiral composition



Image 117: Bhil Art by Geeta Baria: central composition, radial balance



Image 118: symmetrical balance across horizontal line

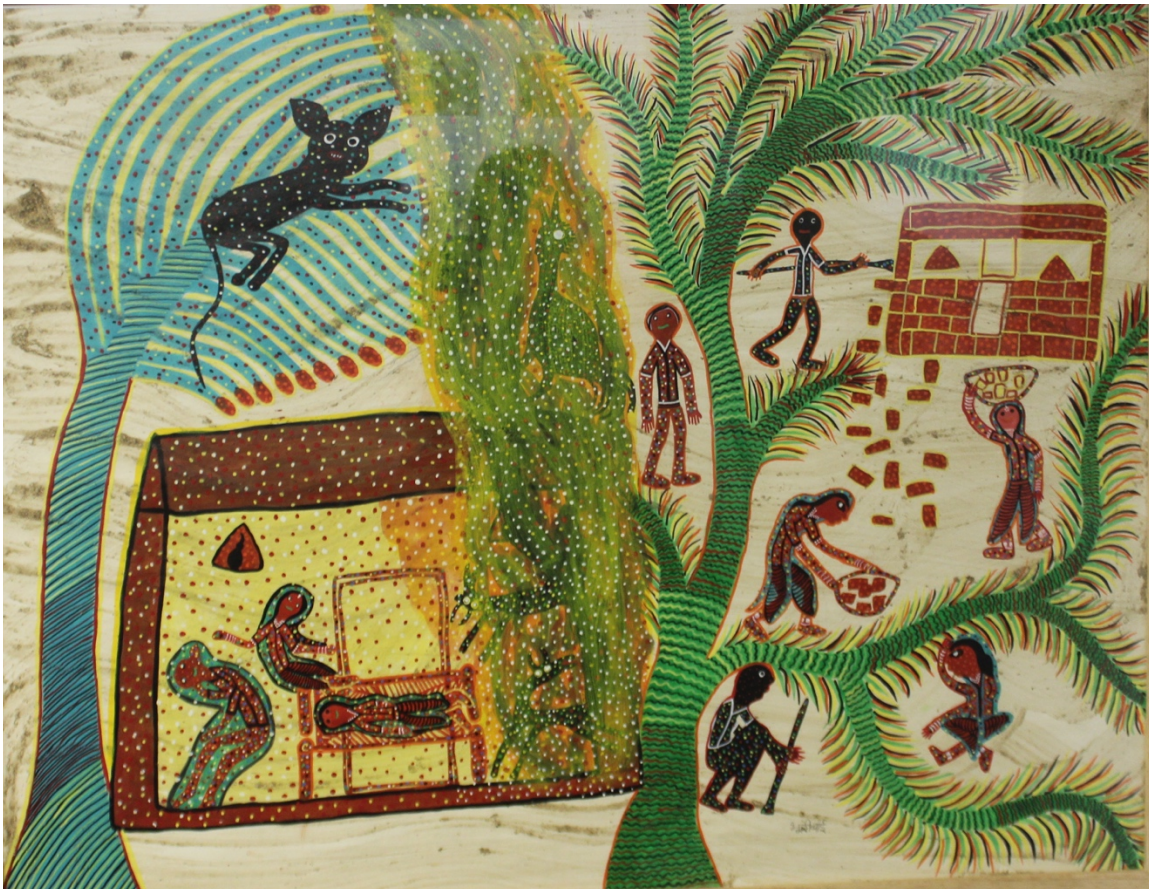


Image 119: symmetrical balance across vertical line



Image 120: asymmetrical balance across diagonal line

Contrast in Pithora and Contemporary Bhil Art

Contrast as a principle of art, refers to the quality of difference or the arrangement of opposite elements and objects so as to create a visual drama and interest. The opposite elements could be colours (light and dark), texture (rough and smooth) or shapes (big and small). In *Pithora* painting, contrast is created through colours, textures and shapes. The central *Pithora* horses are pure white surrounded with other elements in darker shades and value. The dots are further added below the *Pithora* horses. A texture is created in the centre by adding external materials like grains, oil and liquor. Also, the shape and size of the horses are bigger and more dominant than the other surrounding elements. Thus, in the *Pithora* paintings, attention is pulled in the centre towards the *Pithora* horses, by means of contrast through colour, texture and shape. In contemporary Bhil art, the Bhil artists achieve balance and contrast through colour, texture and shape in compositions based on their choice of subjects. I have mostly observed artists, explore high contrast compositions by using complimentary and contrasting colours for the dots.



Image 121: High contrast images by Bhuri Bai

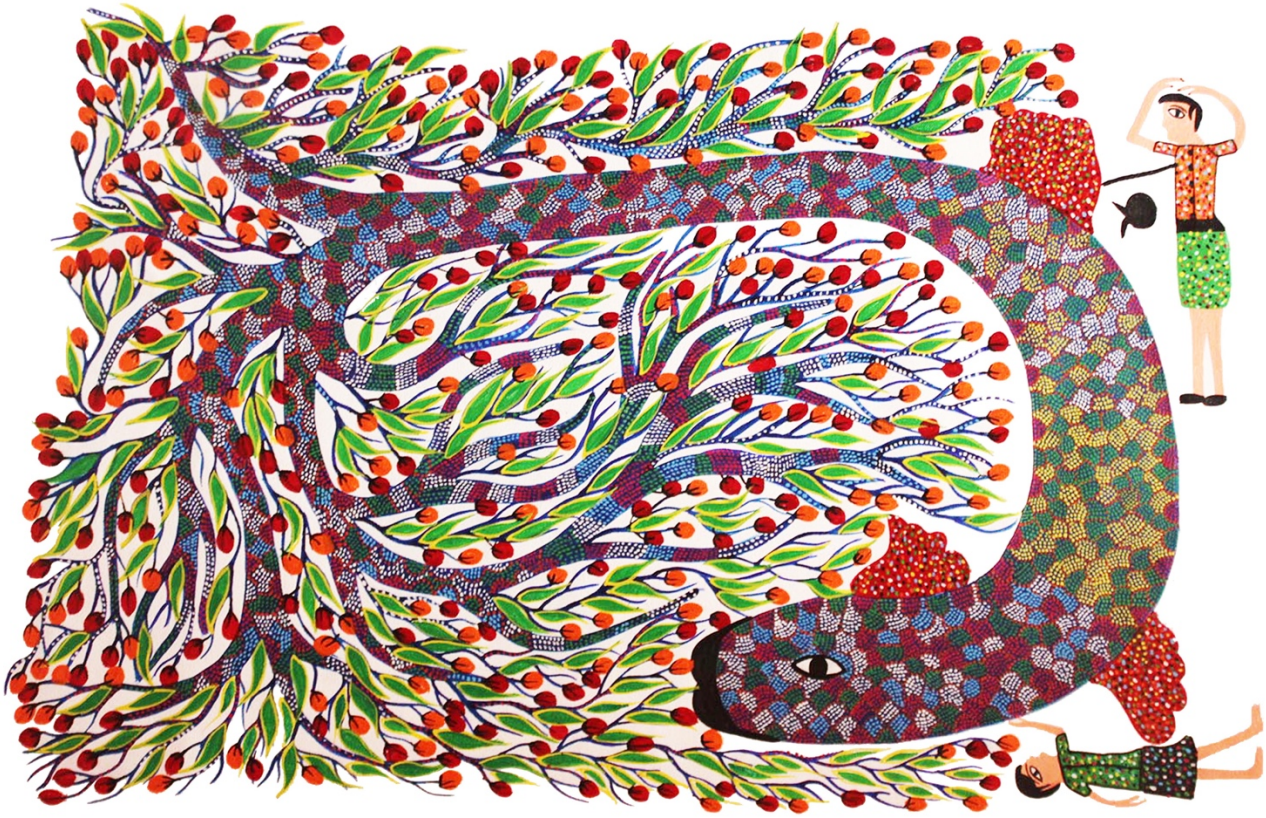


Image 122: High contrast colour composition by Gangu Bai

Emphasis in Pithora and Contemporary Bhil Art

Emphasis is defined as the area within the artwork that draws attention to the focal point of the composition. In the *Pithora* painting, the emphasis is naturally drawn towards the centre by means of colour and size. The patterns around the *Pithora* subdues and dominates the other

elements surround it. In contemporary Bhil art colour is often used in contrast to draw attention to the central or the main character. Indirect lines, such as a twig or leaf, are used to direct attention to the focus point. Sometimes the characters are positioned in a way to direct the audience and guide them to the same.

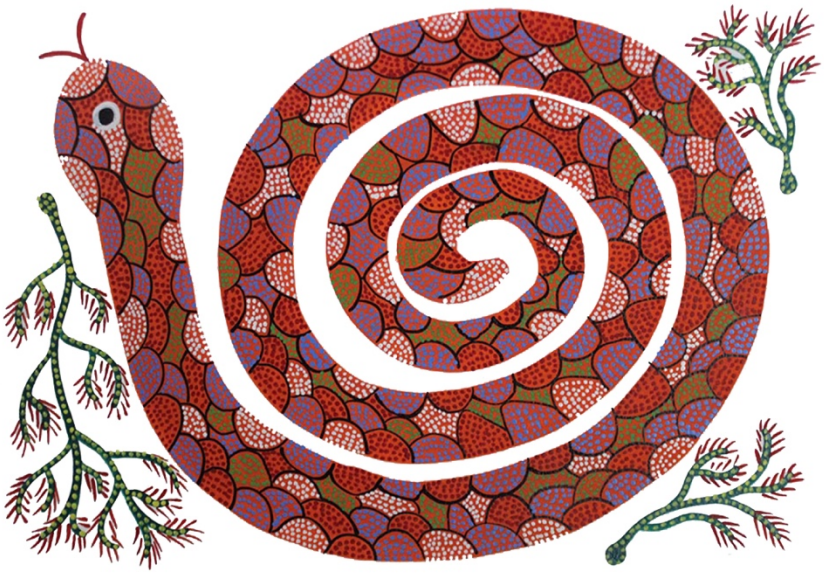


Image 122: Central character focus by Bhuri Bai

Movement in Pithora and Contemporary Bhil Art

Visual movement is a principle of art that creates a sense of motion and action in the artwork. Visual movement in *Pithora* art is strongly guided by the oral narratives. However, movement is also present through colour, balance and rhythm in the traditional *Pithora* painting. The central *Pithora* horses are always white against a darker background colour. Hence, it immediately catches the attention of the audience and seems to guide the eye of the observer. Then, it keeps lingering to every other character in radial motion, the focus point being the centre. Thus, colour guides the eye movement of the audience in the *Pithora*. Balance also contributes to this radial movement. And finally, the rhythm in painting, created by repeated patterns, adds further movement. On the other hand, contemporary artists are free to choose and explore the colours often in contrast to the lighter colour background paper. Sometimes, the reverse style is also explored by some artists. However, the movement in Bhil art is mostly guided by its balance and rhythm surrounding the central and focal character.







Image 123: Different eye movements in each of Bhuri Bai's paintings

Rhythm in Pithora and Contemporary Bhil Art

Visual rhythm is a principle of art that is difficult to explain in words but rather experienced as a musical beat in the paintings. Visual rhythm is created by repeating shapes, patterns, colours, or any other visual element of art. It may even be created by the style and brushstrokes of the artist. I have experienced the visual rhythm in the form of repeating patterns, such as dots in Bhil art, that also forms an important element of indigenous art. These patterns can vary in spacing and arrangement to form unique motifs in an indigenous art. These motifs often represent the unique style of an artist. When the patterns appear in irregular yet harmonious order, it seems to represent nature. Further, the visual rhythm was enhanced by the music and oral chants accompanying it in the traditional practice. The contemporary Bhil art, even in isolation, continues to have the rhythm of dots as in the traditional form.



Image 124: Rhythm in dots in Bhuri Bai's gathla paintings

Pattern in Pithora and Contemporary Bhil Art

Pattern is a structure arranged in a regular and consistent way. It also organizes the elements of a composition in an order. In the book, 'Patterns of Nature', Biologist Peter S. Stevens suggests that in nature there exists only a finite number of ways that a pattern can be structured. He suggests the grid as the foundation of all organic patterns and that there are a finite number of ways the points of the grid can be connected to form patterns. Thus, in nature we see patterns of branching, flow, spiral and packing or cracking. Pattern is an important principle in indigenous Bhil art that connects the various elements of art. We see the use of the *packing* pattern in the layout of elements in *Pithora* painting. Often, it is also arranged in a spiral, around the central *Pithora* horses. The dots in the Bhil *Pithora* and contemporary art, form the Bhil identity and make the art unique as compared to all other tribal artforms. These dots also form the artist identity in a way that they are arranged together to form patterns. Each artist has formed their unique ways of repeating the dots and arranging two or more dots to form a pattern. These patterns are either linear around the border (Bhuri Bai Pitol), random (Bhuri Bai Zher), branching, flowing, spiral (as how I make these paintings), packing or cracking. Sometimes these patterns are also followed by the other members of the family, after a popular artist from the family.

Unity/Variety in Pithora and Contemporary Bhil Art

Unity is also called harmony. It is a principle of art that gives a sense of cohesion and coherence in the composition so as to complete it and make it a whole. Unity brings about consistency in the forms and the content or narrative of the artwork. Unity, variety and harmony is created in the *Pithora* painting through colours, texture and composition. We see a variety of elements or characters brought together through the oral narrative, composition and arrangement. Further, the varied colours balance the artform in the traditional painting. Texture in the traditional and contemporary paintings was an important element bringing together variety to form harmony and unity in both the traditional and contemporary Bhil artforms.

6.3 Summarizing the Curricular Components of Bhil Art

My objective and rationale of the above section was to delve deeper into appreciation of an artform by identifying the various elements and characteristics. I am aware that, as a way of description and explanation, I may have had to categorize and threadbare a painting but that is not with the intension to break it up, but have an in-depth understanding of it. Thus, all of the elements and the principles of art are effective and practiced when linked to one another. An understanding of each of these characteristics, the relationship between them and how they complement or stand with each other, in a given painting, gives us a holistic experience of the painting.

It is interesting to note that even through the Adivasi artists making the paintings may not have verbally named these elements but at the same time, we see a deep understanding and practice of these elements in their art. Not only that, these characteristics are quite defined and definitive in an indigenous artist community that often marks its identity. Further, it is interesting to note that these elements and principles are practiced non-verbally within an artist community.

The various theoretical lenses adopted for the study, helped me to understand and illustrate these curricular components, elements and principles of traditional and contemporary Bhil Art. It helped me further trace how the narratives and the visual form evolved with shifts in the social and economic contexts, over time. This coexistence of the traditional and contemporary forms and narratives is illustrative of how an Adivasi community has adapted its practices to be in sync with modern society and its effects on the narratives and the artform. This reconfirms the idea that indigenous art is organic and living, and thus the dynamic nature of the culture is preserved.

At the same time, I am also aware of the challenges of using various formal lenses to study an organic artform in an informal context. Thus, I have also made an effort at times, to view the same through a wider perspective and often reflect on my personal experiences for the same. The process helped me identify other dimensions that could have been possibly skipped while restricting and imposing a formal lens. These dimensions, usually revealed through the oral and visual narratives or through the practice of the art itself, essentially point towards their belief systems, their relationship with nature and art, and further, experiencing art as a way of life. These important aspects keep coming and revealing itself in many ways and in different stages, thus often finds its mention in the study, which I discuss in detail in the next chapter. In the next section, I also attempt to understand the processes of Bhil Art from a pedagogic standpoint.

I look at the basic aspects of the teaching-learning process such as the learning environment, the role of the teacher and the learner and the relationship between them. I also attempt to identify some overarching themes or elements of pedagogy that seem to be characteristic of the indigenous art dissemination process.

Chapter 7:

Indigenous Art Pedagogy

7.1 Introduction

This thesis was an attempt to understand the centrality of art in the lives of the Bhil people, an Adivasi community in transition, navigating the challenges of a modern industrialized society while upholding their cultural identity. The thriving Bhil artform in all its complexity, be it in the traditional or contemporary context, is testimony to how the artform has been preserved and passed down over generations. In the previous sections, I have drawn insights on Bhil Art and its beliefs, characteristics, art practices, curricular elements and pedagogy with an attempt to answer the initial research questions reiterated below.

1. What is the nature of the relationship between an indigenous artist community and the art practiced by them?
2. How is indigenous art knowledge and its practices disseminated across generations, adapting over an evolving timeframe?

Further, as an endnote to the final chapter of my thesis, I have reflected on my personal journey as an artist and a researcher, and my experiences with art practice, since my engagement with the Bhil community.

7.2 Art as a Way of Life

When attempted to enquire about '*What is art?'* in the Bhil indigenous community, it did not take me long to realize that there exists no word for art in their language. This pointed towards a deeper relationship with life where art does not exist in isolation or as a tangible object to exhibit. Thus, in order to understand '*What is art?'*, I first made an attempt to reflect on '*Why art?*' from my understanding of a community's point of view, with whom I have shared and experienced art. This helped me draw insights on the purpose of art, leading to the modern sense of the aims and objectives of learning.

The practice of art in an indigenous community is embedded its belief system, connecting the *human, nature* and the *universe*. In other words, art acts as a mediator to keep alive and communicate the guiding stories. Here I make an attempt to understand the relationship between *human, nature* and the *universe* in the context of a community.

Self-Community Relationship and its adaptation over time

In my initial years of field trip, I shadowed and interviewed individual artists within the Bhil Adivasi community with an attempt to document their experiences of art practice in both, the traditional and contemporary context. For a very long time, this provided an incomplete experience and understanding of the community where I often compared my data, clinically identified differences and similarities in their experiences of art beliefs and practices. Over the years, when my relationships matured with many such individuals, I realised the presence and a strong sense of a 'community' within an 'individual' artist. To explain further, an indigenous artist has a constant strive between being a community artist (where he/she bears the responsibility of representation of the community, following the community style, belonging to that overarching umbrella) and an individual artist (where he/she struggles to make an individual identity through form and content in the style). Each of the artist are in the process of acquiring this balance between the two. Thus, their interviews reflected their own struggles in their journey of acquiring this balance as an artist. It was never an individual vs community struggle as in my initial understanding, but rather individual *with* community where both emotions are intertwined and inter-dependant.

To support the above, I share interactions with Roshni, a young Gond artist, niece of celebrated Gond artist Jangarh Singh Shyam and daughter of artists Durga Vyam and Subhash Singh Vyam. Trained at NIFT Bangalore along with non-indigenous, urban artists, she found it an advantage in her initial years, to develop her unique style. However, once she started practicing painting as a full-time professional, she was invariably compared to other Gond artists and the pressure to create an unique style and identity as a Gond artist became a challenge. Over a period of time, she overcame it by self-exploration, collaborating with other artists and adapting stories that addressed the present context.

According to my interpretation and understanding of the idea of 'self' in an indigenous civilization, it is often synonymous to the perception of the community, during community practices. The character identity or ego of a person is not only shaped by but, is also a reflection of the larger community. The self does not exist in isolation with the community. Thus, it may also be argued that the self *is* the community in most indigenous civilizations. This perspective may justify the

strong community bonding, pride in community identity and community performance of rituals in an indigenous context. Moreover, the ritualistic practices and performance are often multi-sensory that involves coming-together, contribution and participation of the entire community. The ritualistic blessings such as rainfall and good harvest are also enjoyed by the community as a whole. Thus, in the traditional context, art is essentially a community centric practice.

In the contemporary context on the other hand, art is created by individuals or a group of people, usually belonging to the same family, working together to create a painting for commercial reasons. This leads to the evolution of the concept of artist ownership and individual benefit in the form of economic remuneration, both of which are individual-led in nature. We can perhaps then suggest that the contemporary artform is moving from a community-led experience to an individual-led phenomenon. Moreover, keeping pace with the growing aspirations of living in a modern urban society has challenged the idea of community bonding and belonging. However, that would not be the entire picture as these individual artists continue to practice an artform that binds all the practitioners together under the larger umbrella of community art. The Bhil artists' common pattern of dots is reflective of this feeling of community identity and belonging. They also continue to inhabit together in the same colony and often work together. Here too, art becomes a way of life for the indigenous artists living in cities. Thus, even though the form of community participation has changed, it continues to exist even if continuously fraught with challenges, in both the traditional and contemporary context. Further, the relationship between *self and community* is also unique to each individual. There are some artists who consciously identify the individual artist and the community artist in their work, through practice and years of experience. There are others who unconsciously separate the two, and few, who strife a balance between the two.

Conversely, the community knowledge is not 'owned' by a person but, rather the community. Art, music and dance are community knowledge that often form their unique identity. Presently, they have become the cultural emblem of the Adivasis. Thus, it justifies why an artform that belongs to the entire community and folk music would not have individual copyright. A ritualistic painting done by a person from the community is never signed by the person since it would not have the self as the owner but rather, is jointly owned by the community. The benefits or blessings are reaped jointly as one with the community. A non-signed painting is not anonymous, but jointly owned by the community. This self-community relationship needs to be acknowledged to move on to the understand the art-human-nature relationship.

Human-Nature Relationship

The belief system and the philosophy of an indigenous community is deeply embedded in their geographical surroundings and reflected in their lifestyle, economic practices and social rituals. In this context, the belief system needs to be understood not through the worship of gods and goddesses, festivals and rituals, but rather through oral and visual narratives that guide these rituals. These narratives mostly elaborate origin stories binding human, nature and the universe in the same context.

Previously in my theoretical framework, I had mentioned Paniker's 2003 classification of oral narratives. The origin stories of the Bhils that I encountered seemed to suggest that for an indigenous community, nature is not confined to the physical terrain, plants and animals. Time and space are also other dimensions that set the context of nature for an Adivasi community. Time is often viewed by the community as bound by nature that is cyclical in its characteristics too. For example, time is marked as the space between pairs, such as two nights. Further, community members frequently recall events through seasons and address births or deaths as a season in time. Thus, time can also be seen to be as a rhythm of nature. This is echoed in the geometry and art in nature. The rhythm of nature is reflected in the indigenous art, folk music and community dance by its pattern of repetition, that is most common in the Bhil art form or most indigenous art forms and folk music. Time is forever present and is conceived as 'enveloping' the sacred space. Time is marked by events such as harvest and ploughing etc…and hence follow a cycle. Space is considered sacred in the sense that it situates an event in time. For example, the sacred space of the *Pithora* serves as the residing ground of the Bhil Gods and ancestors, in the present. The community identity is marked by its immediate geography and this nature is reflected and is responsible in shaping its identity. By recreating art in a sacred space in time, an indigenous community is tuned to nature. Thus, art and music are believed to be the human manifestation of nature that is celebrated through its characteristic pattern of repetition.

The 'pattern of repetition' in nature is celebrated by the humans through their cultivation, art, music and dance. This 'pattern of repetition' in nature gives birth to rhythm. For example, the crops are planted and harvested in a rhythm in time, the Bhil Art has a rhythm in repetition of the dots, the music, chants and dance follow a rhythm often inspired by nature. To elaborate further, the beating on drums and the growth of leaves in a tree, both has repetition in the process

and this leads to a rhythm. Thus, rhythm and repetitive of nature forms an essential element of pedagogy[70].

Human-Universe Relationship

The Universe is perceived in many ways in an indigenous community. It is, as I have understood from my conversations, revered as gods, ancestors, an extension of nature, an extension of self and beyond. It is always connected to the community, their surroundings, their ancestors and themselves through stories. Thus, by revisiting the stories and reliving them, the imaginative distance between the community members and the universe is reduced. This universe is manifested in the paintings through origin stories of man and nature, and the relationship between them. An indigenous community also believes that they are constantly surrounded by their ancestors who guide them through their journey. These ancestors are often worshipped at par with their gods and goddesses. Thus, conceptually, they exist in the space between nature and the universe.

Human-Art Relationship

Art plays an important role in the community. It seeks to express the emotions of the people, reconfirm their connectedness to their roots, and is a vehicle to communicate their religious beliefs. The earliest evidences of written language in history can be found in the ancient cave paintings. Hieroglyphs and murals have been a way of documenting history of ancient civilizations. The Bhil community too, believes that the Gods have themselves instructed the people to communicate through the language of visual art and music[71]. It is with this very belief that the traditional *Pithora* ritual is conducted every year to document origin stories and to ensure the wellbeing of the family. Similarly, all religious and cultural events and milestones are accompanied with their relevant art practices.

Even today, natural resource dependent Adivasi communities continue to worship the elements of nature and celebrate the forces and elements of nature through their accompanying art rituals. It may be viewed that the human extends its consciousness into nature and then, the universe through the medium of arts. Conversely, it is also the responsibility of the universe (their ancestors and Gods) to nurture and protect the needs of human, through their blessings manifested in the form of nature. Thus, art becomes the mediator through which the community explores the relationship between human, the nature and the universe.

[70] I agree that this concept of repetition and rhyme may seem complex especially, when attempted to explain through words. However, it is seamlessly realized and experienced while practicing the art in the context.
[71] According to a Bhil origin tale, as documented in the book, 'The Origin of the Bhils'.

The Purpose of Art Education

Through the above argument, it seems that an indigenous community has a clear objective for the practice of the art form. It is guided by the religious beliefs of the community and their socio-economic aspirations. Art is the vehicle through which these beliefs and aspirations are communicated and realized, irrespective of age (time, whether ancient or modern) or geographical context. Even for the migrant Bhil artist community in the contemporary context, the cultural association with art remains, along with an additional form of economic dependence on art. Thus, we see art evolving as a means of overall sustenance for the community, both in cultural and economic terms. It is perhaps almost natural that art practices are nurtured over generations, and thus occupy such central space for not just the Bhil Adivasi community, but also across indigenous communities and cultures.

The tangible purpose of art education therefore is that it has economic benefit, both in the traditional and contemporary context. The *badwas* and *lekhindras* are the beneficiaries in traditional Bhil society, whereas the artists are, in the contemporary context. Knowledge and skills of the traditional artform are nurtured and passed down over generations to ensure this means of basic sustenance. However, as is evident from the community's innate beliefs, economic sustainability is only a very small role that art seeks to serve. The larger, and more intrinsic purpose of art is more intangible in nature. Thus, Art in a sense becomes a religion to the practitioners of the community. To elaborate further, the intangible purpose lies in the intrinsic quality of art education that helps in personal growth, art for art's sake, the joy of practicing art as a community practice, the pleasure of creation and most importantly, the faith that art can heal and bring good to the community. These intrinsic qualities are difficult to quantify, yet defines the larger purpose of art education. Interestingly, the young learners of the artform understand the purpose as a whole, and the ones interested in the experience, continue the practice. The teachers gauge this understanding in their students to determine their readiness to learn. Hence, it is still looked upon as a criterion of selection for dissemination of art skills after the new learner is immersed in the field of practice.

To conclude, and to reiterate, art does not exist in isolation in an indigenous community. Art is a part of an intrinsic network connecting all other knowledge source and experiences. In the traditional context, it is a part of a multi-sensorial performance along with music, food, dance and oral narratives. Not only that, art is also connected and often a mediator between humans and nature, universe, their ancestors and deities such that it becomes a way of life and supports

their belief system. In the contemporary context, even though the art is disconnected from the traditional ritual setting, it continues to be a way of life through the practices and the narratives in the art. Art practices in the contemporary context are embedded in their daily lives such that the artists have their home converted into studios where they constantly create an environment of learning, along with others practicing the art in the same family. The children and other members are exposed to the form at an early age and the narrative in the art. As for the narratives in the contemporary context, they are mostly depictions of a village life left behind, the nature and festivals illustrated from a wider perspective of that of an attendee. Thus, in both, the traditional and contemporary context, indigenous art continues to be *a way of life* practiced even today, by the practitioners of art. It is also important to note that one has to be a continued practitioner of the art to continue being connected to the larger network.

7.3 Indigenous Art Pedagogy

If we consider art as a part of an intrinsic network connecting all other knowledge source, beliefs and experiences, it stands equally important to understand the pedagogy as a holistic experience. This section is essentially based on the data collected from my extensive field engagement with the Bhil artists of Madhya Pradesh, Bhopal from January 2015 to January 2020, and from my personal journey as a learner of the Bhil artform. I talk about the learning environment and relationships between the teacher and the taught and then further attempt to document some characteristic features of the teaching-learning methodology as inferred from the practices of the indigenous Bhil community, that hints at a pedagogy of indigenous knowledge transfer. Even though these themes are documented in an order, it must be remembered that in an organic environment, they often occur simultaneously. Also, I reiterate that the elements of pedagogy in a community practice, are interconnected and hence, not been identified in isolation or named by the practitioners. However, that does not mean that these elements do not exist in the pedagogy. Hence, for the sake of convenience and understanding, I identify some characteristics and elements of indigenous pedagogy and name it as known and practiced in the formal learning space.

The pedagogic approaches (teaching-learning practices) to art as practiced by the Bhils in the traditional and contemporary context.

Learning Environment

In an Adivasi community, the indigenous knowledge and beliefs are not transferred in a structured learning environment as in schools but rather, through their way of living. The responsibility to record, preserve and transmit knowledge rests on every member of the

community. This may be observed through the organic participation of the community members in ritualistic practices. In both the traditional and contemporary context, the indigenous artform is introduced to the learners through a practice-based environment. The young learners are familiarized with the medium through traditional rituals and festivals. They are unconsciously acquainted to the holistic experience of art, music, dance, oral narratives from a young age. In the contemporary context too, the co-living and co-working urban environment of the artist community contributes to the creation of a living and dynamic environment of the artists at work. It exposes the young members to all the aspects of art production, promotion, packaging, storage and distribution. Hence, we see the presence of an essentially ***practice-based learning environment*** across contexts. An enabling and nurturing environment that engages the learner, acknowledges his/her inherent potential and mentors and guides the practice of the artform from the initial stages of learning to even beyond the time when the learner becomes a seasoned practitioner on their own, is perhaps a commonality of character that could apply across contexts and time.

It is also interesting to note that such a practicing-learning environment, exposes all the stages of art practice to the new learners. This further reveals the nature of the practice as a holistic experience. Not only that, the practicing-learning environment ensures the teachers to be practitioners that help them to be in constant touch with the requirements of the patrons and addressing the purpose of art, in the given context.

The Teacher and the Learner: Roles and Relationships

As explained earlier, it is important to internalise that the teacher is first and foremost a practitioner him/herself. In traditional Bhil society, the art is driven by faith and belief, and the outcome of the art process is more of a tangible product of that faith, that may be witnessed on the walls of an Adivasi house during the *Pithora* festival. Thus, the focus of the teacher in a traditional context is on the practice of his/her art and its cultural preservation. However, in the contemporary context of the Bhil artist community there is a shift in the larger purpose and there is a change in the role and responsibility of the practitioners as well, where they are also engaged in preserving and popularising the artform.

I have mentioned earlier in the data chapter that an important role of the *lekhindra* or *badwa* is to select a successor that would follow in his footsteps and take forward the art rituals of the traditional Bhil society to the next generation. It is with this intention that the teacher chooses his students, based on their interest and motivation, and thus a major role of the teacher in

traditional Bhil society is to mentor, train and equip his next generation to carry forward the community's beliefs, culture and traditions through the medium of art. The teacher is looked up to as a moral and social role model and commands authority based on his social status as a *lekhindra* or *badwa*. An interested learner (selected on the basis of gender[72] and social position) is invited to shadow the *lekhindra* or *badwa* during the *Pithora* festival. The role of the student is to assist the *lekhindra* in his rituals. The student learns through observation, and this learning is self-driven and self-initiated. It is only when the teacher is convinced of the learner's motivation and interest and acknowledges the student as worthy of becoming his potential successor, that he consciously makes an effort to involve the student in the art rituals and eventually teach him its intricacies.

In the contemporary context, the teacher is still a role model, mentor and guide for the new artists learning the trade. However, here the end goal is to ensure economic sustainability and to preserve the artform, and the role of the senior artist seems therefore to contribute to the building of a thriving artist community. The senior artist is a seasoned professional, and it seems that his/her status as a practitioner and trainer, is more relevant than his/her social position in Bhil society.

In both the traditional and contemporary context, the senior artist is the authority that decides and enforces the art curriculum. In the former, the curriculum comprises of the ancient rituals and practices that have been passed down for centuries. In the case of the latter, the role of the teacher-artist is more flexible, he or she can introduce the contemporary artform and the associated modalities of the art trade based on his or her unique approach, and quickly adapt to the changing requirements of the patrons. The learner or junior artist starts by observing the teacher in his/her work environment. The learner is introduced not just to the contemporary artform, but also the processes of drying, packaging, narrating the context to a client or making a prospective sale. The learner eventually starts practicing the contemporary artform on separate sheets and with experience goes on to work on collaborative and finally individual paintings.

It is important to note that the learning environment in both the traditional and contemporary context nurtures a strong personal relationship and initiates one-on-one learning. It guides through the stages of growth of the student from imitation to exploration and later collaboration between the teacher and the student. This personalized, one-on-one learning also decides the pace of learning that is hugely dependent on the learner. In both the cases, the one-to-one bond

[72] Women in the Bhil community were forbidden to paint the *Pithora* painting.

between the teacher and student is mutually dependent and nurturing. The students mostly contribute in the form of professional and household help, whereas the teachers share the knowledge, beliefs, practices and techniques of the subject. The relationship between the teacher-learner guides the pedagogy through the initial stages of introduction to the arts, practice methodology, assimilation, reproduction and later, collaboration and co-creation of knowledge. Once, the trainer shows capability in executing a part of the knowledge, the teacher slowly traces back, providing more space for the trainer to exhibit the work. Thus, the learner needs to be an active and self-motivated participant in the process of knowledge acquisition.

As addressed above, the traditional and the contemporary art practices of the Bhils share characteristic features in their purpose, practice, roles, relationship, pedagogy. However, one would also notice some salient similarities/features in their approach to pedagogy, that I realised formed the core of the indigenous pedagogy. They are 'the evolving relationship with art' and 'a holistic approach to its practice', that forms the fundamental characteristic feature of Indigenous art pedagogy. In the next section, I make an attempt to explain the indigenous approach of pedagogy'; their 'evolving relationship with art' and 'a holistic approach to its practice' through terms as understood and discussed in a formal learning space. This is solely for the purpose of convenience and discourse and I am aware that in an indigenous community the elements of practice are mostly non-verbal. However, despite the pedagogic approach being organic and unstructured, I have been able to cull out certain elements that are also similar and equivalent to our understanding and learning of art. I have explained each of the elements of the pedagogic approach through examples from the field, in either the traditional or contemporary context. Also, since the data collected is essentially non-verbal, collated through observation along with my personal experience of learning the artform, I have often shared my personal experiences as examples. With that, I now make an attempt to verbally document my experience of indigenous art practice and its pedagogic approaches in the Bhil indigenous community.

Characteristic Features of Indigenous Art Pedagogy

During my fieldwork, I had the opportunity to witness how the artform was being taught, learnt by sitting on several sessions of the Bhil artists at work and while observing the art rituals in the village. In my interviews with these artists, I probed further about how they had originally learnt the artform and also about their own beliefs and approaches to teaching. The themes that emerged from my conversations were often further reinforced when I started to learn the

artform from Bhuri Bai. Here I have listed some of these themes and talked about their perceived role in the process of art dissemination, in an indigenous artist community.

Interest and motivation are two of the key pre-requisites for being taken on as a probable learner of an artform. In traditional society, an interested candidate is just not chosen based on the lineage or relationship. They are further required to spend plenty of time with the *lekhindra*, observing the task at hand before actually getting involved in the practice. Often, the teacher acts as if the student is invisible and refrains from giving him any task. However, he is also observant of the nature of the student as a person and as a probable learner. Similarly, in contemporary society, the young learners share the space of practice, of the practitioner. Even though nothing is expected of the yet-to-be learners, the practitioners who are often family members, keep a sharp eye on them to create mental notes of their interest, motivation, practice, self-exploration and so on. In my interviews, the practitioners would comment on every member of their household's talent, interest, perseverance and passion. Even though it is seemingly invisible, these form the initial criteria of selection. I have also observed that within the community, perseverance was given most importance by the teacher, followed with passion and interest and lastly, talent. This may ensure a serious handover of knowledge for preservation and safekeeping, by the teacher to the learner.

The teacher often introduces the artform to the new learner through ***demonstration*** while he/she practices the task in a real context. The artist demonstrates the task at every stage of its development that also involves the different levels of complexities or challenges in the real context. This gives a holistic idea of the process and practice to the new learner. In the traditional environment, demonstration depicts the stages of development building towards the final experience and also the levels of experience through additions of different layers such as oral narratives, music, mahua, community and food. Similarly, in the contemporary context, demonstration depicts the stages of development of the artwork building towards the final painting. Further, it involves the packaging, preservation, exhibition, selling and all the challenges involved in each of the stages. Also, many a times, there are multiple projects that a contemporary artist is involved in, and hence the student gets to observe multiple projects in different stages of information. One may assume that the process would be either overwhelming for the student or confusing. However, through personal experience I have realised that such a process reveals a holistic understanding of the subject. If I may reflect back and attempt to articulate, the process helped me associate the subject with the real context, understand its relationship to every stage and perceive each stage as a network, linked to each other…rather

than a linear flowchart relationship from one stage to the next. Thus, the stages in art process was assimilated as an organic structure, in close network with one another, much like the veins in a leaf. Thus, even though the order of demonstration may not be a linear process, but rather an organic process, a new learner is quick to understand and create the chain of the linear, organic and the parallel processes of learning through these demonstrations that are led through actual practice. Here I would also like to restate that such an understanding is often non-verbal and can only be possible through practice and demonstration. Active observation and reflection by the student would reveal it to themselves at different stages in their learning process.

Participation in indigenous art pedagogy may be observed in two forms, through community participation and through the practice of the artform. In the traditional environment, a new learner once motivated, participates in the task consciously and is involved through practice. There is also an unconscious or organic involvement through community participation during festivals and other community events. This nurtures the sense of community belonging that further sustains the belief system surrounding the task. In contrast, this involvement is observed in a different form in the contemporary Bhil artists who live together and practice in their home studios, driven by the demands of the profession and the sense of purpose. As we have already mentioned before, the junior artist continues to collaborate and co-work with his/her teacher much after he/she establishes his/her own name and body of work as a contemporary artist. At this stage, he/she is more aware of the practice, process and the order of the task. In both, the traditional and the contemporary context, participation by the students are both conscious and guided and oblivious and intuitive. In the first case, a learner is often instructed by the teacher whereas, in the other case, one engages in the process intuitively driven by their interest or a way of habit. Nonetheless, both contribute towards their experience of the initial practice and in understanding the work environment.

Observation is an important manner in which the holistic aspects of the artform are understood and internalized. The visible elements include the task at hand, the process of making the art object, the order in which it is made and the mannerism of the teacher. The invisible elements that are also observed and eventually imbibed are the temperament, belief system, perseverance and passion of the teacher. In both the traditional and contemporary environment, the teacher and learner are both observant of these visible and invisible elements in each other's practice and disposition, which in turn informs the teaching-learning process and also aids feedback.

Imitation can be understood as a mirror image of observation for the learners. In both, the traditional and contemporary environment, the learner attempts to imitate the teacher and the practice. Imitation may also be interpreted as conscious and organic. Conscious imitation is mostly done of the visible elements of observation such as the task, process, order and mannerism of the teacher. Organic or unconscious imitation takes place of the invisible elements such as the temperament, belief system, perseverance and passion of the teacher. It also needs to be understood that the elements of both, conscious and organic imitation are often mixed with the personality of the learner to show its final results. The learners are of course influenced but at the same time, reveal their individuality through the style and practice of the art.

Practice seems to be integral to indigenous art pedagogy. Equal importance is given to the practice of the form and to the practice of the discipline. The practice of form involves exercising the elements of indigenous art such as the oral narratives, visual narratives and the visual form. The practice of discipline involves exercising routine in food habits, time of starting the ritual of painting, process of painting, patron relationship management and also the business transaction involved in the process. In the traditional environment, practice of the form and the discipline hold equal weightage and importance, especially because the art is a part of community ritual. On the other hand, in the contemporary environment, practice of the form is given more importance over practice of discipline and newer areas of artist-patron relationship management and business transactions emerge as important.

We observe ***repetition*** in the form and context of most indigenous artforms. Repetition in form comprises the oral narratives, visual narratives and the visual form. In each of these, repetition in form appears either as rhyme in chants, musical rhythm in the story, repetition of situations or plots that build to a climax, repetition of places or contexts, repetition of character's mannerism, and also in the process of drawing the form (for e.g. making dots in the Bhil painting, arcs in the Gond painting or triangles in the Warli). Repetition in context is observed in the real context where the practice, challenge or outcome is repeated over a period of time. Repetition is also observed in the periodic pattern of the festival and the rituals. In traditional Bhil Pithora repetition is also observed in the gestures of the badwas and the *lekhindras* through chants or application of paint. Further, it is enhanced by the music and dance that follows during the Pithora.

We may also associate this rhythm or repetition in the art to nature itself, (for e.g. through changing seasons) that prompts to connect art to other forms of expression such as music, dance and even chanting during festivals (where often *badwas* swing their heads to chants and rhythm of drums). Thus, repetition in form is integral to most indigenous or folk art or music. In Bhil Art, we see it in the form of repeating dots and patterns, in the Gond art, we see it in the form of curves, in *Pattachitra* we see it repeated in motifs, in folk music we hear repeating and returning beats, words or the chorus and so on. My personal experience while practicing repetition in art, helped in concentrate further in the process of art-making, where the hand would be involuntarily participating in the process, much like the muscle memory of a pianist, while the mind would be in a state of concentration in the task. We further elaborate this in 'meditation'.

Interpretation of knowledge was an important step involved in the process of learning the Adivasi artform. In my initial years of training, it was challenging as I would attempt to make-meaning and find immediate answers to every stage, much like the formal education system of which I was a product. In my initial years of formal school training, 'asking questions' in class were discouraged. Later, exposure to alternative education systems as often practiced in design schools, made me believe that 'asking questions' is good for one's cognitive development and understanding. And again, in the present context, 'asking questions' were not entertained. I was often ignored at times. It took me a couple of years to understand that one is expected to 'ask questions' to oneself and not to others, especially in this non-verbal practice of arts. I realised that a learner is expected to find their answers over a period of time, based on their questions, interests and context. It may be so, since these questions are seemingly unique to each person and thus, are expected to have unique answers. Thus, it seemed to me, that the teacher or practitioner would rather rely on demonstration rather than answering queries. It is mostly for the learners to solve and find answers to their questions through observation and assisting the teacher across contexts. Thus, the learner understands and internalizes the task, process, sequence, community style and the belief system through their personal experiences.

The personality of the learner also comes into play here, and it is the student's unique interpretation of the practice that shapes his/her perseverance, passion and individual style. The teacher is aware that each learner is different, and paces his/her instruction accordingly. Interpretation of art knowledge is an ongoing process that further initiates reflection, self-learning and exploration from the learner.

Reproduction is the idea of replicating the task at hand, with limited or no guidance. It is very different from Imitation where the learner makes the first attempt to copy the teacher, from the beginning to the last stage. In reproduction, the learner produces an original work that is in essence an outcome of the training acquired from the teacher and follows the same ethics, principles, laws and practices. However, this is not the final stage of learning. Once a learner successfully passes the reproduction stage, he/she is ready to practice on their own. It opens a gateway of self-learning and self-exploration. Further, the learner starts collaborating with other practitioners or even the teacher, for bigger assignments. In the traditional context, the learner continues to assist the teacher for many more years after being able to reproduce the task on their own, before choosing to work independently. Traditionally, the teacher slowly withdraws guidance at this stage but continues giving suggestions. In the contemporary context too, the learner continues to learn from the teacher where now, he/she is introduced to new challenges over time. This stage continues from one year to sometimes even five years.

Reflection is a stage where the practitioner engages in contemplation of ideas, concepts, narratives, elements of art and its form. It also seems to go parallel to the *interpretation* stage where a learner is left to contemplate on their experiences. Like *interpretation,* the reflection stage also seems to extend and practiced over a period of time, based on the learners growth. In the traditional environment, reflection involves the form (visual form) and content (oral narrative and visual narrative). Often, interviews with *badwas* and *lekhindras* reveal their dreams associated with a painting. These dreams urge the creator to make a new *Pithora*, direct them to a narrative and often they visualize themselves in the act of creation. There are also recordings of shared experiences or dreams regarding the creation of a *Pithora*. However, in ritualistic paintings, the form lends itself to further exploration compared to the content. In the contemporary environment, the content is further explored beyond the ritual context. Reflection in contemporary context is experienced in the form of conscious contemplation of ideas, real experiences and even daydreaming. These contemporary artists are exposed to other folk artists, their artworks, exhibitions and workshops. All of these result in both, conscious and organic reflection of the form and narrative of their creations.

Meditation is an extension of the experiences of involvement in a process, that are deeper and more situated. It seems to follow the *repetition* stage. It is experienced as a stage where the practitioner is unaware of their immediate surroundings during the time of practice (of the task at hand; here painting), where the noises and conversations happening around the person slowly become mute. In the traditional environment, meditation is a state of trance reached by the

practitioners of the *Pithora* painting. One needs to remember that it is a multi-sensory act where the oral narratives of the *badwa*, the painting of the *lekhindra* and the drums of the musicians are all in tune and sync with one another. This experience is further enhanced by the incense of the food, the hookah and the mahua. In such an environment, *badwas* and *lekhindras* often claim to encounter an out-of-the-world experience or a state of trance, as documented in the interviews. In the contemporary scenario, it seems that artists experience the state of meditation especially during the act of repetition (as in the dots of the Bhil art). My experience of this stage came through the overlapping practice of repetition, reproduction and reflection. Again, it is difficult to articulate in words but more of an experience where one is so deeply involved with an activity or a process, that they are no longer aware of the other elements surrounding them, but are rather interacting with the self and the medium itself.

Application occurs when the knowledge of the artform is put to practical use in the real context. In the traditional environment, application is witnessed when the teacher and student collaborate to complete the *Pithora* painting. This participation can be in various stages, which is indicative of the level of growth of the learner. The students are given a scope to experience, perform and test their knowledge in the real-life context at various short intervals during their course of learning the artform. In the contemporary context, the young learner shares the artwork with the teacher who sells or exhibits their artwork alongside their student's. Sometimes, during a larger assignment, they work together on a project. In both the traditional and contemporary contexts, the exposure of real-time work and participation is at various stages of learning of the student, and is not confined to the end of the learning process or completion of the curriculum. In this stage the teacher also observers the growth of the learner and based on their assessment, slowly removes the guidance to let the learner practice and perform independently. The stage too continues throughout the learning process and sometimes extended to even after the completion of the learning process, for the sake of practice and collaboration.

Exploration as a pedagogy process that usually takes place after the successful completion of the curriculum. Here, the student explores the form and the content without the guidance and supervision of the teacher. It is also important to note that this stage encourages self-learning and is a continuous process of growth for the learner. Also, this is not the last stage of the pedagogy process as most of the pedagogy processes are overlapping and are repeated based on the personality of the teacher and the learner. In the traditional environment, exploration usually involves the form (visual form) and content (oral narrative and visual narrative) to some

extent. In the contemporary environment, apart from the form, the content is further explored beyond the ritual context. While I have narrated the characteristics of the pedagogic processes in an order, it is for my convenience alone and must be looked at cautiously. Thus, I also refrain from mentioning days/time for each section and believe that most of these stages are practiced parallelly and are often overlapping. Also, the pedagogic approach is unique to the teacher or practitioner just as the learning journey is unique to the student or learner. In reality, the process of knowledge dissemination is organic and unique, and these occur simultaneously with considerable overlaps. There is an inherent flexibility in the process and it is primarily guided by the interaction between the teacher and the learner and the student growth.

The above reflection on the pedagogic approach of the Bhil indigenous community was based on my multiple fieldtrips, relationship and personal experience of learning the art from a community member. It essentially focused on 'the evolving relationship with art' and 'a holistic approach to its practice', that formed the fundamental characteristic feature of Indigenous art pedagogy. Hence, I refrained from viewing the data from any particular lens for the fear of limiting the perspective and missing out on acknowledging of its multiple dimensions of the study.

However, in my literature review in chapter 2 and while discussing the theoretical lens of the study in chapter 3, I did mention the Collins, Brown and Newman's Cognitive Apprenticeship Learning, as multiple researchers associated the indigenous pedagogy process to it. However, I feel that the Indigenous community knowledge can be partial understood with Collins, Brown and Newman's Cognitive Apprenticeship Learning in its *method, sequencing, sociology and content.* It has all the elements of *Modeling, Coaching, Scaffolding, Articulation, Reflection and Exploration*. However, some essential indigenous pedagogical elements of *Motivation, Participation, Imitation, Repetition and Meditation* to name a few, remain to be acknowledged and further explored. It also shares similarities in its *sociology* but again, other important dimensions of cognitive apprenticeship learning that lead to the purpose, the concept of 'art as a way of life', the evolving relationship with art, holistic approach to its practice, the belief system of the practitioners, the social relationship and evaluation need to be conceded. While 'indigenous pedagogy' might have some underlying similarities with apprenticeship learning, to understand the holistic perspective of the same, one needs to address the gap in literature. It therefore points to a need for a separate model of cognitive learning that is organic in nature, interconnected in space and lends itself to adaptation over time, to explore the larger social and cultural dimensions of indigenous knowledge transfer.

I share the derived organic model of Indigenous Art Education, that encourages art practice as a way of life to build lifelong practitioners and learners of art. It is nurtured by indigenous knowledge in the form of narratives and supported by the belief system of the community. It thrives in a practicing-learning environment. The petals of the knowledge (inspired by Basil Bernstein[73]) are the curricular components of the art, the pedagogy and the feedback system, that often overlaps in its approach. Each of these components are further explored through its essential elements such as oral narratives, visual narratives and visual form in curricular components; motivation, demonstration, participation, observation, imitation, practice, reflection, interpretation, reproduction, application, reflection, exploration, meditation in pedagogy and community feedback, practitioner/mentor feedback, peer feedback and self-reflection in the feedback system. Further, it is deeply rooted in the context and is constantly in transition, as a living entity. It is affected by various interventions from the outside world and interacts and responds to it by actively adapting to the scenarios. This adaptability preserves as well as thrives the unique knowledge system of a closed community. The Indigenous Art Education model, depicted as a flower is unique in nature to this specific community of the Bhils (through we find similarities in knowledge dissemination in other indigenous communities as well). My understanding is that even though various indigenous communities have their unique knowledge systems that are still connected with each other in principle, belief and practice. The model is consciously made by hand and not digitally reproduced, to emphasis on the organic nature of it.

[73] Bernstein, Basil B. 1971. *Class, Codes, and Control. Volume 1: Theoretical Studies Toward a Sociology of Education*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

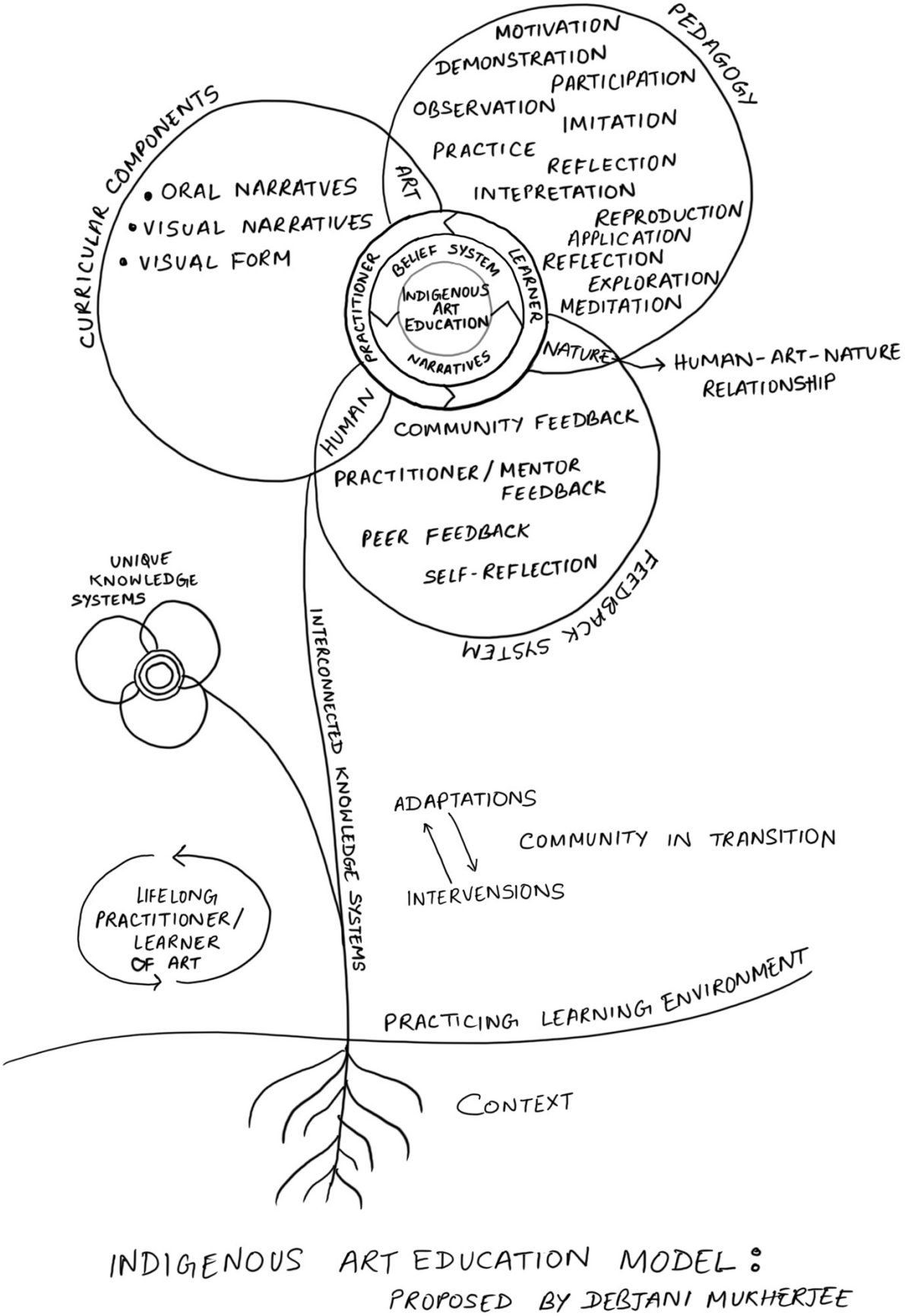


Image 125: The Indigenous Art Education Model

7.4 Evaluation

Evaluation plays a key role in the process of knowledge dissemination. In the case of a community artform, we have seen earlier how learning experiences have been suitably organized and passed on over generations to ensure the preservation of the artform. It is in this regard that the presence of a feedback system becomes important to understand the effectiveness of the learning experiences. For the Bhil community, feedback occurs simultaneously with socialization in the case of indigenous art, and in the case of the contemporary artform, the feedback usually comes from the senior artist, peers and the client. In the course of their learning journey, the individual practitioner uses this organic feedback (from the teacher, community, self, peer or client) as a tool to understand, appreciate, grow and eventually master the artform. The changing context and purpose of the art – be it traditional or contemporary, guides the manner in which the art object is imagined, understood, adapted and eventually created. Self-reflection of the artist also appears to be an important element of the feedback system through which the practitioner understands his own practice and passes it down over generations.

Ethics And Validity Of The Study

The research findings are validated by practitioners of art who on one hand belong to the indigenous communities and on the other, trained in a formal art school to be able to articulate and reflect on their indigenous art practices. Further, artists from within the Bhil community, especially Padma Shri Bhuri Bai, who was my teacher, also contributed to the validation of my findings. It also led to further collaboration with the artists to produce books and animated films on the same where the findings will be documented not alone as an academic writing but also accessible to the non-academia.

7.5 Conclusion

After revisiting the research objectives of the study, the primary question was to study the nature of the relationship between the Bhil Adivasi community and the art practiced by them. The secondary objective that followed was to understand how the indigenous art knowledge and its practices disseminated across generations, over a simultaneously evolving timeframe.

This study attempted to explore the diverse ways in which the community perceives their art, identifies with it and depend on it to mediate their relationship with people, nature, ancestors and their deities. It led to understand the beliefs and rituals practiced by the Bhil community

concerning and involving art and the positioning of art in their lives of the Adivasis. Through the research, I briefly tried to examine the transition of the traditional *Pithora* artform, the external factors causing changes in its practices in any and the ways in which the *Pithora* artform has adapted and evolved over time to give birth to the contemporary Bhil Art. Thus, I also touched upon the associated roles of the museums, government and the market in creating a demand for these new artworks, identifying new patrons, its associated monetary benefits and exposure to the world beyond. The study focused on Bhil Art and its art practices as a whole, in both the traditional (*Pithora* painting) and the contemporary (Bhil Art) forms, without necessarily looking at them as two separate categories. Further, I identified the curricular components of the Bhil artform that the community felt important to be preserved and the central pedagogical insights that one can extract from the study.

Perhaps one of the most important findings of my research is perceiving and practicing art as a holistic entity of life and not just as a subject, disconnected from life itself. This is an understanding that is achieved through years of practice of art with the community and independently, which over a period of time, became a part of my lived reality and experience of non-verbal collaborative practices shared with the community. I am aware that this experience, reflection and information is difficult to elaborate, collate and express in words and hence, it is one of the biggest challenges I faced in the process of documentation of my thesis.

The entire analysis of the thesis could be concluded in a capsule of experiencing art as a way of life, being conscious of ones evolving relationship with art and accepting a holistic approach to its practice. These three findings, interconnected with one another, are strongly situated in one's belief system that is supported by narratives. These narratives are further exalted and preserved by a community. Further, this community helps in offering a natural nurturing ground for growth of the artist and forwards them towards a life-long journey of self-learning and self-discovery, towards gaining happiness or peace. The impact of such a life-long relationship that positively affects the belief system of the whole community explains their unbreakable bond with nature, art, and its intricate connection to evolution. My contribution to the research has been, to organise and structure the non-verbal pedagogic practice of indigenous art and its various components that have been an integral part of community living. As a future scope, this pedagogic approach can be proposed to formal and informal learning environments.

I conclude with an open-ended pronoun 'ones', that is beyond gender, artform, community or geographical identity since, these larger findings are experienced by any practitioner of art,

irrespective of its gender or the artform or the community identity. However, I am forever indebted to the Bhil Adivasi community, since I could consciously be a part of their practice, reflect and experience art as a way of life. In the process, I have also become a part of a community to inspire my journey forward.

Publication

Journal Paper:

Titled 'Animated Documentary as a Social Tool' also presented and published in a peer-reviewed International Journal paper with Society of Animation Studies.
https://journal.animationstudies.org/?s=Debjani
https://debjanibol.myportfolio.com/research

Conferences and Seminars:

- Title: "**Exploring Animated Documentaries as an Ethnographic tool**" - Winter Workshop at Diphu, Assam, India. An Anthropologists conference, meet and workshop. On Jan, 2020.
- Title: "**Animated Documentaries: Stories of Love, War and Peace**" - Presentation in Nov 2019 at Chitrakatha 2019, National Institute of Design, Vijayavada, India.
- Title: '**Chasing the Elephant in the Living Room': Animated documentary as a social tool.** Workshop and Paper Presentation at the 31st Society of Animation Studies Annual Conference – June 2019, Universidade Lusófona De Humanidades E Tecnologias, Lisboa, Portugal.
- Paper Presentation on '**Research as Design and Design as Research'** at INSIGHT 2018, NID Ahmedabad, India.
- Paper Presentation at Society of Animation Studies - June 2016, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore.
- Paper Publication and Virtual Presentation: "**Narrative Illustrations**: A comparative study of illustrations from children from different art education backgrounds", at International Conference of Education, Research and Innovation (ICERI Nov 2015), Seville, Spain.
- Seminar at National Palace Museum - July 2015, Taipei, Taiwan.
- Paper Presentation at Society of Animation Studies - June 2014, Toronto, Canada.
- Showcased and Presented my Graphic Novel at the Kolkata Literary Festival 2012.

Annexure 1

PHOTO JOURNAL OF MAKING BHIL ART

This visual documentation traces the step by step process of making the contemporary Bhil Art, as recorded from participatory observation and multiple workshops with the contemporary Bhil artists of Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh.

As with all art practices, the process of making Bhil art, starts with a conceptualization of an idea. This idea is usually derived from a story situated in the past village life of the artists, a festival, a ritual of their practice, an origin tale or a personal experience of theirs, living in the city. This imagery, usually triggered by a narrative, is then interpreted through personal experiences of the artists. Finally, the painting is an expression of the experience, interpretation and reflection of the artists, that is brought down on a tangible surface through their craftsmanship and skill.

The narratives of the Bhil community, such as origin tales, folk tales, myths, festival and ritual stories are documented as a book, 'And Then Came the Bhils!', in (Annexure II). In this section, we look at the tangible process of Bhil artmaking, from after the conceptualization stage. As mentioned earlier, the photo journal is based on the documentation and interviews with multiple artists, and hence, in each stage, we discuss the various different and similar practices, followed by each artist.

Stages of Preparation

The preparation of the artists before making the Bhil art, involve conceptualizing the scenario or revisiting the story in case of the visual narrative. The steps involved in making the contemporary Bhil art are detailed below.

I. *Conceptualizing the narrative*: An idea is conceived by the artist. It could be a character from an origin story, an element of nature, or an experience that the artist wants to capture on canvas.

II. *Canvas*: Choosing the canvas size is important and it is based on the narrative. For a single or two-element composition, a standard international paper of size A4 or A2 is usually preferred. Visual narratives with an elaborate composition are made on 2 feet size onwards, on larger canvas or walls.

III. *Brushes*: Round bushes usually of number 3, 4, 6, 8, 10, 12 are used to fill in the forms and paint. 0, 1 and 2 numbered brushes are used for making the dots.

IV. *Colour*: Usually an acrylic colour set of 12 to 24 shades are used. However, the number of colours and the shades used are dependent on the personal preferences of the artists.

V. *Outline:* A pencil is used to lightly mark the forms and make the composition. However, some senior artists directly start painting with the brushes and skip this stage. When a pencil is not used, they draw in a way of sculpting the form.

VI. *Border*: Some old Bhil paintings were created with floral borders. However, recently artists do not make borders in their paintings so that it is easier for the patrons to frame it later. This exclusion came after the feedback sessions from the patrons and design workshops by the museums and galleries.

VII. *Colour Fill:* Then the paint is filled inside the form as a solid colour. Sometimes, when drawing a human character, the fill colour is further divided as the skin, top/shirt and skirt/pant are filled with different colours. When drawing nature elements and animals, the same fill colour marks the form.

VIII. *Border to forms*: Some artists mark a border to define the outline of the forms in another colour. This is either done with steady straight lines or even dotted lines.

IX. *Dots:* Once the form blocks are made, they are decorated and embellished with the characteristic Bhil dots. Again, the frequency of dots, the colours, the number of shades and patterns of the dots are dependent on the choice of the artists. Some prefer different tonal variations by using shades of the same colour and others apply a complimentary or contrast colour shade.

X. *Pattern*: The dots are filled inside the form drawing to give it a texture, by creating unique patterns. These patterns formed by two or more dots are unique to each artist so much so that they become the signature style of the artist. Often a whole family follows the same pattern so that they produce more commercial art as a family. Later, a confident and well-trained artist, explores it further to develop her own unique pattern and signature style.

XI. *Lines*: Though the use of lines to fill in a form is comparatively recent (inspired by the Gond artists of M.P.), it is usually used for plants and houses to give it a texture. However, not all artists use ‘lines’ to create a texture.

XII. *Texture*: Both, the dots and lines filled inside the form provide a texture to the painting. These textures are also unique to each artist and the painting. Sometimes unique textures are created by artists with the use of organic elements such as mud, sand, etc.

XIII. *Finishing*: Once the process of painting is finished, it is kept aside to dry. Finally, the finishing touches are made. Usually at this stage, the colour black is used to make the eyes and the hair. White is also sometimes used to make a detailed eye.

XIV. *Preservation*: Once the work is dried, the paintings are stacked one on top of the other, in case of smaller sheets. For canvas, they are preserved as rolls and then wrapped by cloth and stored in plastic bags. Some senior and established artists use butter paper to store paper artwork especially in case of commissioned work.

In the next section, I share the description and process through the stages of contemporary Bhil art making, along with photographs.

Border

Space is considered sacred in the traditional Adivasi communities of India (Paniker, 1972). Hence, we observe that often in the traditional pithora painting, the sacred space, where the Pithora Dev resides, is marked by a floral border or with patterns.

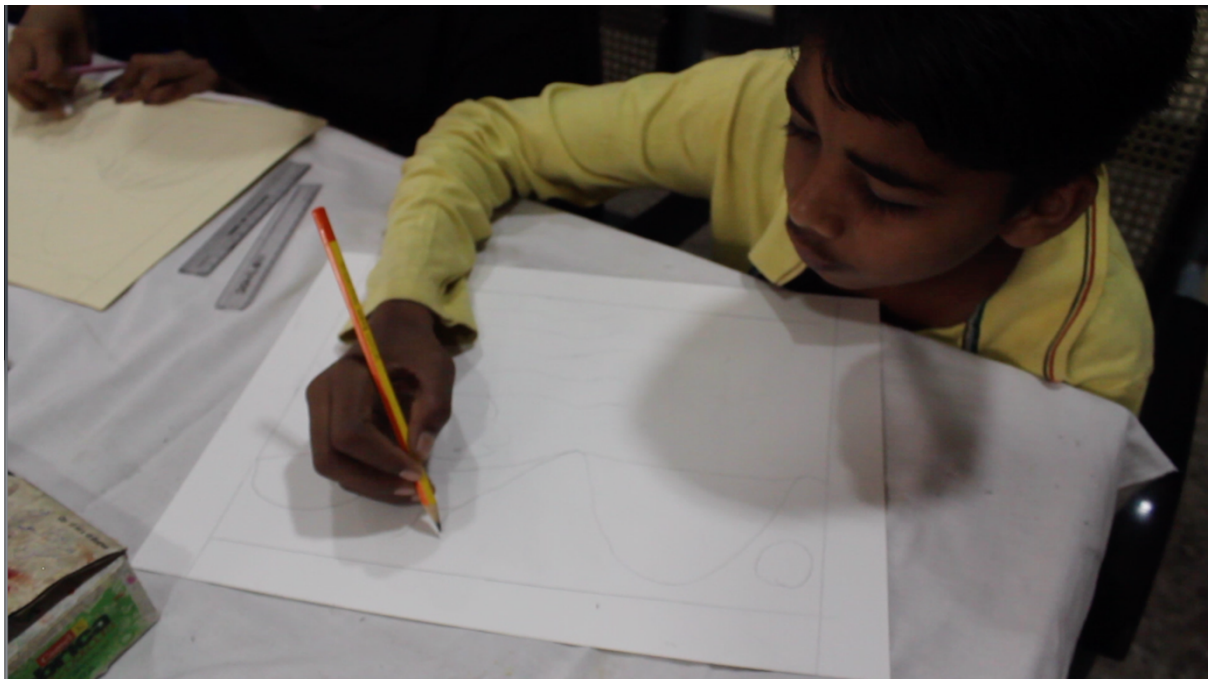
In the contemporary scenario, a border is often lightly marked by an artist to keep the framing in mind and leave ample space for it. Hence, in other words, the drawing space continues to be sacred where now the border ensures a step taken towards its commercial success ensuring customer comfort.



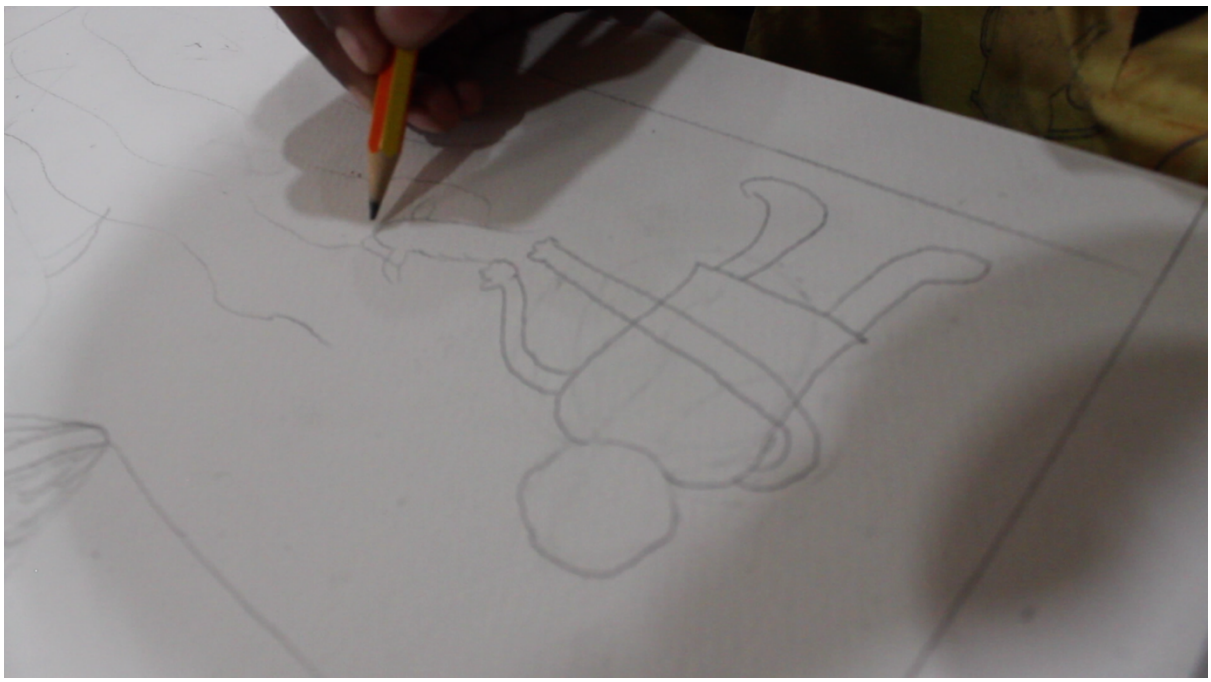
Some beginner artist, marks a border lightly with a pencil and ruler (as shown above), some make a freehand border while others keep a border in mind, during composition of the painting.

Composition

Next, the composition is made with the light strokes of a pencil. Usually, a central figure is made and later, depending on the available space surrounding it, more elements are added. Erasers are avoided by most artists since it removes the paper texture and makes the place flaky. Later, colour spreads unevenly over the region where the eraser is used. In case there is a mistake, the artist overwrites/overdraws on it, avoiding the mistake.



Form and Line



A free-flowing line is used to make the form. Shapes are often fluid. Mostly front facing characters are drawn. Mostly linear perspective is used where elements behind the characters would be placed above it. Overlapping is usually avoided.



Colour

Acrylic colours are used. A variety of colours are available in the market today, and based on their choices a set of colours are used by different artists. Often, multiple, contrasting colours are used by most contemporary Bhil artists.



Colour Mixing

Mixing of colours are avoided by the Bhil artists. Usually, the pure pigment is diluted with a little bit of water, in its own cap, and used for painting. A thick coat of paint is applied.



Applying Colour

A flat brush is used to fill large areas/blocks with colour. Sometimes a large round brush is also used as a flat brush.



Brush Strokes

Brush strokes are usually unidirectional, as in flows in one-direction, during its application. This ensures a smooth application and avoids unwanted brush strokes in the patch.



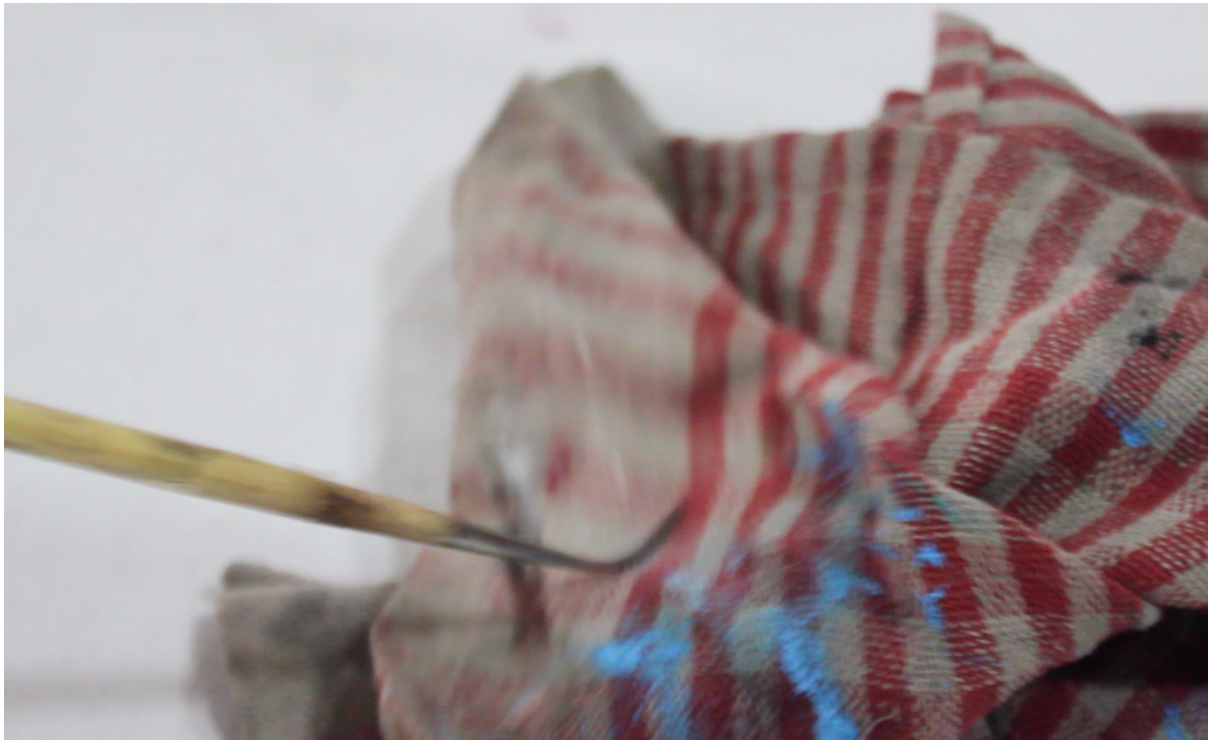
Washing Brushes

The brushes are washes thoroughly before changing colour. The water is changed once it gets dirty. Sometimes, two bowls of water is also used.



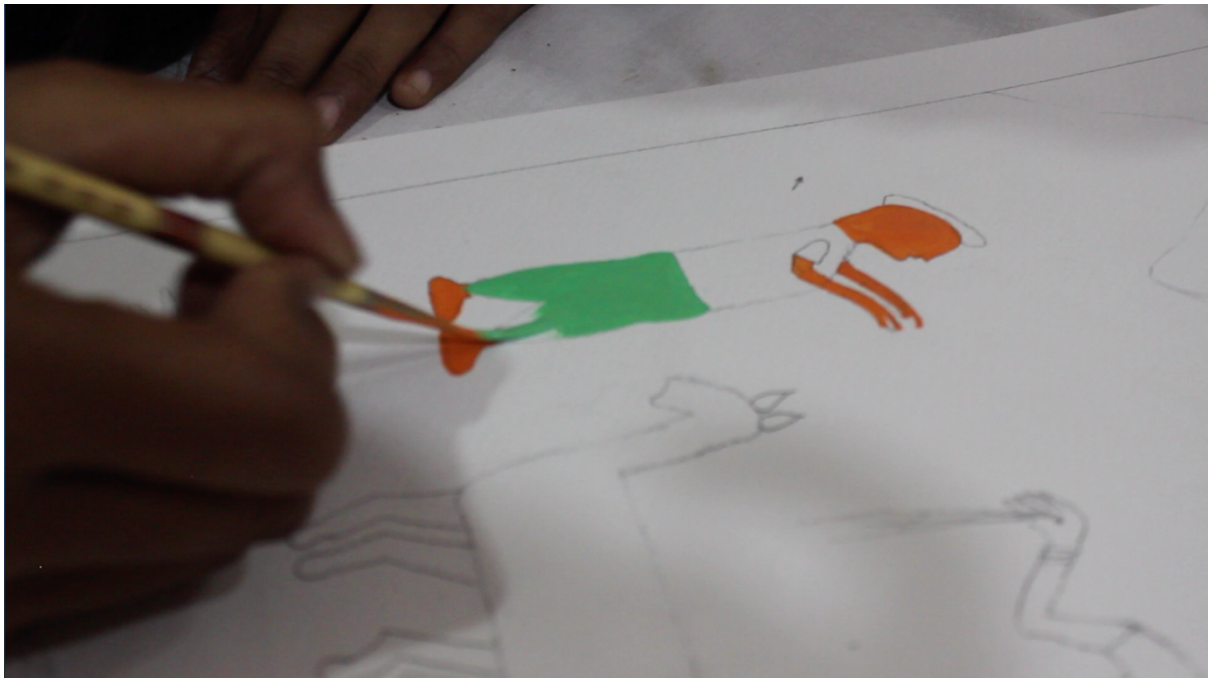
Wiping Brushes

The washed brushes are then wiped well to remove any excess leftover colour.



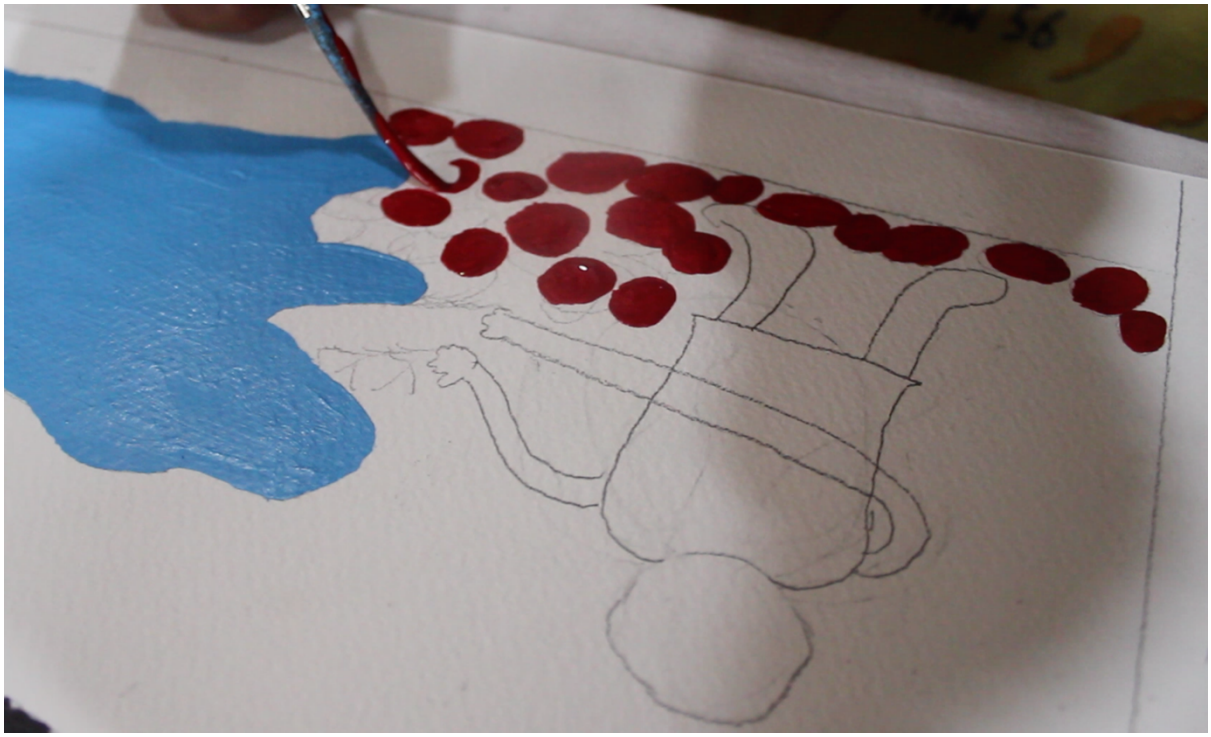
Changing Brushes

The brush is chosen based on the area that needs to be applied paint on. For large patches, a larger number is used and vice-versa. A brush with a lower number is used to fill up thin stripes.



Applying Similar Colour Together

All patches with similar colour are finished in a go. Then, the brushes are washes, dried and the second colour is used. This lets the colour dry, is more convenient and helps save time.



Choosing Colour

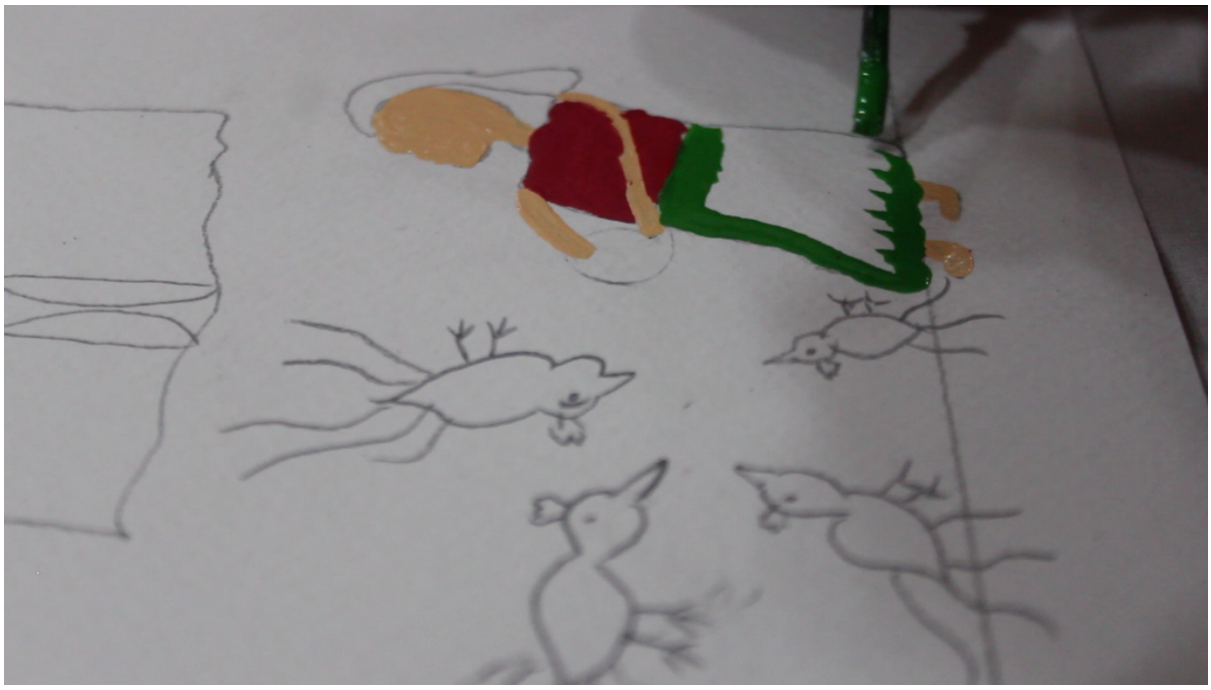
The choice of a colour is based as a reference from nature, but the Bhil artists are not bound by the rule.



We often see the use and application of any colour that holds the contemporary artists fancy at that point in time. In many interviews' artists have shared that they do not have any pre-plans or samples colour testing done for their paintings, in advance. They make their colour choices during the time of painting.

Application of Colour

The colour is applied at the border of the form or shape first, before filling up its insides.





This is to avoid the colour leaking from the sides of the shapes. Also, the excess colour from the brush can be managed to fill in the inside-base, rather than a border-fill. This also gives the scope of having a coloured border to some parts of the painting (like above).

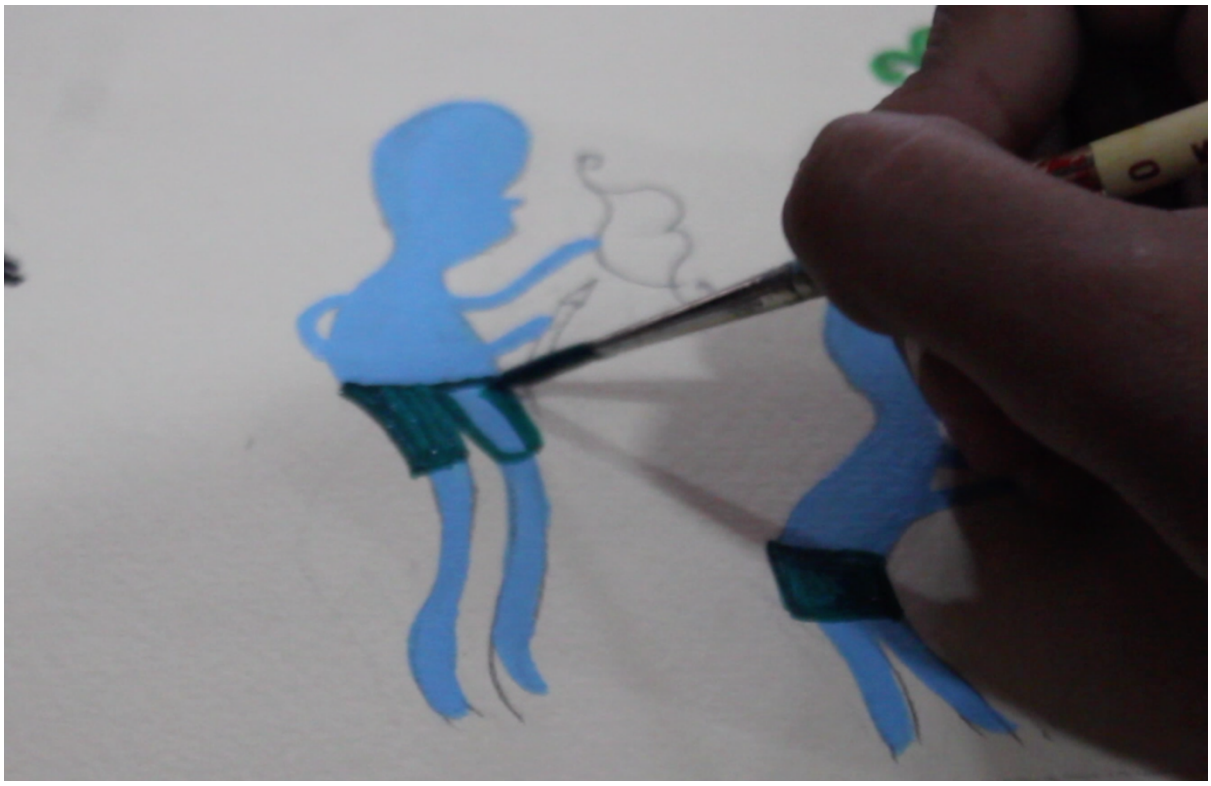
Overlapping Colours (to hide mistakes)

In case of any mistake in application of a colour, another colour is applied on top of it, after the base colour layer has dried up well. A thick coat of paint is applied and the colour is not diluted much.



Overlapping Colours (on purpose)

Sometimes for a good finish and relief effect, double layers of colours are applied. In the picture below, this gives a raised effect as a cloth on the skin.



Adding Colours

Multiple colours are applied in the form of embellishments like adding leaves to plants, clouds and stones. Again, artists don't necessarily stick to a colour reference from nature.

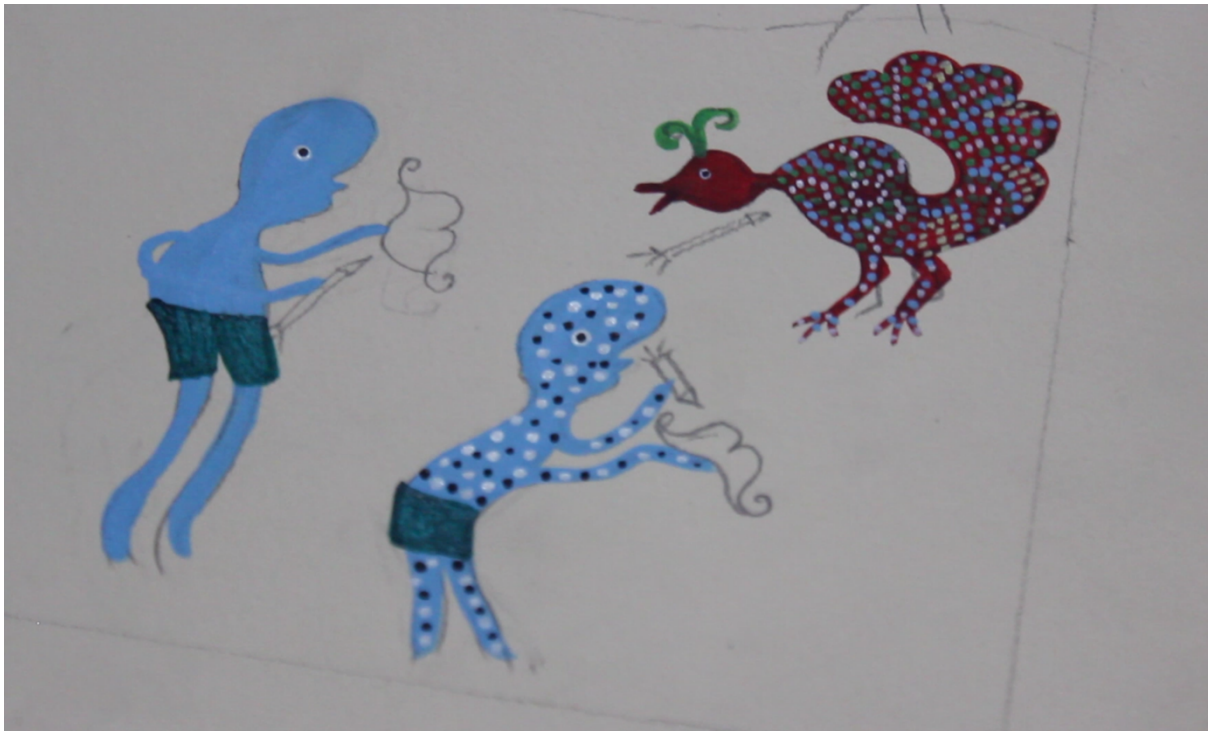


Eyes

Next, eyes are added to characters, humans and animals. They are either white or black. Sometimes, another black dot is applied on the white base. The size of the dots varies from tiny to a pea sized, based on the artist.





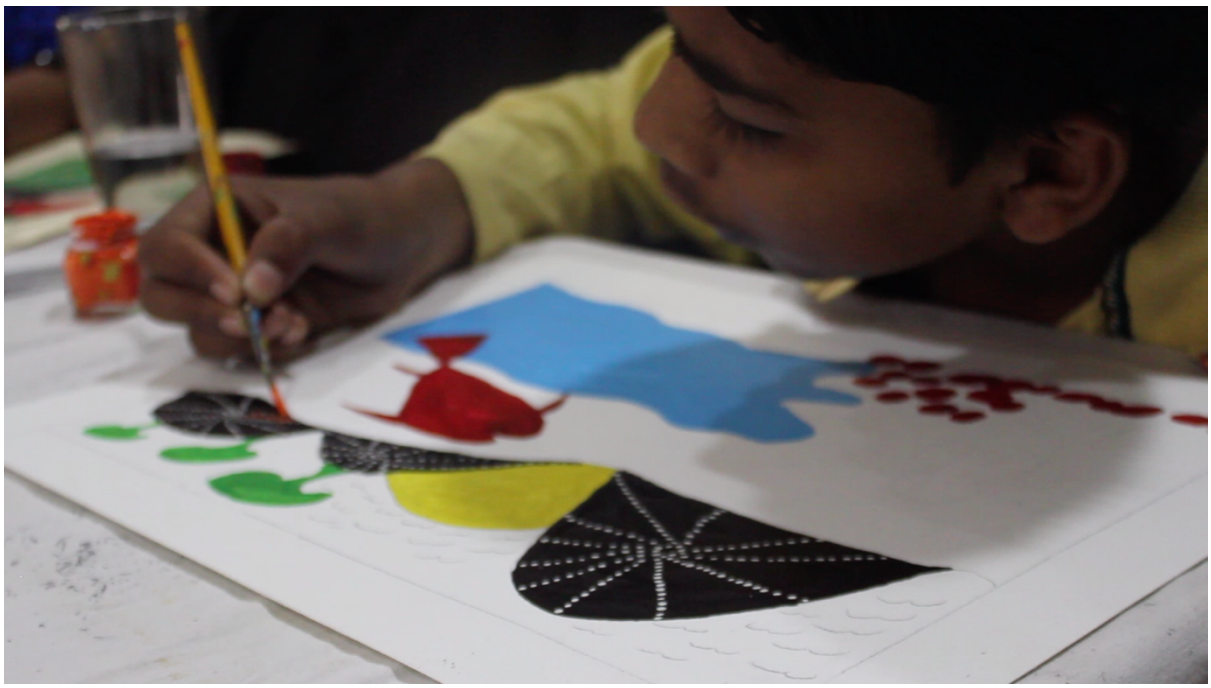


Dots and Patterns

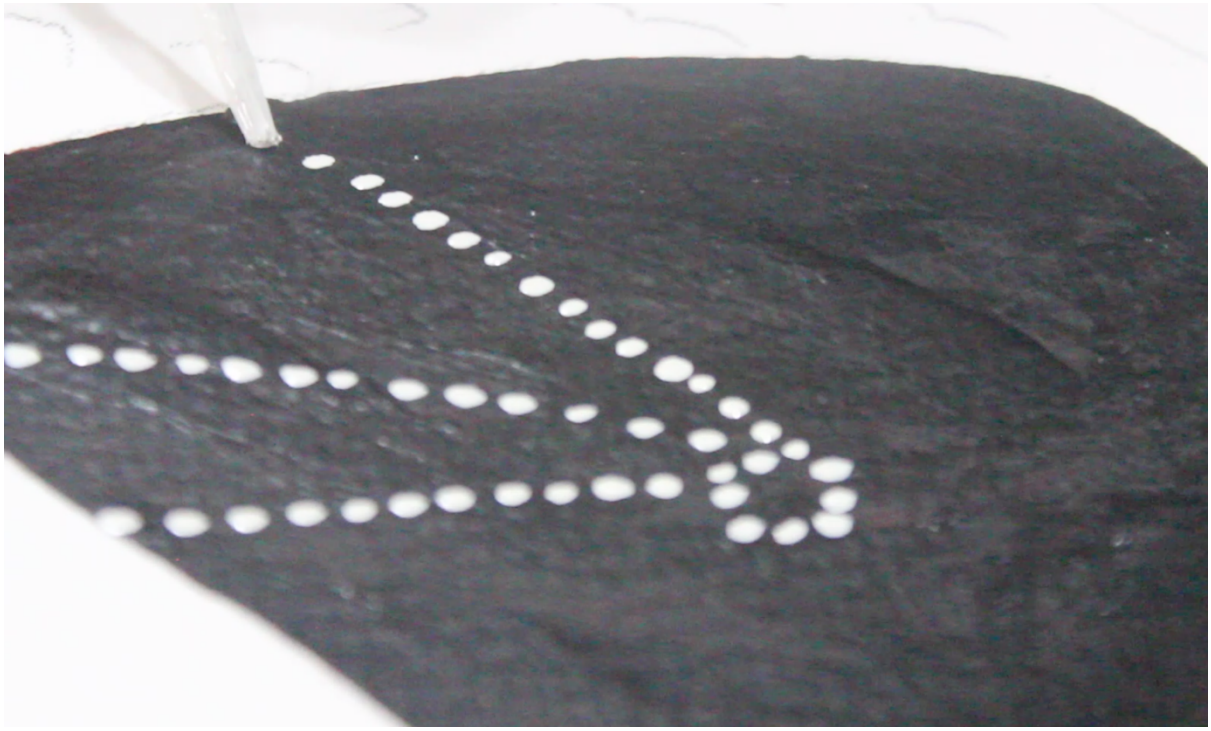
Once, all the elements of the composition are given a base coat of paint, patterns are introduced. They are either in the form of dots (randomly placed),



dots (as linear lines),



or dots (as radial lines),



or stripes.



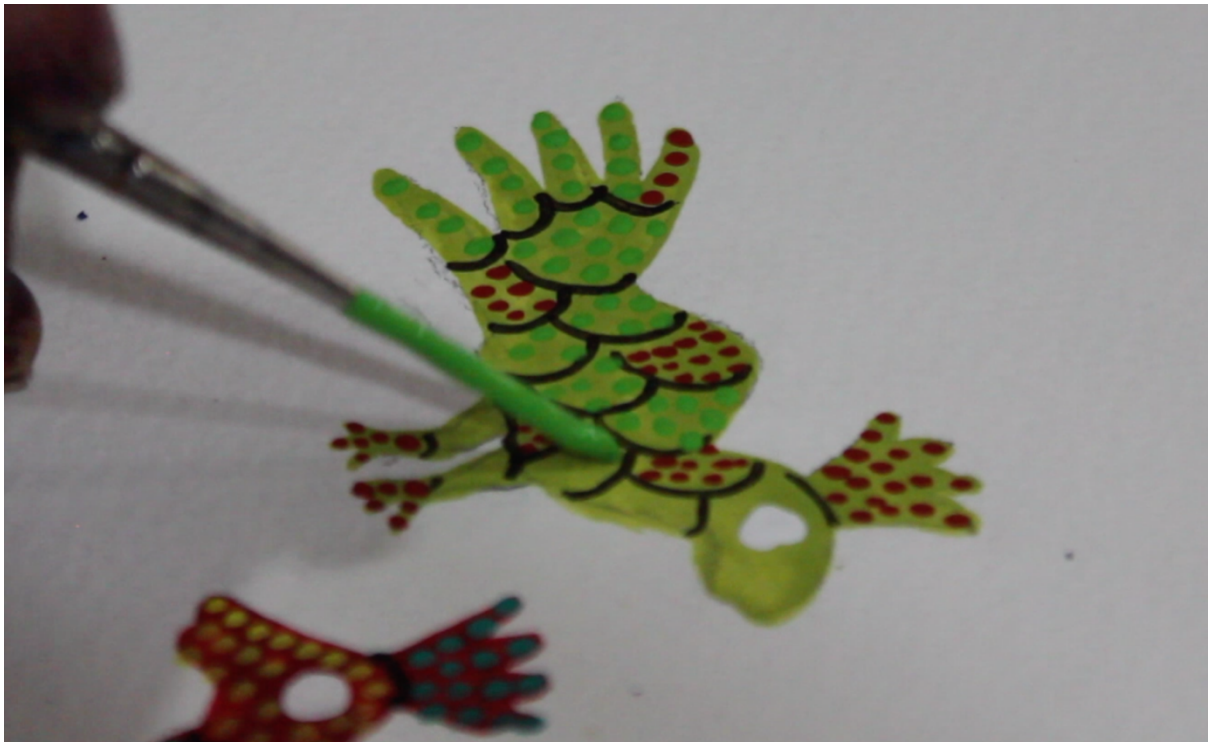
or semi-circular lines (as popular among the Gond artists).



However, the identifying element of the Bhil contemporary art that separates it from all other Adivasi paintings, are the application of multiple dots. These dots are used as patterns to form identifying unique pattern for each artist, which also serves as their signature style.



These dots are repeated to form patterns. Often, they fill up an existing block of pattern (as in the picture below),



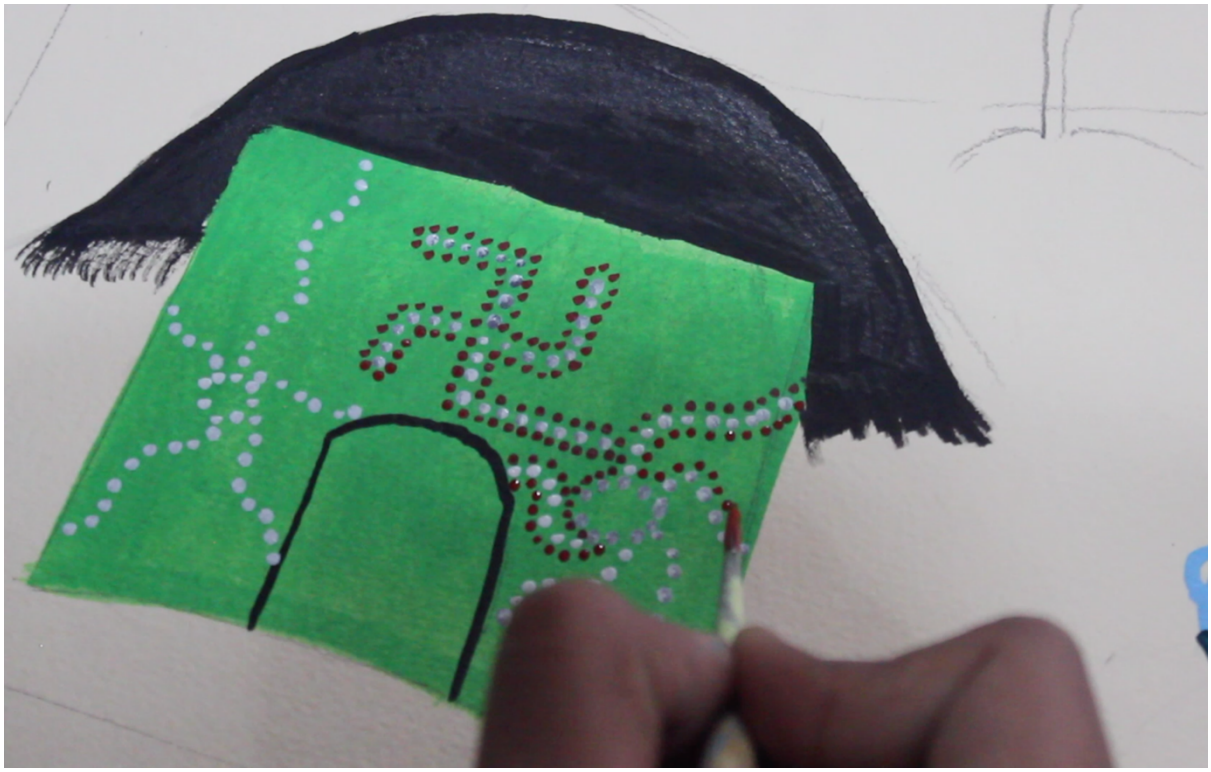
or form patterns independently,



The dots are also filled in a confined space in randomness, which also forms a repeated pattern.



Sometimes complex patterns are formed from the dots, which is repeated at a pattern to fill up the remaining space. They could be a traditional motif, a tattoo from the community or a popular symbol from other culture (as below).



The dots are also arranged at the border of the forms to make a natural pattern. The pattern thus derived is repeated with multiple colours in an intricate fashion to enhance the embellishments.



The dots follow a path,

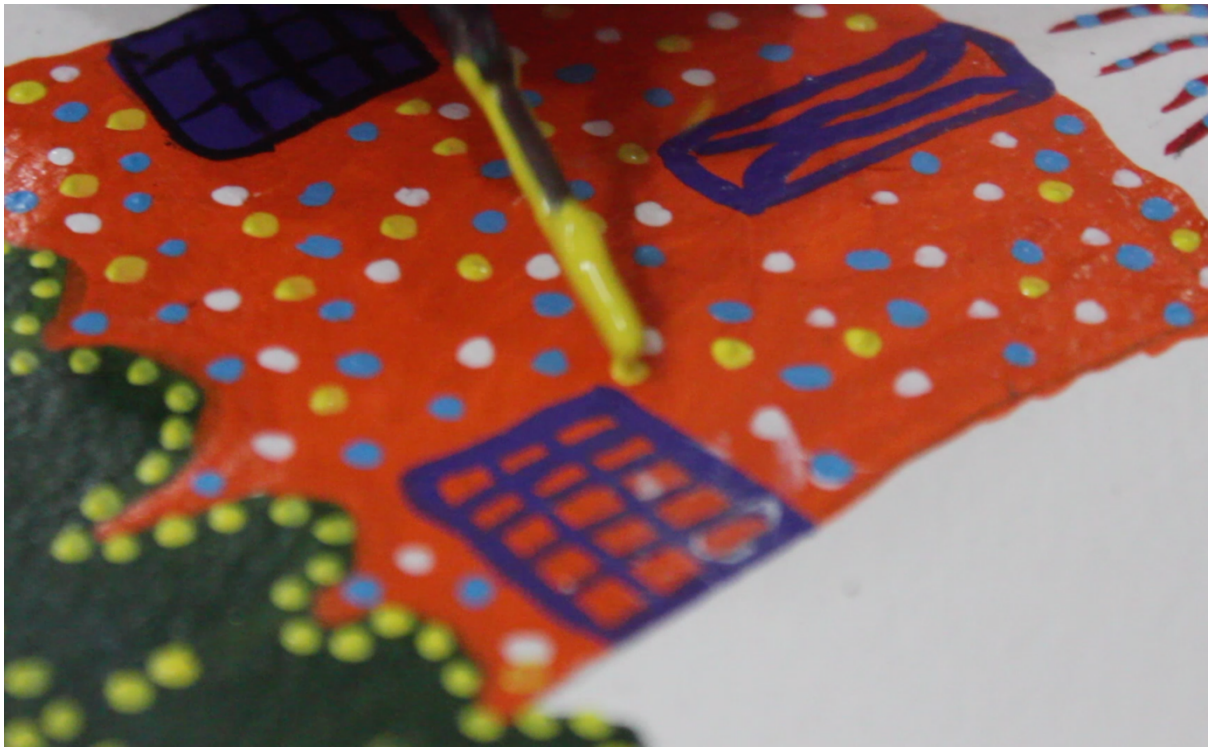


Or are reproduced in randomness to fill up a confined space.



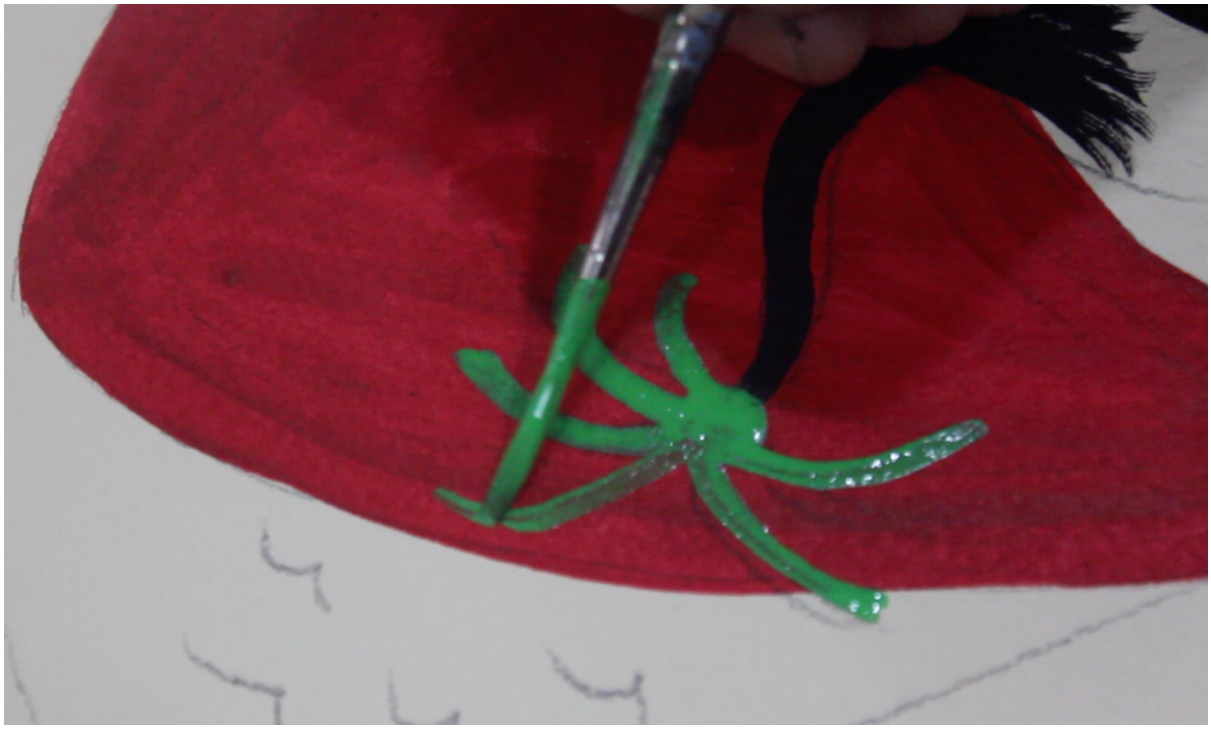
At this stage, often multiple colours are used based on the choice of the artists. The base layer and the pattern colour could be in contrast or complimentary.



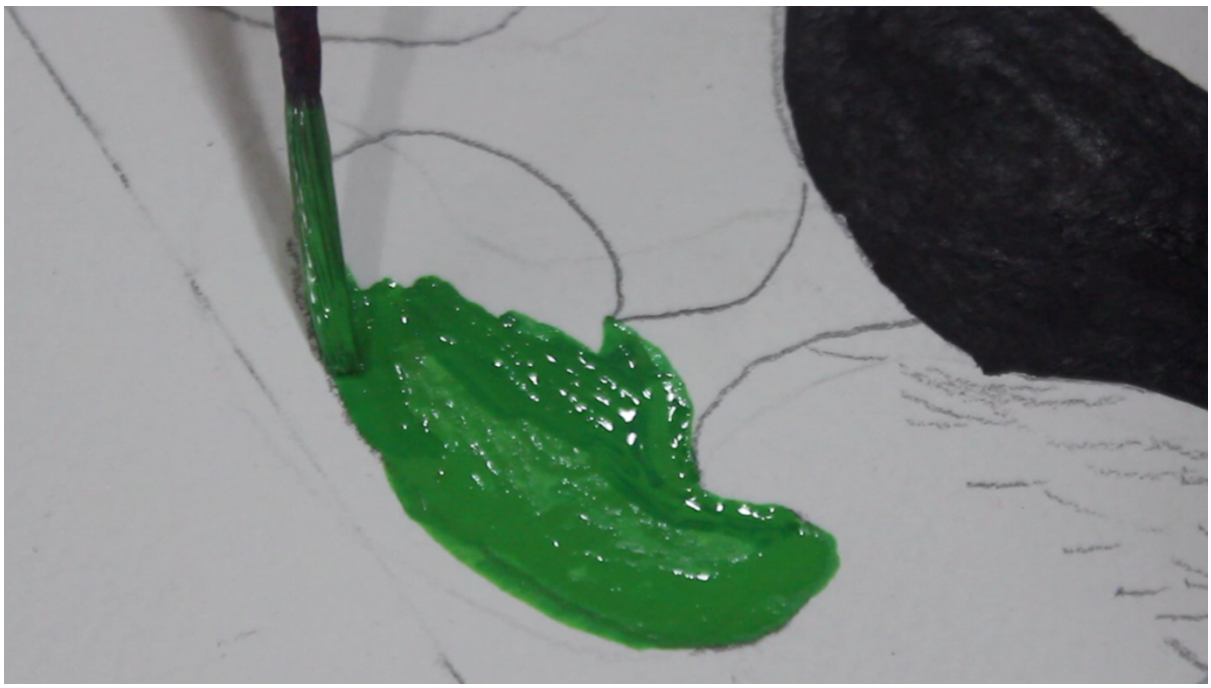


Trees and Plants

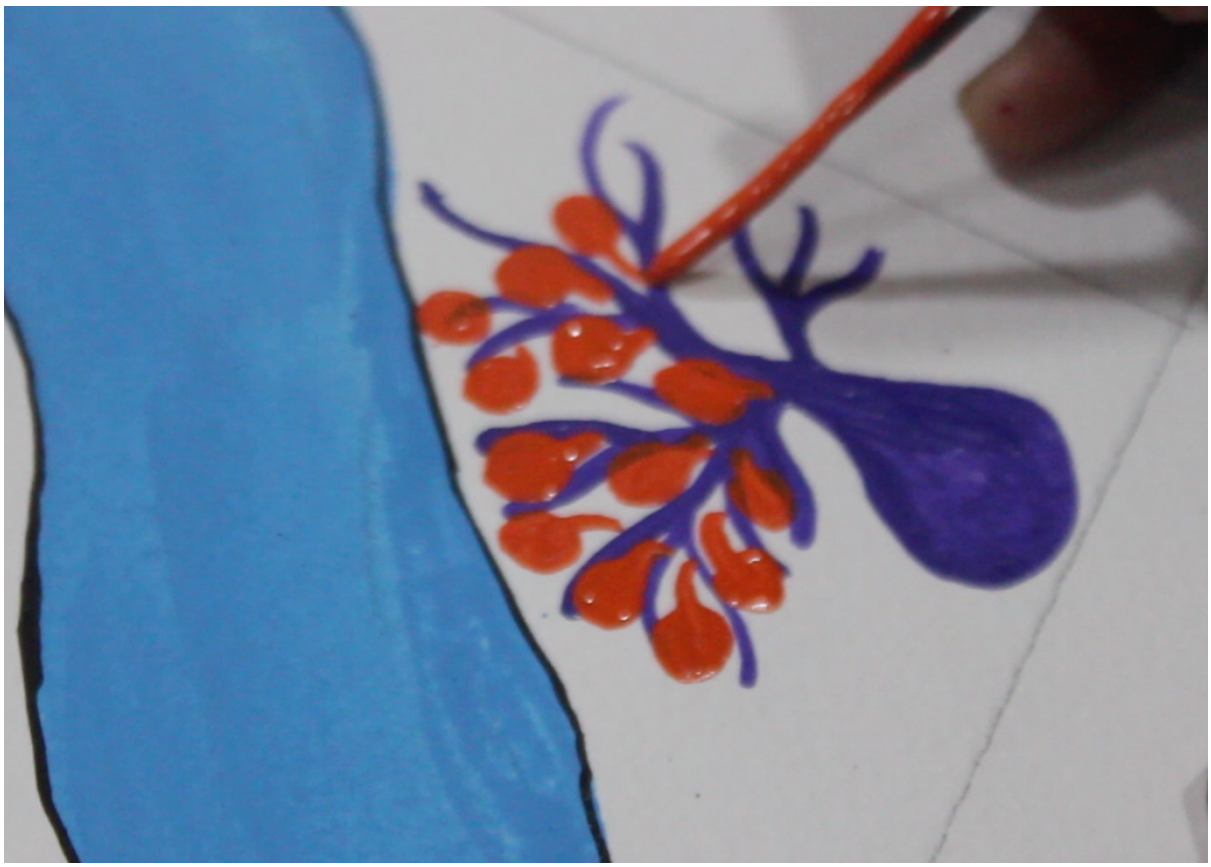
Trees and plants form an important element of Bhil art. They are either conceived and added right in the beginning of the composition or later, at this stage, towards completion, to fill up the remaining spaces around the central element and the imaginary border. Fruits and leaves are added in plenty.



It is interesting to note that the Adivasi artists know the tree that they are painting. Infact, they hardly mention it as a generic term, tree. The Bhil artists are specific to its nature and name. They mention, if it is a Sal tree,



a Mahua,



or *Peepal*.



Later, fruits, leaves and tree animals are drawn based on the composition and the available space. It solely depends on the artist to make the art as intricate as he/she desires, by adding these elements.



Shared Colour

The artists' work as a family or a community. Hence, they often share their materials,



desk and space.



Often artists work together, as a family, or community, on the same painting, quickly adapting to each other's style of applying dots as patterns.



Finishing Touches

Finally, the finishing touches are made as adding more nature elements, adding the pattern of dots,



or even add characters, based on the narrative.



Then, the process is repeated to add patterns of dots on these new elements.

Border

Sometimes the border is filled with paint,



or left empty.



Signing

The artists finish by signing their paintings.



Drying and Packaging

Lastly, the painting is left to dry in open air, before being stacked up together and stored in plastic sheets. The canvas is rolled and stored.



Below is the team of young Bhil artists who helped in the documentation process, along with Ms Sudha Bhandari, Bhil art curator.



Annexure II

And Then, Came the Bhils!

(A collection of tales of origin, myths and ritual stories of the Bhil Adivasi of India)

By

Debjani Mukherjee

With original illustrations from
Padmashri Bhuri Bai

Contents Script

(Based on titles of stories collected)

Long long ago, there was water and water everywhere…

And the sky would slip and fall into the water.

However, the sky looked rather empty, so came the Sun and the Moon.

There was also no place to rest, so came the Earth.

But the Earth shook…and shook often.

The earthquakes had to be stopped.

Now, the waters move instead.

The tide evoked the Lord of Rain and the Queen of Lightning.

Meanwhile, the Sun and the Moon, like most siblings, began fighting with each other…
Till there was Fire.

The river too waged a war against the sea.

So, God had to come to put things in order.

He also created the first Man and Woman.

But they were rather stupid.

And they blamed it all on Fate.

To be challenged by the Tiger…

Lead by the Fox,

Or to fool a Fish.

They could not take care of themselves, so they had to be taught to live happily.

God taught men and women to tell stories, sing and to paint.

But man continued to cheat,

…fight and kill.

This made God very angry…and he covered the earth with water again.
However, few happy men and women were saved.

God thought to make his presence felt so that men and women did not forget him. He introduced pain, fear and fever.

Men married and grew in number.

They continued to tell stories,

Be kind,

And just.

Men and Woman learnt to love their animals.

And once they had lived happily on Earth, they travelled back to God on their horses that they had never rode on Earth.

SCRIPT

And Then, Came the Bhils!
(A collection of tales of origin, myths and ritual stories of the Bhil Adivasi of India)

Long long ago, there was water and water everywhere…

In the beginning of the beginning, the Earth was made of an enormous boundless sheet of Water, enveloped in darkness. Then, came Light in the shape of a man. As it touched the sheet of Water, she split into half. The Water thus divided itself to form seven channels; the sweet sea, the salty sea, black sea, yellow sea, oily sea, chik sea and kid sea, named after the seven children of Water and Light, who choose to stay back on Earth.

And the sky would slip and fall into the water.

Now, the Sky was not fixed well as the roof of the earth. So, God used some nails to fix it right in its place. But he used too many. By the time he finished, it looked rather ugly. So, he added some more nails to make patterns and sometimes, represent things from the Earth. He also made

the nails shine at night. They became stars.

However, the sky looked rather empty, so came the Sun and the Moon.

Now, the sky looked so pretty that God wanted to look at it all the time. He forgot all about his work and life. Days passed into Years. After thousands of years, he realised his mistake. So, He called for Light and asked for help. Light gifted God a Sun to light up his Day, and a Moon to light up his Night. So was born the Day and Night, time and seasons.

There was also no place to rest, so came the Earth.

God was happy to start work again. But he wished for a place to lie down and look up at the beautiful sky. So, he created seven sisters and asked them to descend to the bottom of the sea, collect mud and form moulds so high that it reaches the surface of water. The seven sisters immediately got to work and they worked hard for many days and nights. Finally, they created the beautiful Earth with flat lands, valleys, caves and mountains. God was very pleased with their creation. So, He granted them their wish to stay on Earth. He also promised to shower rains on the seven sisters every year, as a token of happiness, gratitude and love. On the other hand, the seven sisters were given the task of maintaining the record of time on Earth.

But the Earth shook…and shook often.

It so happened that Veelu Bai, daughter of one of the sisters and Dudha Samudra (ocean), in order to entertain herself decided to make some toys. She placed some clay on the potter's wheel to create the ox, bull, cart, plants and insects. But the rain would wash away the mud toys back into the sea. All her creations would slip and dissolve. This made her very sad and as she wept, the Earth shook.

The Earth shook so vehemently that the records that the sisters were keeping, vanished deep into the Earth. So, God to teach Earth a lesson, placed her on the head of a snake. The legend goes that sometimes, when the snake feels the heavy burden on its head, in an attempt to redistribute the weight, shakes it. This came to be known as the earthquake.

The earthquakes had to be stopped.

The earth continued to shake…and his records kept vanishing. So, God visited Earth and found poor little Veelu crying. He told her that in order to make the toys insoluble and for them to

have life, it had to be born from a Chila (an eagle). God also asked her to create Raga fish, fishes as heavy as Earth itself, and release them into the sea. Veelu began to spin her potter's wheel and created all the animals, plants, insects and fishes that we see even today.
The Raga fishes in the bottom of the sea were so heavy that they did not allow the Earth to shake so often.

Now, the waters moved instead.

Now, nobody noticed the Witch on the banyan tree on the moon, that looked down at Earth and rejoiced every time it shook. With the Earth heavier, it stopped shaking so often. So, the Witch made the waters move every day and night, to keep her entertained. This we know as the ebb and tide.

The tide evoked the Lord of Rain and the Queen of Lightning.

The rainfall sent as a token of happiness, was not enough for the seven sisters and all the animals and plants to survive on Earth. That year, the sisters had planted maize seeds and were expecting a good harvest only if they had enough rainfall. One day, it so happened that one of the sisters were sitting in the field, staring at the passing clouds. She heard some noise and as she looked back, there stood a handsome man. He said, if I get you rains, will you marry me? She readily agreed for he looked like a Prince. However, he had a condition that she should never be afraid of his looks, that kept changing with every season. The sister did not think mush of it for she was already in love with his looks.
That evening, as they were getting married, the sky was covered with rain clouds.
The next morning as the new bride woke up, she found a dark looking man covered with mud, lying next to her. Earthworms, scorpions and snakes moved all over his body. She screamed in fear and streaked across the sky as a flash of lightning. The Prince on the other hand, sprang up from his bed and chased her with a knife, for she had broken the promise. He followed her as thunder.
It is believed that to this day, the Queen of Lighting is chased by the Lord of Rain.

Meanwhile, the Sun and the Moon, like most siblings, began fighting with each other…

Till there was Fire.

One day, the Moon invited the Sun for lunch. The lunch was delicious and when the Sun asked, the Moon joked that she had cooked her children, the stars, to feed him. But the Sun took it

literally and went back home to cook his children. Now, his eldest son, Fire, hid inside the Sal tree while his daughter, the Lightning, darted hither and thither to escape from the Sun. So, the Sun cooked his other children and eat them. In the evening, when the sky was full of stars, he noticed the Moon smiling down at him. He realised his foolishness and cursed the Moon that from now on she too will be eaten up. This led to the waxing and waning of the Moon, every fortnight.

To this day, Fire remains hidden in the Sal wood, and when the Badwa, village priest, wants to find fire, he simply rubs two pieces of Sal wood to chase it out.

The river too waged a war against the sea.

The Mahi river born from the beautiful ranges of Satpura hills in the Western Ghats of Madhya Pradesh, is a strong and agile river. Believed to be the daughter of the region, she is as dark as the night sky and as strong as the hills. As nature would have it, Mahi fell in love with the sea. But her father, Satpura hills discouraged her from the marriage saying that he already had many fair wives and will not love her enough. Mahi still longed for the sea. Eager to meet her love, one day she left home. The way was strewn with thorns, stones and a wild jungle. But she did not give up. She crossed the rocky and dry lands of eastern Gujrat to finally reach her destination. Unaware of the world, as she stood there at the banks of the sea, she was covered with dust and mud. She was exhausted but confident that her love would embrace her. But the sea turned his face.

The rejection hurt her and made her equally angry. She soon prepared an army of stones and was prepared to wage a war against the sea. The sea was impressed by her strength and determination. As soon as he asked for her forgiveness, she let go of the army of stones, ran to meet the sea. The army of stones are still seen settled at the bed of the Mahi river, just before it meets the sea. The children born of this unison were dark and fearless, just like their mother.

So, God had to come to put things in order.

The war caused a lot of destruction around. On the other hand, all the living beings had multiplied in large numbers and they were crowding the Earth. So, God asked the Earth to clean up herself. Immediately, she set to work.

The leaves falling from the trees were swept away by the wind, to be later washed away by the rain. In some places, the forest cleaned itself by forest fires. The fallen fruits and seeds were eaten by the insects and small animals. The smaller animals were eaten by the larger ones. The smaller fish became food for the larger fish. Even the dead animals were eaten by some other

animals to clear the remains and remove the fowl smell. The oceans kept itself clean by throwing out all that belonged to the land. Soon, the Earth became self-sustainable with the establishment of the food-chain and interdependence on one another. The sunlight, wind, rain, sea and animals everyone came together to keep the Earth beautiful and thus, became helpers to God.

He also created the first Man and Woman.

Earth was in full bloom. The forests were full of plants and animals, and the sea full of fishes. The colourful birds too adorned the sky. One day, God decided to visit the Earth to appreciate all he had created. He took the form of Shiva. As he was roaming in the forests, he had a severe pain in his stomach. It was getting dark. So, Parvati took the form of a dark woman to go into the forest and look for some medicinal herbs that could cure Lord Shiva. As she came to Shiva's rescue, he fell in love with the dark-skinned, lady of the forest and decided to marry her immediately. The children born from that unison were dark-skinned and brave. They came to be known the Bhils and were the first man and woman to walk the Earth.

But they were also rather stupid.

It had been long since Shiva and Parvati had visited their children. So, they left to check on them and see how they were doing on Earth. The Bhils lived in the forest and eat its fruits and plants. However, they were dependent on what was available and often had to go to bed hungry. So, Shiva gifted his precious bull Nandi to them who would in turn teach them to cultivate and grow their own food. The children were very happy with the gift and thanked their parents. However, when they saw that they had to work hard to first cut the forest for the land, till it, plant seeds and then wait for the crops to grow, they started getting impatient. They thought, why not kill the bull and eat it instead? And, so they did.

As soon as Shiva saw that his children had killed his beloved and most powerful bull, Nandi for meat, he was furious. He came down to Earth and cursed the Bhils that they would no longer be able to cultivate and till the land for food. Then, he resurrected Nandi and took him back with him. It is believed that till date the Bhils cannot produce their own food by cultivating their barren lands. The Bhils continued to dwell in the forests and came to be known as the children of the forest.

And they blamed it all on Fate.

From the time the seven sisters were asked to keep record of everything on Earth, two of them

also took up the task of writing the fate of all living things. One wrote of their sorrows, happiness, dreams, challenges and death while the other wrote about success, wealth, health and love. Slowly, these two sisters grew to be very powerful. Every living creature on Earth feared them and surrendered their lives to their writings. Thus, with every passing day, they grew more fearful, stronger and unchallenged.

To be challenged by the Tiger…

It so happened that some day a tiger stepped on the tail of a mouse and didn't even bother to apologise to the tiny creature. And quite rightly the mouse, took it to her heart. She was sure to challenge the tiger. So, she started keeping a close watch on the tiger.

One day, as the tiger was asleep, being sure that she would not be noticed, crept close to the tiger and slowly but steadily, nibbled off its ears. It is said that till date the tiger jerks its head and is unable to listen to all the warnings of the jungle. From that day on, the tiger always bows his head to the mouse. He also crawls through the jungle, quite unlike a huge beast, to hunt its preys, so that he never again steps on the mouse.

Lead by the Fox,

Once a Bhil father and son were attacked by a tiger, while they were picking berries from the jungle. During the fight, the father was killed by the tiger while the son hid inside a nearby tree and watched it helplessly. Years passed and he grew up be a skilled bow and arrow shooter. One day, he came back to the jungle to revenge his father's death. He positioned himself hear a waterbody where all animals came to drink water. He made sure that no animal could drink a drop, till he found the tiger. All the animals in the forest were thirsty and distressed. Meanwhile, the tiger hid himself in his cave.

Seeing all, the fox came to meet the Bhil. After he heard the entire story, he agreed to lead the tiger out of its cave but in return he wanted a gift. So, the Bhil agreed to provide him with berries and fruits every day. The fox agreed and set out to work.

He went to the tiger and said, "Everyone knows that you are scared of the mouse. Now, you are scared of a blind man too?" This angered the tiger so much that he forgot all about seeing the Bhil son with bows and arrows in hand. His ego was hurt and he walked out of his cave, behind the fox. As soon as he stepped out, the swift arrow of the Bhil pierced its heart and killed it.

From that day on, the Bhils remain grateful to the fox and offer food to him in the forest. They also believe that it is a sin to kill a fox.

Or to fool a Fish.

Forbidden to cultivate, the Bhils would find food from the forest or try to fish from the river. They learnt the skill of archery. However, they found fishing very challenging. Maybe because of their lack of patience from the time they could not wait for Nandi to teach them to cultivate. So, they devised various tricks to catch the fish but failed every time.

It so happened that one day a Bhil invited a fish to their daughter's marriage. The usually smart fish, this time fell for the trap, and accepted the invitation. As it entered the marriage hall, the bride caught hold of it, and the groom chopped off its head. The body of the fish was served to the guests and the bride was served the head of the fish.

Now, the bride who had the brain of the fish, gave birth to children who grew to be very smart and intelligent. Thus, the act of eating fish during wedding, continues to be a part of the belief and ritual of the Bhils.

They could not take care of themselves, so they had to be taught to live happily.

A long time ago, during the rule of Dharmi Raja, the land was hit with drought. The forest died, the cattle perished and the sea went dry. The hungry people forgot to sing, dance or laugh and so did their prince, Pithora.

On the advice of Dharmi Raja, Pithora set to meet Goddess Himali, on a white horse. Goddess Himali blessed prince Pithora with rainfall, songs, dance and laughter. She also said, that any house where he resides, will be blessed with the same.

Prince Pithora came back to his village and visited every house to bring their happiness back. The villagers in turn, decorated their houses with the Pithora painting, depicting his journey. They also cooked a sumptuous meal for him and offered him the local liquor mahua.

God taught men and women to tell stories, sing and to paint.

Rain, art and laughter all flourished during the times of Prince Pithora. But as years passed, people got busy with procuring the tangible pleasures of life while, what they had, were left behind. They hardly noticed when rainfall reduced year and year, and when music faded away from their lives. As years passed, the people got used to low rainfall and they started finding other alternative roles of employment. People left the villages.

So, again a time came when there was drought, death, pain and unhappiness in the village. The elders of the village thought of consulting their *badwa* (shaman, village priest). The *badwa* agreed to help if the entire village got together.

That evening, the *badwa* lit a fire, broke an earthen pot, and started painting the story of the Prince Pithora and how he got back rain and laughter in the village, during his time. With each stroke, he sang to give life to what he painted. He used natural colours to paint on mud. The villages watched him perform in trance.

The villages got local made mahua, hookah, sacrificed a goat for meat and prepared food for the entire community. They then came together to sing and dance. The next morning, the sun rose in a sky full of rain clouds.

It is believed that since that day, the Bhils got together every year to celebrate the Pithora festival every year, right before the rainy season. They paint their walls with the stories of Prince Pithora, prepare a grand feast and sing and dance all night long. On the other hand, Prince Pithora and their ancestors take care that neither rain nor art or laughter leaves the Bhils. Since that day, the Pithora festival is celebrated every year, right before the rainy season.

But man continued to cheat,

It so happened that a man came to the Bhil King Motia, to ask for land on which he could start a business. He begged for as much land that could be covered by the hide of a camel. The unsuspecting king readily agreed to help and granted his wishes. As soon as he did so, the man cut the camel hide into thin strips of leather and tied them together to make a long rope. Then, he used the rope to circumscribe the whole of Motia's kingdom and thus took away all of the Bhil land.

…fight and kill.

King Motia was landless, but he still had a very special gift. He could not be killed till his *pughree (*headdress) was on. It so happened that a neighbouring king invited King Motia to his palace in order to help him procure his land back. But instead, he fed him mahua and a sleeping potion, to finally remove the pughree and cut off his head. Then, scared that he might be caught, the king ordered the head of Motia to be buried in his kingdom and the body thrown across the Satpura hill range.

To this day, the place where Motia's head was buried is called the Mathwar, or the place of the head, and the place where the body fell, called the Dhargaon, or the place of the body.

This made God very angry…and he covered the Earth with Water again. However, few happy men and women were saved.

War and hatred among men spread like wildfire and soon it covered all of the Earth. God was hurt and so he decided to end it all. However, there was a washer man and woman who were loving and kind. It hurt him to kill them too.

One day, while the washerman was working, a fish came as a messenger of God and warned him of the approaching deluge. He immediately got his wife and cock on a wooden plank, and set off to sail.

After sailing for many days, the desperate crowing of the hungry cock finally attracted God's attention. He rescued them and gifted the couple a horse, to travel the land.

However, already hungry and tired, they failed to master or ride the horse. On top of that, they had one more mouth to feed. So, they left the horse in a jungle and went away.

There is a saying that till date, the Bhils are unable to master or ride a horse.

God thought to make his presence felt so that men and women did not forget him. He introduced pain, fear and fever.

One day God realised that only when men and women were in trouble or need that they thought of God. In other happier times, he was forgotten. Upset, he called over Boro (Fever).

Now, Boro was a donkey who loved to wallow in a heap of dust all day long. When he heard that he was called by God, he got up in haste and shook his body. The dust settled on Earth and darkened it. When he was asked to go to Earth and infect the men and women with fever, he happily set off, but landed over a heap on hemp. The hemp gave the donkey a strange itch and he was terrified. So, he turned and ran away as fast as he could, with his tail swaying in the air. As the puffs from his tail touched the people, they fell down with fever, one by one.

Unable to cure the new illness, people started praying to God.

God, on the other hand, was happy to be remembered by his creation. He further gave rules of sacrifice and worship. Thus, cough, cold, fever, pain and sufferings have come to stay on Earth.

Men married and grew in number.

It so happened that once a Bhil man fell in love with a maiden from the nearby village. They decided to elope because the bride's family was too poor to arrange for a formal wedding. They lived in the forest, made their own living by selling beetle leaves, had children and grew old.

Years later, when they returned to their villages, people spoke highly of their love.

Even today, around Holi festival a *Bhagoriya* (runaway) Fair is held in the Bhil villages, which is famous for its enthusiastic participation of young boys and girls. In this fair, the young Bhils gift beetle leaves to one another if they are in love, and elope in consent. Later, if they find themselves compatible, they return to their homes to get married else, the relationship stands annulled.

They continued to tell stories,

Once, a Bhil dacoit named Ratnakar was asked by an old man if his sins would be shared by his clan for whom he robs. He had always thought so because they always shared everything amongst themselves. But he was shocked to know that no one agreed to stand by him in his afterlife. Shattered, he sat for meditation chanting 'ma ra' (kill) for that is all he could do passionately. Years passed and an anthill grew on top of him. Pleased by his dedication, God named him Valmiki (one who is born from *valmika*, anthill).
Thus, the Bhil dacoit Ratnakara became Valmiki, who later came to write the epic, Ramayana.

Be kind,

A Bhil woman named Sabari was a great devotee of King Ram. She would pray for him to visit her someday. One day, she heard that Ram was indeed passing by her village. She was overjoyed. But she was poor and did not have much at home to feed him. So, she collected some berries from the forest.
That evening when King Ram visited her, she served him the berries that she had picked up from the forest. But afraid, that some of them might be poisonous, she bit into each one of them before giving it to him.
The villagers were shocked that she had served eaten fruits to the King but Ram readily had each one of them and praised her for her intensions.

And just.

It so happened that a Bhil boy named Eklavya, was keen to learn archery from the renounced teacher Drona. But when he approached him to be his disciple, he was rejected on the grounds of his low caste. Dejected, hurt but still determined, he made a sculpture of Drona in the forest,

and practiced archery in front of it. Years later he came to be known as the best archer of the land.

When Drona heard about Eklavya, he could not believe that someone could be better than him in archery. So, he went to meet him in the forest. Drona was surprised to see a sculpture of himself in the forest.

Once he came to know the entire story from Eklavya, he cunningly asked for a *gurudakshina* (a gift for the teacher) from Eklavya. He readily agreed.

So, Drona asked for Eklavya's right thumb so that he could never shoot a bow again.

Without thinking twice, Eklavya chopped off his thumb and handed it over to his idol.

Men and Woman learnt to love their animals.

Dharmi Raja, the son of Baba Dev and Kalka Rani, was to be married to Dholka Rani. It so happened that after their wedding, Dholka Rani refused any other customary gift from her parents. But, instead choose to take a cow, whom she was very fond of.

Dharmi Raja did not disapprove. However, on their way to his palace, when he observed that the cow was too weak to follow, he was furious. He immediately asked Dholka Rani to leave it in the forest.

Saddened at the order, she went to the jungle and was weeping her out, when a snake asked her why she was sad. On knowing the reason, the snake advised her to pour a few drops of her blood on a stone. As she did, the stone turned and, in its place, appeared a deep trench. She then left the cow inside it and went on with her journey to her husband's palace.

A fortnight later, Dharmi Raja dreamt of the same snake who advised him to visit the forest and pour a few drops of his blood on the same stone. Curious, he did as he was told. And there, the stone flipped again, and out came an endless stream of cattle. The snake appeared again and asked him to run towards his kingdom. He also told him that the endless stream of cattle would follow him untill he doesn't look back at them.

Dharmi Raja started running towards his kingdom but soon got tired and fell. The cattle were too fast for him and in the process, ran over him and hurt him badly. He looked back in agony and as soon as he turned, the cattle vanished with just one bull left in the ditch.

It is since believed that the Bhils believe cows are more precious than bulls. Also, that the bull is a symbol of the male progeny. Even today, on the sixteenth day following Diwali, Gai Gouri or Gohari is celebrated where Bhil men swear to undergo the penance similar to Dharmi Raja, if they give birth a male child. During this festival, men prostate themselves in front of a running cattle of cows.

And once they had lived happily on Earth, they travelled back to God on their horses that they had never rode on Earth.

The Bhils, being children of God, were blessed by Shiva and Parvati, with a horse that would take them to their heavenly journey. Thus, the Bhils have a practice of erecting a Gathla or a memorial pillar for the dead. It is usually made of stone or wood with relief work of mud and paintings on it. On it are carved or painted figures of the sun, the moon, horse rider, the dead person and some of the favourite things of the dead. But a horse is surely drawn on it. A horse that they could never master to ride in their life on Earth, but which takes them back to God in their afterlife.

End Page

How was the Earth formed? How did they fix the Sky as the roof of the world? Where did animals come from? Where did humans come from and where do they go? Who taught the humans to sing, dance, paint and live happily? The answers to these and many more existential questions chased man and woman, since time immemorable. Stories helped them make sense of the world around. This book is a collection of origin tales, myths, ritual stories and festivals of the Bhil Adivasi community of India, collected and curated from the rich oral traditions of the land. Generations of listeners have delighted themselves and found console in stories of the natural, moral and spiritual world of the Adivasis.

Here stories can lead, music can cure, and art can heal.

Annexure III

List of Respondents

BHIL ARTISTS

BHIL ARTIST	AGE – GENDER	EXPERIENCE, Edu –Literacy level	CONTACT, HOME ADDRESS	ASSOCIATED WITH	STUDENTS – Age, Gender, Duration of learning term	NOTES
1. SHER SINGH	30 - M	Sher Singh learnt about contemporary Bhil painting from his mother, Bhuri Bai of Zher. Sher Singh works on a daily wage basis.	Suresh Nagar, Bhadbada Road	IGRMS		He has recently started accompanying his mother to painting workshops. He likes the colour red and enjoys painting pithora horses and gatlas.
2. BHURI BAI BHABOR (MOTHER OF SHER SINGH) OF ZHER	65 - F	As a child, she would go to the haat or local fair, an integral part of Bhill life, where the colours inspired her to paint. She paints the laughter and fun of the Gad Bapsi festival, where young men try to scale an oiled pole to get the coconuts tied to its top. Bhuri Bai was very young when her mother Jhabbu Bai taught her to build a kothi, (Granary) and Bhil hut. They shaped figures from a mixture of clay, cow dung and chaff and plastered them on the walls. This is known as bhittichitra or mittichitra, Bhuri likes cows, so she always made a cow for her wall.	Suresh Nagar, Bhadbada Road	IGRMS on a daily wage basis.		came to Bhopal twenty years ago. She has been painting with acrylic on canvas for the past nine years and has already established herself as a Bhil contemporary artist. The walls of the Museum of Mankind, are covered with Bhuri Bai's paintings. The Jhabva hut (the Bhil hut) in IGRMS, was made by Bhuri Bai and other Bhils. Bhuri Bai of Zher loves to sing and paint. The white on white relief wall at IGRMS
3. RAM SINGH						
4. SURAJ BARIA (DUBU)			Dashera Maidan, Ban Ganga	IGRMS		8717847769

5. SHARMA BARIA (DUBU'S WIFE)			Dashera Maidan, Ban Ganga	housewife		
6. SUBHASH AMALIYAR			Dashera Maidan, Ban Ganga	IGRMS		
7. ANITA BHIL (SUBHASH'S WIFE)			Dashera Maidan, Ban Ganga	Home maker		
8. JAMBHU SINGHAR			Dashera Maidan, Ban Ganga	IGRMS		
9. GANGU BAI	F	Like the other Bhil artists, Gangu Bai's favourite themes revolve around nature.	Dashera Maidan, Ban Ganga	IGRMS on as a daily wager.		She was inspired by Bhuri Bai of Pitol to take up painting on paper and canvas. Gangu Bai also holds painting workshops from time to time. Gangu Bai's main motifs are gatla, gal bapsi, gad bapsi and gohari. When she paints the gatlas, as the memory pillars are called, she remembers her ancestors who are still around to protect her. Gangu Bai has often painted the gohari ritual, where bullocks walk over the backs of Bhil men possessed by the gods and goddesses.
10. SITA MERA (GANGU'S DAUGHTER)						
11. SARAT MERA (GANGU'S SON-IN-LAW)						
12. KALI BAI				IGRMS		
13. SANTU BAI				IGRMS		
14. MALLI BAI				IGRMS		
15. BHURI BAI BARIA – PITOL		Awards: highest award Shikhar Sanman (1986-1987) from the Government of Madhya		TRIBAL MUSEUM Bhuri Bai now works as an artist in the Adivasi Lok		Initially Bhuri Bai had found it a little strange to paint in a sitting position. But the magic

		Pradesh. In 1998, the Madhya Pradesh Government honoured her with the Ahalya Sanman. Bhuri Bai of Pitol was the first Bhil artist to use paper and canvas for her painting. J Swaminathan, the then Director of Bharat Bhawan asked her to paint on a paper, Bhuri Bai began her journey as a contemporary Bhil artist. That day, Bhuri Bai painted her family's ancestral horse and was thrilled to see the effect of the poster colour as it touched the white paper. "In the village, we had to work so hard to extract colour from plants and clay. And here I was given so many shades of colour and a ready made brush!" In 2021, she received the Padma Shri Award for the Arts.		Kala Academy in Bhopal. She is a recipient of the highest award Shikhar Sanman (1986-1987) from the Government of Madhya Pradesh. In 1998, the Madhya Pradesh Government honoured her with the Ahalya Sanman. Ornaments: They made it themselves, of silver and beads. They incorporate new and old designs quite often. The ornaments are made in paintings too. Before Diwali, they make paintings of ornaments, little children and women and the festive village. After finishing off the puja at home, everyone dressed in ornaments go to the Gohori Puja. They go to the market grounds to see the Gohuri. They have mannat to Gohari and men, after drinking and performing puja to the cows, lie down on the village roads and the cows run on them.		of painting soon drew her in. Bhuri Bai says, each time she starts to paint, she casts her mind back to various aspects of Bhil life and culture and when a particular theme becomes dominant, she brings it to life on her canvas. And her paintings have captured every aspect of Bhil life – the animals in the forest, the serenity of the forest and its trees, and gatla (memory pillars), the Bhil deities, attire, ornaments and gudna (tattoos), huts and granaries, the haat, festivals and dances and oral narratives. Bhuri Bai has recently started painting aeroplanes, television, car and buses along with trees and animals. And they all seem at ease with one another.
16. RAMESH KATARA	M		Dashera Maidan, Ban Ganga	Ramesh Kataria works		He has only recently started painting on

				for daily wages in IGRMS		paper. He was inspired by paintings of Gangu Bai and Bhuri Bai. His main motifs are the gods and goddesses of the Bhil pantheon, and scenes from folk tales.
17. SUBHASH KATARA (SON OF RAMESH KATARA)	M	Subhas Bhil, Gangu Bai's son, has been painting for the past 4 years. He was inspired to paint by his mother.	Dashera Maidan, Ban Ganga			He works in Bhopal on daily wages. When Subhash became a father, he painted birds with their chicks and animals with their young. When he goes to Jhabua, he paints gatlas, gad bapsi and gal bapsi. He sometimes depicts only the wooden frames of the gad bapsi, or gal bapsi, as they are before the people arrive. Subhas Bhil's brothers, Dinesh and Rakesh have also taken up painting and their favourite motifs are animal and birds.
18. RAMESH BARIA						
19. KASSU BAI (RAMESH BARIA'S WIFE)			9644536430	Home maker		
20. SHANTA BHURIA (RAMESH BARIA'S SISTER)						
21. JETHA BARIA						
22. GEETA BARIA			Dashera Maidan, Ban Ganga			9893390609, 9179417614
23. SATTUR MERA						
24. LADO BAI		Through the years, she has		NATIONAL AWARD,		She started painting on

		received support and encouragement from the noted artist, J Swaminathan.		TRIBAL MUSEUM Used to work at Lado Bai works as an artist at the Adivasi Lok Kala Academy. Her job as an artist at the Adivasi Lok Kala Academy now allows Lado Bai to paint all the images she has been wanting to for so many years		canvases at the same time as Bhuri Bai of Pitol. She has returned to painting after a long time, as financial constraints prevented her from pursuing her art.. Lado Bai's main motifs are the animal kingdom and Bhil rituals and festivals.
25. MUKESH BARIA						
27. JOR SINGH	M			Jor Singh works in the Public Works department of the Madhya Pradesh Government.		Jor Singh started painting after he married to Bhuri Bai of Pitol. Bhuri Bai has taught the art to many people in painting workshops all over the country, but she says Jor Singh was her first student and he picked it up very fast since he could relate to the themes. Jor Singh's main motif is aquatic life. In Bhopal, he often goes fishing in the Bada Talao (Big Lake) and he captures those times in his paintings. His other favourite motifs are animals in the jungle and memory pillars.



YOUNG ARTISTS

S No	NAME	AGE – GENDER - CLASS	LEARNING FROM	HOW MANY YEARS	EXPERIENCE/EXPOSURE	SCHOOL - CLASS	NOTES
1.	ANAND BARIA (DUBU BARIA'S SON)	13 YEARS - M	DUBU BARIA	Dashera Maidan, Ban Ganga			
2.	NIRMALA BARIA (SHER SINGH'S DAUGHTER)	7 YEARS - F	SHER SINGH	Suresh Nagar, Bhadbada Road			
3.	REETA BHURIA (SHANTA'S DAUGHTER)	13 YEARS - F	Shanta Bhuria	Dashera Maidan, Ban Ganga			
4.	MANISHA BARIA (RAMESH'S DAUGHTER)	13 YEARS - F	DUBU BARIA	Dashera Maidan, Ban Ganga			
5.	ANJALI BARIA (DUBU BARIA'S DAUGHTER)	10 YEARS - F	DUBU BARIA	Dashera Maidan, Ban Ganga			
6.	SANGEETA BHABOR (GEETA IS HER AUNT)	15 YEARS - F	DUBU BARIA	Dashera Maidan, Ban Ganga			
7.	SUMAN BARIA (DUBU IS HER UNCLE)	16 YEARS - F	DUBU BARIA	Dashera Maidan, Ban Ganga			

8	ANITA BARIA – daughter of Bhuri Bai of Pitol	15 yrs	From 6 yrs old from Mother, Bhuri Bai	Dashera Maidan, Ban Ganga			
9	ANISHA BARIA (RAMESH'S DAUGHTER)	11 YEARS - F	DUBU BARIA	Dashera Maidan, Ban Ganga			

As collected in 2016

Annexure IV

Interview Questionnaire – 1st , 2nd and 3rd Generation

Personal:

1. From where do you belong?
2. When did you shift to Bhopal?

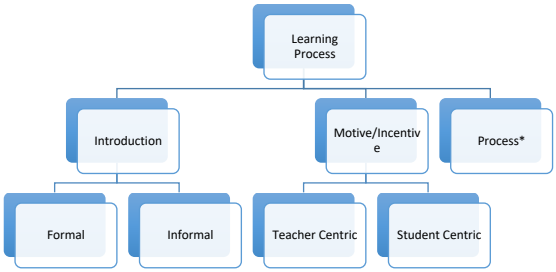
On their Art:

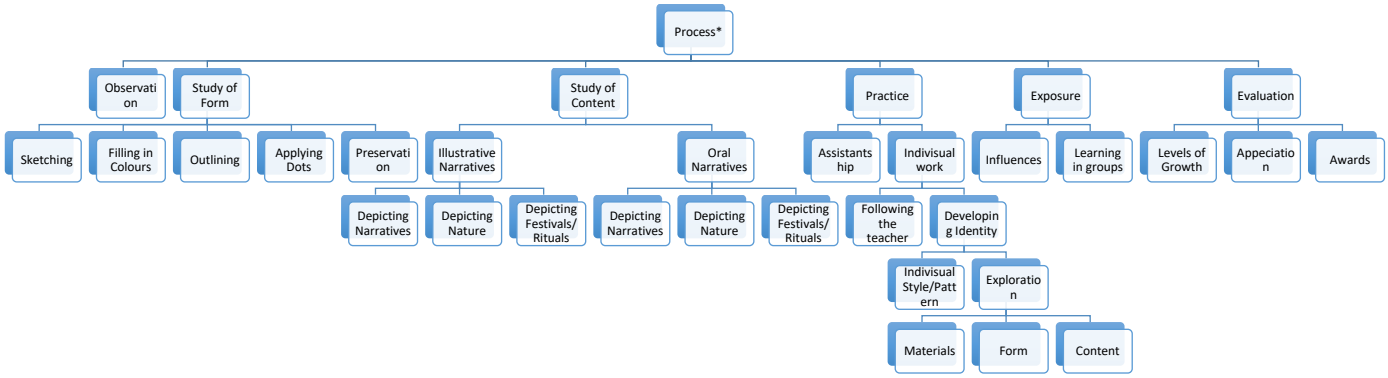
3. From when have you been painting?
4. Do you paint on walls?
5. When did you shift from walls to canvas?
6. What are your inspirations in your painting?
7. What are your most favorite things that you draw, quite often?
8. What are the topics covered in the paintings?
9. Do the paintings have any narrative?
10. What are the stories behind them?
11. Do the paintings have any religious or ritualistic significance?

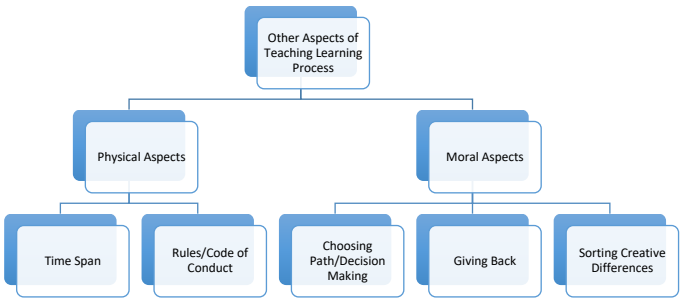
Physical Attributes of Paintings

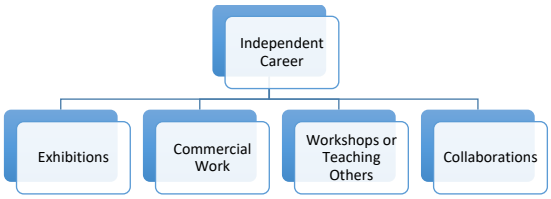
12. What are your favorite colours?
13. What is the role/significance of the dots most commonly used in the paintings?
14. How to they portray distance or perspective in their paintings?
15. Do you practice 'Still-Life' in the art? Eg, do you see and draw at the same time?
16. Do you attempt to draw realistic images of characters or nature?
17. What is the importance of patterns in your art? What is your trademark style?
18. Do you use floral?
19. Do you use borders in your art?
20. Do you use shading?
21. Do you use gradations?
22. How do you differentiate the different characters in a painting?
23. How important is the background in the painting?
24. What colours do u mostly use to make the backgrounds?
25. How do you portray light, shadow and reflected light in the paintings?
26. How do you show time in your paintings?
27. How do you render plains?
28. Do you make the sky?
29. How do we draw comparative sizes?
30. What are the most commonly drawn Animals?
31. What are the most commonly drawn Trees?
32. What are the most commonly drawn Rituals?
33. What are the most commonly drawn Stories?
34. What are the most commonly drawn Festivals?
35. What amount of space do we leave surrounding the image?
36. How do you preserve the paintings?

Talking about their learning process:









A. Starting Off/Introduction:

1. How was your earliest introduction to the Bhil art?
2. How was your earliest introduction to the artists?
3. How many years did you observe the artists (your future teacher) work?
4. At what age did you start?
5. Did you choose your teacher or your teacher choose you?
6. How did you first approach him/her?
7. Were you inspired by your teachers work to make you choose him/her or it happened naturally?
8. Was your teacher inspired by your work to make him/her choose you?

B. Motive/Incentive:

1. When did you first get interested in drawing?
2. What is the objective of learning the art? (Why did you learn the art?)
3. Why is it imp
4. Did your initial motive change during the process of learning?
5. What was the initiative/motive of the teacher to teach you? (Tradition/helping hand/payment)
6. What was your initiative/motive to learn? (Tradition/helping hand/payment)
7. What happened if you suddenly lost interest in the art or got busy in the process? How would your teacher react? Would s/he continue teaching you if in case you got back after years?
8. What level of commitment is involved in the process?

C. Process:

1. How did the process start? Do you rem the first day of your learning process?
2. What drawings did you first start with?
3. Can you remember the step-wise process?
4. Based on the information I have gathered till now, there are 10 Steps in the Indigenous Art Learning Process:

a. Observation,

(a) How much time did you spend in observing your teacher painting?
(b) Were you exposed to other artists as well?
(c) How early do you remember being exposed to the art and the artists at work?
(d) What was your role? (A silent observer, running errands or both)
(e) Were you asked to sit and observe?
(f) What aspects did you like about the art and the painting process?

b. Sketching,

(a) What is your earliest memory of drawing?
(b) Where did you start making your drawings? (notebook or walls/floor)
(c) Do you use of pencil or brush?
(d) What brush size do you use?
(e) Would you do it quite often?
(f) Did anyone tell you to do so?
(g) Did anyone guide you in that?
(h) Would you do that mostly when there were festivals?
(i) Would you doodle when you would see others painting around you or in isolation/in your own time?
(j) What initial sketches did you make?
(k) Was it a part of the formal learning process?
(l) Where did you make your first sketch? Paper/Wall/Floor?
(m) Did you show it to your teacher?
(n) What would you draw? (nature/festivals/rituals/village)?
(o) In case of festivals, were you aware of the festivals?
(p) Did you draw these festivals from memory or from the paintings of your teacher?

(q) Did you try copying your teachers art?
(r) Do you still doodle?

c. Filling in Colours,

(a) What sizes of papers did you first start on?
(b) Were you shown the process of filling in the colours before you started or did you try filling in by yourself and then, your teacher corrected it for you and showed the technique?
(c) Can you show me how you would fill in the colours without it spilling out?
(d) What elements did you first try filling colours with?
(e) Is it easier to fill in a rounded shape or an angular shape?
(f) Once made a mistake, can you fix it? And how?
(g) Did you mix the colours with water before using it for a fill?
(h) Do you create your own colour for fill?
(i) What if you finished your mixed fill colour for an element, and it is still not complete. How do you fix the problem? (Paint with a new colour on top or continue with a slight different shade?)
(j) What problems did you face in this step; of filling in colours?
(k) What were your teacher's guidelines?
(l) What brush size do you use?

d. Outlining,

(a) Do you use the same brush as filling colours, for the outlines?
(b) What colours do u generally use for the outlines?
(c) What are the most commonly made mistakes?
(d) What is the technique taught to you?
(e) How often do you dip in the paint? (Wait for the colour to completely dry out or use little at a time)
(f) How do you maintain a consistent thickness of the line?
(g) How long did it take to have this skill?
(h) Would you practice often?

e. Applying Dots,

(a) Do you use the same brush as filling colours, outlines for applying the dots?
(b) What colours do u generally use for the dots? (contrast colours or different shades)
(c) What are the most commonly made mistakes?
(d) What is the technique of applying dots, taught to you?
(e) How often do you dip in the paint? (Wait for the colour to completely dry out or use little at a time)
(f) How do you maintain consistency in size of the dots?
(g) How long did it take for you, to have this skill?
(h) Would you practice 'applying dots' often?

f. Preservation,

(a) How would you preserve your art?
(b) Have you kept your all earlier workbooks?

g. Developing your own pattern/style,

(a) When did you find the need to have your own style?
(b) Now that you sign your name, and people realize that its your painting, why do you still need to have your styles?
(c) Is it more than just a signature?
(d) Can you recognize others paintings through their styles?
(e) How do the different styles differ?
(f) Have you acquired your own style of painting?
(g) Can others identify your art without you having to sign it?

(h) How easy or with difficult was it for you to discover your own style?
(i) How long did it take for you, to have this skill?
(j) Would you practice 'applying dots' often?
(k) What was the process involved in you narrowing down to your style?
(l) Did your teacher help you in the process or it was a personal journey?
(m) Does the content also mark individual styles?

h. Exploring different materials,

(a) On what different materials you can paint?
(b) When you start exploring different materials?
(c) Did your teacher tell you to, or did you do it own your own?
(d) What changed with the change of materials?
(e) What is the largest scale of your art?
(f) Does change of materials come for a reason of festivals or rituals?

i. Depicting narratives: nature/rituals/festivals,

(a) What do you mostly depict in your art?
(b) Why? (personal/commercial/rituals)
(c) How did you/teacher decide the content?
(d) Are the narratives in paintings told to you by your teacher or others?
(e) Are the narratives told to you at the time of painting them or other times?
(f) Are they picked up by you from various sources and over a period of time?
(g) Do you use references while drawings? (other's art or still life or memory?)

j. Storytelling

5. Are there any more levels?
6. What are your steps of learning?
7. What was the practice technique? Did you finish steps a-e or practices each step and become perfect before moving to the next step?
8. Did you finish steps a-e at each time you painted or stored it to resume work later?
9. Which was the most difficult level for you?

k. Assistantship:

1. Have you ever assisted your teacher?
2. If yes, since when?
3. Have you ever assisted others?
4. What are the works that you did together?
5. What did you learn from those experiences?
6. In case you did a work with her/him, who would sign on the painting? (One or Both)
7. In case you did a work with her/him, who would get paid for the painting? (One or Both)

D. Independent Career: Commercializing (selling and exhibitions)

1. After what time does a student start their independent career?
2. Do you wish to earn from your paintings?
3. Did you sell any of your paintings yet?
4. For how much?
5. Did you ask your teachers advice before selling?
6. Did you ask for a quote reference?
7. When did you start your independent work?
8. Was it approved or disapproved by your teacher?
9. Did your teacher help you in selling your paintings yet?
10. Did your teacher refer you to exhibitions?
11. Did you ever discuss your future plans with your teacher?

F. Workshops or Teaching others:

1. Have you ever been to a workshop with your teacher?
2. Do you like teaching others?
3. Did your teacher refer you for workshops (to learn from others)?
4. Were you ever asked to teach other junior students during your process of learning?
5. Did your teacher refer you to conduct workshops on his/her behalf?
6. Were you paid in that instance?

G. Future Relationship and Working Together:

1. Do you continue working with your teacher? How often?
2. Do you like working together?
3. What is your learning in the process?
4. Who decides the content?
5. Do you both paint in your individual styles?
6. Who would sign off?
7. Are the payments equally distributed?

Others:

A. Time Span:

1. How many years have you been painting?
2. How many years did it take for you to learn and make your teacher feel that your learning is complete?
3. How many hours a week did you practice?
4. How many hours a week did you sit with your teacher?

B. Learning with others:

1. Did s/he teach you in a group or separately?
2. Were you given a common task?
3. Were you asked to work on a canvas together?
4. Did you share work with your fellow learners?
5. Did you enjoy working in groups or in isolation?
6. What is your concept of competition in a group?

C. Rules/Code of Conduct:

1. What was the one thing that your teacher was particular about?
2. What was the one thing that you are particular about while painting?
3. What was the one thing that you are particular about while teaching others?
4. Was he strict on timing?
5. Was he strict on discipline?
6. Was he strict on cleanliness or clearing the space after learning the art?
7. Was he strict on having clarity of thought?
8. Did he ever complain about focus?
9. Narrate one incidence you made him very angry.
10. Narrate one incidence when he was very pleased with you.

D. Appreciation:

1. Were you awarded when you did better? (Appreciation or in kind)
2. Did you show your work to others before you were told by your teacher that you have finished your learning (during the learning process)?
3. Did your teacher show your work to others before you have finished your learning (during the learning process)?
4. Did your teacher tell you to participate in competitions?

E. Choosing Path/Decision Making:

1. Did you or your teacher decide the future plans?
2. Did you or your teacher decide the content or subject to draw?

3. Did you or your teacher decide the cost of your paintings?
4. Did you or your teacher decide the places to go for exhibitions, workshops etc.?

F. Influences:

1. Were you allowed to draw in different styles while learning to paint in the Bhil style?
2. What were your influences?

G. Exposure Levels:

1. Were you exposed to artworks of other artists within the community?
2. Did you even learn from more than one artist?
3. Did you travel places with your teacher?
4. Would your teacher show you works of others he/she appreciated?

H. Levels of Growth:

1. Did you set your own benchmarks?
2. Did your teacher setup a benchmark for you?
3. What mistakes did you most commonly make?
4. What were you good at?
5. How would you know that you have moved to the next level of learning? What are the criteria?

I. Giving Back:

1. Is there any Dakhina given?
2. Do you ever pay him/her when you sell a painting?
3. According to you, how do you give him back/show gratitude?

J. Sorting Creative Differences:

1. Did you ever have creative differences with your teacher?
2. How di you solve it?

Teaching others:

1. Do you teach/take workshops?
2. Where have you been for such workshops?
3. Who all attend your workshops?
4. Do you teach anyone at home/locality?
5. What is the stepwise process of teaching art to a novice?
6. Do they have any basic shape/form to start?
7. What are the basic tools required?
8. What are the principals of drawing and painting?
9. How is the context of paintings introduced to a learner?
10. What are the stages/levels of growth in learning art?
11. How does a teacher access the students?
12. Are there any criteria to access the growth level? If yes, what are they?
13. Does it require any previous knowledge of art or basic drawing skills?
14. Does it require any previous knowledge of their art and livelihood practices?
15. What initiates the process or how do that start and at what age?
16. Do they have a formal method of teaching at home or in the community, like certain days in a week and number of hours, a day?
17. How are their teaching methods different from the person, from whom, they learnt the art?
18. How many years of practice does it generally take for a child to be accepted as an artist within the community?
19. What are the levels of growth and how are they identified?
20. At what stage is there a change of medium, if at all, and how is it identified?
21. Does the teaching method involve sharing stories of their rituals and festivals?

22. How are the topics or subjects decided in the drawings? Does it have an order?
23. Have you painted with your students together on any projects?
24. Do you plan such a project any time soon? If yes, when and where?

Annexure V

First Year of learning Bhil Art from Bhuri Bai: A day wise report

Day 1: Description: BB given an assignment

It started with a ceremony. I gifted Bhuri Bai (BB) a sari, brushes, coconut, sweets and incense sticks on a brass plate covered with a red cloth. She accepted the gifts as a gesture to teach me the art and then distributed the sweets to her colleagues, and introducing me as her student. The gesture felt really warm.

After a cup of tea, we started with drawing. She took out her paintings to show me.

Meanwhile, the coordinator of Tribal Museum approached BB to illustrate a Bhil story. (Audio Recorded) She coaxed her to start the work. BB complained that she couldn't internalize the story yet and asked her to recite it again. The coordinator complained in a friendly way that she had repeated the story three times the previous day. I intervened with a solution to record the story. So, she narrated the story again while BB listened to it and I recorded it. After hearing the story, BB said that it would take her some time to draw because 'the idea is the key'. 'Ill draw it in no time she said, but I need to visualize it first.' She asked me to play the recorded story again while asked the coordinator to wait through a gesture. Then she asked her a few questions.

BB: Where do I start?

Coordinator: Start from the beginning when …. (explains a scene)

BB: Who are the main characters of the story?

Coordinator: There are 4 protagonists. Then, she asked BB to paint them in a specific colour each, throughout the book. (Analysis #1)

Description: BB starts teaching

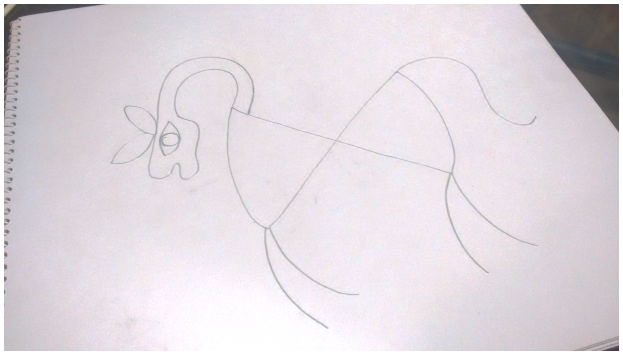
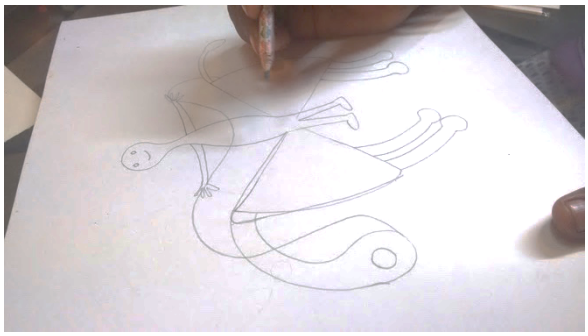
As the lady left for her rounds, BB directed her attention towards me. I took out my pencil box and brushes. However, since I was not sure about the paper quality, I did not have a paper to paint on. She gave me a couple of cut pieces from her drawing copy.

Then, she showed me her scribbles from the copy. Carefully narrating the stories behind them. She asked me if I could tell what some images were (since she had told me each story during my previous visit). Together we browsed through her work revisiting the stories of her past. Then, she took out some of her complete paintings, that she keeps with her for selling to the visitors of Tribal Museum, if they approach her. These paintings mostly represented nature, animals and lifestyle elements since the buyers generally preferred these subjects (Analysis #2). She went through the entire bundle but didn't choose any though she showed me each one of them silently. Next, she kept them aside and took a fresh piece of paper to scribble on. She made the Gathla and then told me the purpose behind making one, the ritual, process and the sacred elements in the offerings. She drew as she spoke about it. She also spoke about the things that should always accompany the Gathla and the things that are modified. The man riding the Pithora horse is drawn in complete or incomplete depending on the reason for his death. For example, if a man is killed by accident, the image of the man is drawn without arms or legs, which he had lost, sitting on the Pithora horse inside the Gathla. Similarly, sometimes a complete or even a

headless man is drawn and so on. (Analysis #3) In front of the Gathla, five, seven or nine Nivas (an offering on leaves) is drawn depending on the space available on the paper so that it fits into the composition well. At the two sides of the Gathla, two men sit crosslegged, participating in the ritual. One spills Dhar (freshly made mahua liquor) and the other, with a Hookah (smoke). Surrounding them, sits the other people as observers. Again, the observers are added based on the space available in front of the Nivas. A cock sacrifice is added to the painting sometimes. Finally, a dried tree is added behind the Gathla, to complete the picture. (Analysis #4) And just as I was wondering why would she want me to start painting with a morbid imagery of a headless man on a horse along with the complete ritualistic elements of the Gathla, so answered me as if she could read my mind. She told me that the Gathla is one of the most pious ritual (cremation ritual) among the Bhils and that the Pithora horse, on whom the man sits, is the vahan (vehicle) of the Baba Dev (Gods), that carry their souls to heaven, and is the most sacred painting of the Bhils. (Analysis #5) Then, she asked me to choose whatever image I wanted to paint. I chose to start with the Pithora horse since it was a sacred element of the Bhils and also because it was an essential element in the Gathla painting. I thought I would practice drawing it separately before I try to make it, within the Gathla. (Analysis #6)

I told BB that I wanted to paint the Pithora horse. She took a fresh piece of paper and scribbled the basic form of the Pithora horse and asked me to copy it. (Analysis #7)

I did as told. However, I made the lines more curvy and smooth edges. She watched me scribble the entire horse. Then, when I showed it to her, she complimented by saying that it looks like a nice horse but not like hers. ‘How would others know that you are my student?’ was her concern. She took another paper to stepwise make the horse. (Analysis #8)
Below is a documentation of the teaching process: ‘Instruction, demonstration, copying (Analysis #9)

Then, when the pencil drawing was finished, she carefully erased the painting with an eraser, slightly so that just a faint reference of the pencil lines remains. She told me that else the pencil lines would show when the colour is of a lighter shade. (Analysis #10)

Then, instead of colouring the drawing of the Pithora horse, she asked me to make the Gathla, this time incorporating the Pithora horse within it. She took a fresh sheet, a larger one, this time, to demonstrate. (Analysis #11)

The Gathla composition is one which comprised of many elements and each had a way of making the forms. There were humans in the composition who were all sitting. However, there were two styles of making them. The cross-legged sitting man:



Finally, I would like to mention, that BB always practiced along with me, every now and then looking into my work. She would often show her work to me too and discuss how she hated a few assignments that did not match her sensibilities. (Analysis #12)

Analysis

(Analysis #1): BB had previously done a series of paintings from her life, represented in the Bhil style. Here, in every painting, her illustrated image was a part of the narrative and was also painted in a distinctive 'pink' colour which made her stand out in a crowd of other villagers.

(Analysis #2): Kept traditional and commercial art separate

Displaying the plethora of her work for the student to get an introduction to the art form and the style of the teacher.

(Analysis #3): Compulsory and flexible elements in a ritual

(Analysis #4, 11): composition of Gathla with reference to space

(Analysis #5): start learning to paint with a ritualistic and religious painting

(Analysis #6): Freedom and Principles in teaching art

(Analysis #7): Copying of art

(Analysis #8): Transfer of knowledge without changing the form, keeping the form as close to the teacher.

(Analysis #9): Instruction, demonstration, copying

(Analysis #10): Line quality

(Analysis #12): Teacher working alongside the student

Day 2: Description

The next day, I was at the Tribal museum early. She arrived and before taking a seat, she took out a dry cloth from her drawer and wiped the already clean, glass tabletop. Then, she wiped the bottom side of it too. Next she folded the cloth back and placed it in her drawer. One by one she took out the drawing copy, pencils, colours and a mug of fresh water. Then, she took out the copy in which I was painting and kept it beside her. Finally she settled on her chair. I sat down beside her and asked her if they don't clean up the place for her. She replied that they of course do their duty, but she likes to clean to herself nonetheless. (Analysis #13)

I asked her where to start that day. She took out the two drawings I had done the previous day, and told me to start colouring. I was really excited to start painting. I asked her what colour to start with. She left it to me to choose. (Analysis #14)

I choose a bright pink and made the horse with it. She observed me doing so and then interrupted and asked me to change the brush. I showed her all the brushes I had. She saw each of them carefully and then took out some of hers. She told me that her brushes had longer hairs and were made of squirrel hair. I was supposed to buy these. But since it is harder to find she mentioned that I could go with her son to the shop she generally gets it from. She gave me a Weston 000 brush to finish painting the horse. (Analysis #15)

I filled up the horse neatly and then showed it to her. She took the brush and gave the final touches.

A. Covered up the eyes that I had left blank and told me that I could paint the eyes from top later.

B. Carefully, with a single stroke she passed her brush on the border explaining that the edges should be smooth and continuous. (Analysis #16)

Next, she asked me to choose a colour to paint the man riding the horse. I suggested yellow or orange. She told me that it wouldn't look nice with pink. She asked me to use blue instead. (Analysis #17)

I painted the man. She corrected it again, smoothening the edges. (Analysis #17a) However, in doing so the man became fat. We joked about it and had a good laugh.

Once I finished, she asked me to keep it aside and paint another drawing, till it dried. I took the Gathla. She specified the colours this time, but for a few elements. (Analysis #18)

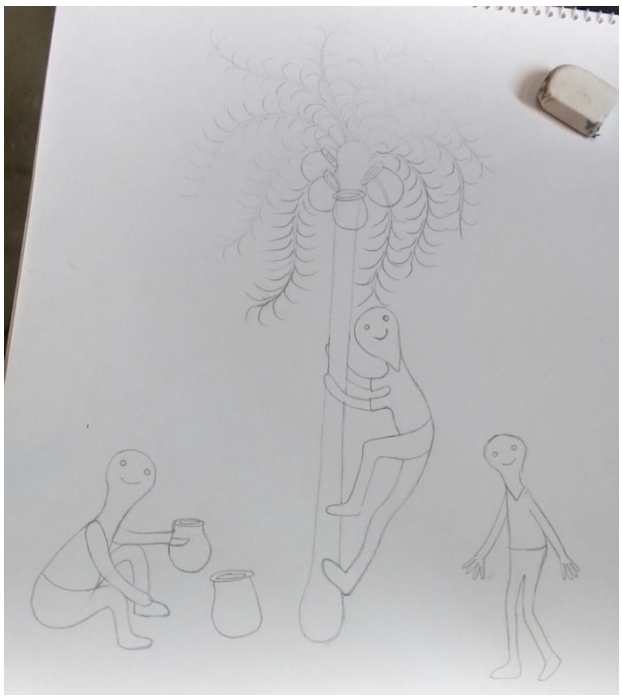
Nivas: Green

Gathla: Brown

Then, when I was about to start, she told me to paint this later. She mentioned painting so many elements in the beginning may be difficult. So rather I choose simpler compositions with a few elements. She took out a bundle of her own artwork. She kept aside the ones that were 'closest to the Bhils' or formed the 'identity of the Bhils'. She kept aside some animals too. Then, she looked for a few trees which she did not find. So, she took me to a painting that was done on a wall by her a few years back, and asked me to make it. It was a Khajur (Palm) Tree. I sat close to the wall to make a sketch while she went to fetch some tea. But midway, she returned back to tell me to make 4 pots instead of 1, that she had previously made. There was also a man climbing the

tree to fetch the pots. I completed the sketch and showed her. Then she made me add a man who was sitting under the tree and selling the pots. I asked her if it was the same man. She said that it could be. Sometimes two people go to fetch the pots but often only one does the job, too. And in that case, they sell a couple of pots of fresh kajur ras on their way back. Once I finished drawing the man, she seemed happy. Then told me to make another man walking towards him, as if coming to buy the kajur ras. (Analysis #19)





Analysis

(Analysis #13): Morning Ritual

(Analysis #14): Freedom in choice of colours to start with

(Analysis #15): Particular about the technical aspects

(Analysis #16): Explaining while correcting

(Analysis #17): Presence of a colour palette

(Analysis #17a): Once the base colour is filled, the borders need to be touched upon in a fluid movement.

(Analysis #17a): Another coat of paint is applied wherever the pencil lines show.

(Analysis #18): Colour specifics for some elements

(Analysis #19): Building composition and storytelling based on space available

Day 3: Description

Today the class was at Bhuri bai's home. She picked me up from the bus stop and we casually walked back to her place talking about the planning for the coming days. She asked me how many days more I would be in town and if I could come the other days to her place to paint as well. I readily agreed.

At her home, she arranged the drawing room. It had a 3-sitter sofa, a table and a TV. Of the shelves higher up were a few awards of Bhuri Bai and her hudbands photograph along with her. She arranged a mattress on the floor and asked me to sit wherever I was comfortable. I chose to sit down spreading the colours, paper and water around me. She got her painting paraphernalia and set it up on the table. Finally she called in her granddaughter Rita, introduced me to her and asked he to join us in painting. (Analysis #20) Then she praised her saying that she is her best student and has perfected the art completely. She quietly went inside and returned with her books instead. She told BB that she would read while we paint because her exams were round the corner. But she also choose to sit with us and share a couple of her drawing techniques with me. When I asked her if that would disturb her, she insisted on staying back and reading at the same time keeping an eye on my work.





I was asked to start with completing the horse with dots today. BB instructed Rita to make the eyes, choose a colour and make the border dots. Once Rita finished showing me, BB asked the sheet to look at it and then, made the eyes a little larger. (Analysis #21) Then she made the eyes of the man, that Rita had missed, and made a black dot within the white dot.

Next, I made the border as Rita showed me, making a complete circle of dots with black, within the horse. Seeing the dots, BB asked me to change the brushes and gave one of hers. Next, she mixed the colour for me and showed the ideal consistency of the colour (how much water needs to be added), the tip of the brush is made smooth (how much colour is taken on the brush) and how to make equal sized dots with one touch (the pressure applied on the brush). (Analysis #22) I copied the process. However, it took a couple of days to apply all the three principles.

Another important thing was the position and posture of the hand. This was a key to have equal sized and equal distanced dots. Though different artists have different methods, she always held her right wrist with her left hand while she applied the dots and not otherwise. The technique was that the right hand should float on the paper, just touching the paper briefly and at the specific points. (Analysis #23)



I tried my best to complete the first loop in that process. Then, Rita suggested that I make another loop in green. This followed with yellow, which I choose. Then, I when I started with white, she gave me a few rules.

No yellow with White.

No blue with Black.

No red and Orange together.

However, Yellow and Green goes with pink. (Because contrasts work).

I suggested Red. She agreed.

I finished that circle and then, I had a doubt. Can I use non-contrast colours on a base colour? For example, using red on pink base are nor contrasts. Thus, I showed it to BB. She mentioned its beautiful. I would however, need to make the dots more steady. (Analysis #24) However, still I was not sure if she first intended to teach me to make the dots and then talk about colours or she was teaching me that parallelly. Maybe that I could answer as time passed. (Analysis #25)

Next, BB took the horse and made a pattern within the horse (a continuous line). Then she asked me to make the dots around it, using the same four colours that I had used earlier. I finished that accordingly.

Then, I made the shirt of the man (choosing the colours for myself). Next the asked me to make the man in 'open dots'. I started with the head and applied a few. Rita interrupted and asked me to leave the head clean. BB agreed and asked Rita to show me. (Analysis #26) Rita started applying the dots from neck down, and this time in loose, random dots. This is what BB meant by 'khuli bundi' or 'open dots'.

When all was complete, I showed it to Rita. She seemed content. Then, I showed it to BB. She seemed happy at the output. Then, after staring at it for long, she applied blue dots on the string of the man. And this time, she finally seemed content. (Analysis #27)

She told me that this now looked like 'her students' work. That this was my first painting and I should keep it safe. I could not agree less.

We broke for an elaborate lunch of homemade bajra roti, dal and soy biryani.

Analysis

(Analysis #20): Tradition of painting together
(Analysis #21): Teaching Rita to teach and me the basics
(Analysis #22): three principles: how much water needs to be added, how much colour is taken on the brush and the pressure applied on the brush.
(Analysis #23): Hand posture
(Analysis #24): Clearing doubts
(Analysis #25): if she first intended to teach me to make the dots and then talk about colours or
she was teaching me that parallelly.
(Analysis #26): Teaching, supervising both… testing her granddaughter
(Analysis #27): Eye for detail

Day 4: Description

BB asked me to paint the drawing of the Khajur Tree that I had drawn the previous day. I started with that. She, on the other hand was creating a scenario from the village fair. She told me about the fair while she was painting and I listened while I was painting the Khajur tree. (Analysis #28)



Rita asked me to paint the bark and the twigs green. BB observed what she said and went back to her painting. I finished doing that. Next, she took the paper and painted one complete leaf, using green, red, yellow and back. She took one colour at a time and made the strokes wide apart. Asked me to do the same for the other leaves and then choose another colour and added next to it. I repeated and then again she used another colour. So, till all the four colours were used, I did not have an idea how it would look finally. (Analysis #29) (Analysis #30) Next, she asked me to paint the pots brown and the men and their dresses, in any colour I choose. (Analysis #31) I did as she mentioned.

Next, she asked to apply 'open dots' on the men. Rita intervened at this moment and she showed me one. The face was left and the dots started from the next down. She choose red on yellow. And then asked me to use another colour with it. I suggested green and she nodded.

At a point, some paint had spilled outside the borders. BB asked Rita to show me to scrape the paint off. (Analysis #32)

At another point, while applying the dots, some paints spread out. BB told me that it happened because there was too much water in the brush and again asked Rita to clean it. She took a dry cloth and pressed it carefully on the exact point till it soaked in the fresh paint. BB then added that it could be fixed only while the colour is still wet. (Analysis #33) I asked how could I fix it when the colour has dried? She answered that in such a case the process gets pretty long as one would need to apply a fresh coat of base paint on that area, wait for it to dry

and then again apply the dots. (Analysis #34) Thus, its better to always have a piece of cloth by you, while painting. (Analysis #35)

Analysis

(Analysis #28): Sharing the content of the illustration (either in a simplistic or detailed way depending on the students background).

(Analysis #29): Demonstration, Copy, Repeat, Practice

(Analysis #30): Control on the final output of a few elements.

(Analysis #31): Freedom over other elements

(Analysis #32): Correcting mistakes 1 (scraping colour from white paper)

(Analysis #33): Correcting mistakes 2 (soaking the wet paint)

(Analysis #34): Correcting mistakes 3 (repainting for removing dry paint)

(Analysis #35): Giving tips once the problem arises (and not telling all the required material all at once).

Day 5: Description

The next day, we continue with the Khajur tree painting. But, this time she picked up the painting and started painting it herself without giving me any instructions. So, I watched her paint all the 11 leaves. I noted the hand posture, the strokes and the distance between the stoke lines. Each leaf was a repetition of the other but she chose to do it herself, like drawing in a flow. (Analysis #36)

Once the tree leaves was complete she made a man with a shirt and then asked me to do the other two men. Then, she applied another coat of paint on the pots and the men when the pencil stokes were visible. (Analysis #37)

That day, after the class, she told his son to take me to the art shop where she purchased her materials. The shop was called Gyan Bharti in New Market area of Bhopal.

I order the following from there:

a. 2 Ivory sheet: (Rs 100 x 2)

This is then cut into 4 pieces from a neighboring printing shop.

b. Brushes: Weston Squirrel fur – (Long Dark fur) - Numbers - 000,00,1,2

Analysis

(Analysis #36): Repetition of strokes as a practice

(Analysis #37): Giving tips once the problem arises

Day 6: Description

I again started with the Khajur tree, working on the two men applying another coat of paint on them and defining their clothers. Then, I applied the dots. Today she asked me to choose any colour I want and I did. (Analysis

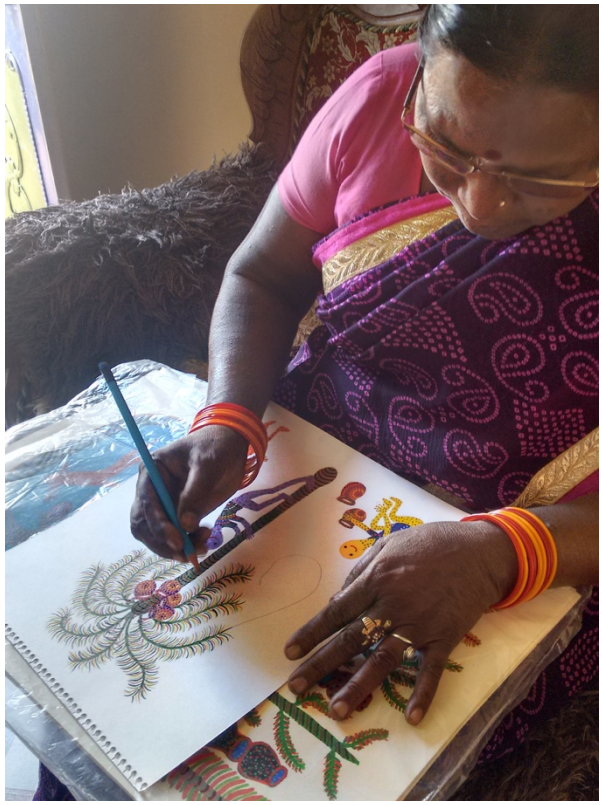
#38) She asked to apply ‘loose dots’ on the human figure and any pattern of dots on the clothers. (Analysis #39) It started with a dot and the circumference increased, one loop at a time, till the element is completely filled. (Analysis #40)
Meanwhile, Rita told me to add lines on the tree trunk quite close to the Gond art form. (Analysis #41) Finally, the Khajur Tree painting was complete.

Next, I was advised to ‘copy’ a bullock cart that BB was painting at that time. She got up to make tea and meanwhile telling me about her upcoming project. The bullock cart was a commissioned work for her that she had to submit that weekend. (Analysis #42)

I completed making a sketch of the bullock cart. Meanwhile she got us tea and we took at break, continuing our conversation. The ‘khajur tree’ painting was lying around us to dry. She picked it up, complimented it and even showed it to Rita and her other grand children who were playing indoors. She praised me and told me that I should sign and frame it for my room. (Analysis #43)

She then took it to her table and added two birds in a nest hanging from the tree. It looked a little ‘blank’ the mentioned. (Analysis #44) I painted the two birds choosing the colours and sticking to my pattern. She continued with her work too keeping a constant eye on my work, which I can justify since I often looked at her for approval, and she nodded.





I made one nest pink and another green. Then I painted the birds red. She looked at the painting and mentioned that pink and red do not go together and asked me to make both the nests olive green. (Analysis #45)




Once that was finished, she looked absolutely content and told me how to frame it. Since I was still learning, I had used a regular paper to paint it. So she asked me to mount it on a thicker paper and then frame. She also mentioned that it should be sold at Rs 2000, if I even wish to do so. (Analysis #46)

Analysis

(Analysis #38): Giving the right of choice for colours. Didn't hear any comments for colour combinations yet whereas, Rita was prompt in sharing the colour rules immediately.

(Analysis #39): Freedom of choice for patterns. It is upto the student to either 'copy/take inspiration' of dots from the teacher or form their own pattern. BB's sons follow her pattern while her one daughter in law and daughter have their own patterns.

(Analysis #40): The patterns also keep evolving with time and exploration. I used multiple colours in the beginning but later (after 10 paintings of my own) settled with 3 to 4 colours for the repeated loops. The same is evident in patterns of many artists like Sher Singh, Gangu Bai, BB and Shanta.

(Analysis #41): Much like the Gond art form.

(Analysis #42): Introducing to 'Copying' her art and at same time giving a complicated drawing that she is presently working on. – raising the difficulty level –

(Analysis #43): Appreciation and honour

(Analysis #44): Getting back to a painting later (rearranging the composition)

(Analysis #45): This is the first time she mentioned about the colour combinations. Rita had given the tips before making the mistakes while BB waited to correct when the problem occurs.

(Analysis #46): Giving professional advice on framing and cost.

Day 7: Description

The next day, BB looked at all the photographs of her paintings that I had taken during my last visit, of her exhibition at Bharat Bhavan. She browsed through them carefully, keeping aside a few. Then, she asked me to 'copy' them, paint it and get it the next time. (Analysis #47)

She had also shortlisted an elephant. But she mentioned that it was not a very good one. She went indoors and returned with another painting of an elephant. This one had carriers on its back. While two people were sitting, one man was trying to climb the elephant from the back or changing his position, on the move. (Analysis #48)

She also looked at her paintings and also pointed out a few ‘mistakes’ that she would not have done now. (Analysis #49) These were mostly comments on composition and narrative of the paintings.

She picked up a Ryan tree from her paintings (a old one – around 30 years back). Then she took a drawing sheet and painted a Ryan tree with a peacock sitting on it. Then, she went inside to fetch another painting of hers of the Ryan tree with a peacock. I noticed that the peacock was painted in a different way. She showed it to me and mentioned that I could paint it that way too. (Analysis #50) BB mentioned that the Ryan should be coloured in either red, black or green. This was the second time, after gathla, that she gave the colours before I choose on my own. (Analysis #51) The also specified that it should be of only one colour completely and not mixing the three in a sequence for the strokes unlike the khajur tree. (Analysis #51)



Then, she showed the colours and patterns for the peacock tail, a red base, half circles on the outside loop and dots on the center. She did not mention anything for the peacock head and neck. (Analysis #52)

Analysis

(Analysis #47): Copy and Practice

(Analysis #48): Preferring a narrative in a painting rather than an element in isolation.

(Analysis #49): Self-critiquing her painting.

(Analysis #50): Providing reference of similar works, over a period of time. Also giving a choice within an existing gamut.

(Analysis #51): Specific colours for a few ritualistic elements

(Analysis #52): Partly specific colours for a few elements. May be her style.

Select Bibliography

Arif, Y. (2004). Passages out of India. *Economic and Political Weekly*, *39*(2), 301–303.

Baviskar, A. (2001). Written on the body, written on the land: Violence and environmental struggles in Central India. In N. L. Peluso & M. Watts (Eds.), *The violent environments: Social bonds and racial hubris* (pp. 354–379). Cornell University Press.

Béteille, A. (1986). The concept of tribe with special reference to India. *European Journal of Sociology*, *27*(2), 296–318. https://doi.org/10.1017/S000397560000463X

Béteille, A. (2004). Sociology: Concepts and institutions. In V. Das (Ed.), *Oxford handbook of Indian sociology* (pp. 41–61). Oxford University Press.

Béteille, A. (2013). Ourselves and others. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, *42*(1), 1–16. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-anthro-092412-155536

Brara, R. (1992). Are grazing lands "wastelands"? Some evidence from Rajasthan. *Economic and Political Weekly*, *27*(8), 411–418.

Brown, J. S., Collins, A., & Duguid, P. (1989). Situated cognition and the culture of learning. *Educational Researcher*, *18*(1), 32–42. https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X018001032

Buchowski, M. Intricate relations between Western anthropologists and Eastern ethnologists. *Focaal*, *2012*(63), 20–38. https://doi.org/10.3167/fcl.2012.630103

Bundgaard, H. (1996). Local discourses on Orissan Patta paintings. *South Asia Research*. *Indian Art Worlds in Contention: Local*. Curzon Press, 16(2), 111–130. https://doi.org/10.1177/026272809601600201

Burton, R., Brown, J. S., & Fisher, G. (1984). Skiing as a model of instruction. In B. Rogoff & J. Lave (Eds.), *Everyday cognition: Its development and social context*. Harvard University Press.

Chakrabarty, D. (1992). Provincializing Europe: Postcoloniality and the critique of history. *Cultural Studies*, *6*(3), 337–357. https://doi.org/10.1080/09502389200490221

Chakravarty, K. K. (2011). Folk and Tribal Arts: Problems of Understanding (Native Art of India). Native Art of India Ed. by Sathyapal Published by Lalit Kala Akademi.

Chatterjee, A. (1988). Challenges of transition: Design and craft in India. In M. W. Meister (Ed.), *Making things in South Asia: The role of artist and craftsman*. University of Pennsylvania Press.

Chatterjee, P. (2004). *The politics of the governed: Reflections on popular politics in Most of the world*. Columbia University Press.

Chatterji, R. (1998). An ethnography of Dementia. *Culture, Medicine and Psychiatry*, *22*(3), 355–382. https://doi.org/10.1023/a:1005442300388

Chatterji, R. (2012). *Speaking with Pictures: Folk art and Narrative tradition in India*. Routledge.

Chatterji, R. (2012). *Speaking with pictures: Folk art and the narrative tradition in India*, Critical Asian Studies Series. Routledge.

Chi, M. T. H., Bassok, M., Lewis, M. W., Reimann, P., & Glaser, R. (1989). Self-explanations: How students study and use examples in learning to solve problems. *Cognitive Science*, 13(2), 145–182. https://doi.org/10.1207/s15516709cog1302_1

Clifford, J., & Marcus, G. E. (Eds.). (1986). Writing culture: The poetics and politics of ethnography. *Berkeley*. University of California Press.

Collins, A., Brown, J. S., & Newman, S. E. (1989). *Cognitive apprenticeship: Teaching the craft of reading, writing, and mathematics*.

Collins, A., & Stevens, A. L. (1983). A cognitive theory of interactive teaching. In C. M. Reigeluth (Ed.), *Instructional design theories and models: An overview*. Erlbaum.

Condon, P., Desbordes, G., Miller, W. B., & DeSteno, D. (2013). Meditation increases compassionate responses to suffering. *Psychological Science*, *24*(10), 2125–2127. https://doi.org/10.1177/0956797613485603

Conrad, S., & Randeria, S. (Eds.). (2002). *Jenseits des Eurozentrismus Postkoloniale Perspektiven in den Geschichts- und Kulturwissenschaften*. Campus Verlag.

Cuban, L. (1984). *How teachers taught*. Longman.

Das, V. (1977). *Structure and cognition: Aspects of Hindu caste and ritual*. Oxford University Press.

Das, V. (Ed.). (2003). *The Oxford Indian companion to sociology and social anthropology*. Oxford University Press.

Das, V. (2011). State, citizenship, and the urban poor. *Citizenship Studies*, *15*(3–4), 319–333. https://doi.org/10.1080/13621025.2011.564781

Das, V., & Randeria, S. (2014). Democratic strivings, social sciences, and public debates: The case of India. *American Anthropologist*, *116*(1), 160–165. https://doi.org/10.1111/aman.12078

Das, M. (2016). Sri Aurobindo on education. 2016-05-26-11, *14*:52 Identifier-arkark:/13960/t1qg3dd4t https://archive.org/details/SriAurobindoOnEducation.

Das, V. (2013). South Asia and the stakes of social theory. In J. G. Carrier & D. B. Gewertz (Eds.), *The handbook of sociocultural anthropology* (pp. 456–471). Bloomsbury Publishing Academic.

Daveluy, M., & Dorais, L.-J. (2009). *À la périphérie du centre: Les limites de l'hégémonie en anthropologie*. Liber.

Dehejia, V. (1990). On Modes of Visual Narration in early Buddhist Art. *Art Bulletin*. College Art Association, Taylor & Francis, 72(3). https://doi.org/10.2307/3045747

Dharampal. (1983). *The beautiful tree: Indigenous education in the eighteenth century*. Biblia Impex Pvt, Ltd. India.

Doty, W. (1988). Selected publications of Clifford Geertz. Retrieved September 8, 2021. http://www.jstor.org/stable/41178434

Dr Pandey, A. (2020). *Some representative folk art of India* International Journal of Research - Granthaalayah.

Dumont, L., & Pocock, D. F. (1957). For a sociology of India. *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, *1*, 7–22.

Elkin, A. P. (1961). Art and meaning: A review article. *Oceania*, *32*(1), 54–58. Retrieved December 4, 2020. http://www.jstor.org/stable/40329297. https://doi.org/10.1002/j.1834-4461.1961.tb00444.x

Faizi, S., & Nair, P. K. (2016). Adivasis: The World's largest population of indigenous people. *Development*, *59*(3–4), 350–353. https://doi.org/10.1057/s41301-017-0115-8

Fleury, H. International Reception of Mithila Painting. Humboldt Kolleg Helsinki 2017 "Vierhundert Jahre Deutschland—Finnland, hin und zurück",. (October 2017). *Helsinki*,, Finland.

Fröbel, F., & Jarvis, J. (1895). *Friedrich Froebel's pedagogics of the kindergarten: Or, his ideas concerning the play and playthings of the child*. D. Appleton.

Fuchs, S. (1973). *The aboriginal tribes of India*. Macmillan Press Ltd.

Geertz, C. (1963). The integrative revolution: Primordial sentiments and civil politics in the new states. In *Old societies and new states: The quest for modernity in Asia and Africa*, New York: The Free Press of Glencoe (pp. 105–157).

Geertz, C. (2004). What is a state if it is not a sovereign? Reflections on politics in complicated places. *Current Anthropology*, *45*(5), 577–593. https://doi.org/10.1086/423972

Gerholm, T., & Hannerz, U. (1982). Introduction: The shaping of national anthropologies. *Ethnos*. *Ethnos*, *47*(1–2), 5–35. https://doi.org/10.1080/00141844.1982.9981229

Giri, A. K. (2009). Sociology and beyond: The limits of loyalty. *Asian Journal of Social Science*, *37*(3), 415–426. https://doi.org/10.1163/156853109X436801

Guha, R. (1999). *Savaging the civilized: Verrier Elwin, his tribals, and India*. University of Chicago Press.

Guha, R. (2002). *History at the limit of world history*. Columbia University Press.

Guillaume-Pey, C. (2017). From ritual images to animated movies: The transformative journey of the Sora paintings (central-eastern India).

Gupta, A. (2012). *Red tape: Bureaucracy, structural violence, and poverty in India*. Orient Blackswan.

Hauser, B. (2002). From oral tradition to "folk art": Reevaluating Bengali scroll paintings. *Asian Folklore Studies*, 61(1). https://doi.org/10.2307/1178679

Heinz, C. B. (1997). Evolving subjectivities in *Mithila* Art. *Department of Anthropology, California State University and presently at Berkley Heinz, Carolyn Brown*. (2006). *Documenting the Image in Mithila Art. Visual Anthropology Review*. University of California, *22*, Issue 2.

Herwitz, D. A. (2012). *Heritage, culture, and politics in the postcolony*. Columbia University Press.

Ibrahim, F. (2008). *Settlers, saints and sovereigns: An ethnography of state formation in Western India*, Critical Asian Studies Series. Routledge.

Jain, J. (1984). *Painted myths of creation: Art and ritual of an Indian tribe*. Lalit Kala Academy.

Jain, J. (1986). Parallel structures: Ritual dimensions of some tribal dwellings. In C. Kagal (Ed.), *Vistāra—The architecture of India, catalogue of the exhibition* (pp. 120–126). The Festival of India.

Jain, J. (Ed.). (1997). *Ganga Devi: Traditions and expression in Mithila painting*. Mapin Publishing Pvt Ltd.

Jain, J. (Ed.). (1998). *Other masters: Five contemporary folk and tribal Artists of India*. Crafts Museum and the Handicrafts and Handlooms Exports Corporation of India Ltd.

Jones, R. A. (1986). Durkheim, Frazer, and Smith: The Role of Analogies and Exemplars in the Development of Durkheim's Sociology of Religion. (i). *American Journal of Sociology*</i>, 92(3), 596–627. http://www.jstor.org/stable/2779917 . https://doi.org/10.1086/228543

Jones, R. A. (1986). *Emile Durkheim: An introduction to four major works*. SAGE.

On modes of visual narration in early Buddhist art author(s): Vidya Dehejia source: The art [Bulletin]. (September 1990). http://www.jstor.org/stable/3045747. *Published by: College Art Association stable*, *72*(3) (pp. 374–392).

Kar. (2009a), "When was the postcolonial: A history of policing impossible lines," in: *Beyond Counter-Insurgency: Breaking the Impasse in Northeast India*. Bodhisattva S. Baruah (Ed.) (pp. 49–77). Oxford University Press.

Kar, B. (2009b) Historia Elastica. *Indian Historical Review*, *36*(1), 131–150. https://doi.org/10.1177/037698360903600108

Kaviraj, S. (2004). The nature of Indian democracy. In V. Das (Ed.), *Oxford handbook of Indian sociology* (pp. 451–471). Oxford University Press.

Kolb, D. A. (1939– (1984)). *Experiential learning: Experience as the source of learning and development*. Prentice Hall.

Krishna, K. (1991). *Political agenda of education: A study of colonialist and nationalist ideas*. SAGE.

Krishnamurti, J. (1953). Education and the significance of life. *Print*. Harper.

Krishnamurti, J. (1974). *On education*. Orient Longman.

Kulchyski, P. (1997). From appropriation to subversion: Aboriginal cultural production in the age of postmodernism. *American Indian Quarterly*, *21*(4), 605–620. https://doi.org/10.2307/1185715

Lave, J. (1988). *The culture of acquisition and the practice of understanding*. (Report no. IRL88-0007). Institute for Research on Learning.

Lave, J. (1991). *Situated learning: Legitimate peripheral participation*. Cambridge University Press.

Lave, J., & Wenger, E. (1991). *Situated learning: Legitimate peripheral participation*. Cambridge University Press.

Lepper, M. R., & Greene, D. (1979). *The hidden costs of reward*. Erlbaum.

Madan, T. N. (1982). Indigenous anthropology in non-Western countries: An overview. In H. Fahim (Ed.), *Indigenous anthropology in non-western countries* (pp. 71–85). Carolina Academic Press.

Madan, T. N. (1993). Whither Indian secularism? *Modern Asian Studies*, *27*(3), 667–697. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X00010921

Malkani, Z., & Rajani, S. (2017). Imperialism, art and pedagogy: Notes on knowledge production at the frontlines. *Open Library of Humanities*, *3*(1), 6. http://doi.org/10.16995/olh.81

Marriott, & McKim (Eds.). (1990). *India through Hindu categories*, Contributions To Indian Sociology Series. SAGE.

Mehta, D. (2014). The Ayodhya dispute: Law's imagination and the function of the status quo. In R. Chatterji (Ed.), *Wording the world: Veena das and the scenes of inheritance* (pp. 273–287). Fordham University Press.

Mishra, G., & Owens, R. (1978). *Mithila Folk paintings*. Huntington Gallery, University of Texas.

Monsutti, A. (2013). Anthropologizing Afghanistan: Colonial and postcolonial encounters. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, *42*(1), 269–285. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-anthro-092412-155444

Montessori, M. (2004). *The Montessori method: The origins of an educational innovation: Including an abridged and annotated edition of Maria Montessori's The Montessori method* (pp. 1870–1952). Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group Publishers.

Mountford, C. P. (1976). *Nomads of the Australian desert. Rigby, Ltd., Adelaide*.

Mukherjee, D. (2017). Indigenous art in transition: Tracing design and commercial intervention and its effects on the Bhil artist community. (Yet. in press).

Mukherjee, D. (2018). Tracing a life through paintings: A documentary-art account of Bhuri Bai. (Yet. in press).

Nachmanovitch, S. (1990). *Free play: Improvisation in life and art*.

Nag, S. (2009). Nehru and the Nagas: Minority nationalism and the post-colonial state. *Economic and Political Weekly*, *44*(49), 48–55.

Naithani, S. (2005). *Folktales from Northern India. William Crooke and pandit ram Gharib Chaube*. Shubhi Publications.

Nandy, A. (1995). History's forgotten doubles. *History and Theory*, *34*(2), 44–66. https://doi.org/10.2307/2505434

NCERT textbook. Verrier Elwin, Virginia, Clifford Geertz Jstor – Tiplut Nongbri ref.

Norman, D. A. (1973). Memory, knowledge, and the answering of questions. In R. L. Solso (Ed.), *Contemporary issues in cognitive psychology: The Loyola symposium*. Winston.

Ocvirk, O. G., Stinson, R. E., Wigg, P. R., Bone, R., & Cayton, D. L. (2008). *Art fundamentals: Theory and practice* (11th ed). McGraw-Hill Higher Education.

Padel, F., & Das, S. (2010). Out of this earth: East India Adivasis and the aluminum cartel, Delhi: Orient. Black.

Parikh, A. (1993). Music education in India today; A brief report. *International Journal of Music Education*, os–22(1), 40–41. https://doi.org/10.1177/025576149302200107

Patel, S. (Ed.). (2011). Doing sociology in India: Genealogies, locations, and practices. *New*. Oxford University Press.

Peirano, M. G. S. (1997). Onde está a antropología? *Mana*, *3*(2), 67–102. https://doi.org/10.1590/S0104-93131997000200003

Peirano, M. G. S. (1998). When anthropology is at home: The different contexts of a single discipline. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, *27*(1), 105–128. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.anthro.27.1.105

Pestalozzi, J. H., 1746–1827. (1977). How Gertrude teaches her children ; Pestalozzi's educational writings. *Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi; edited and with prefaces by Daniel N. Robinson*. University Publications of America.

Pink, S. (2001). Doing Ethnography: Images, Media and Representation in Research [8 paragraphs]. *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung*. *Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, *3*(1), Art. 9. http://nbn-resolving.de/urn:nbn:de:0114-fqs020197

Pink, S. (2013). *Doing visual ethnography*. SAGE.

Pink, S. (2015). *Doing sensory ethnography*. SAGE.

Raina, M. K. (2002). Guru Shishya. *Psychology and Developing Societies*, 14(1), 167–198. https://doi.org/10.1177/097133360201400109

Ramanujan, A. K. (1989). Is there an Indian way of thinking? An informal essay. *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, *23*(1), 41–58. https://doi.org/10.1177/006996689023001004

Randeria, S. (1999). Jenseits von Soziologie und soziokultureller Anthropologie: Zur Ortsbestimmung der nichtwestlichen Welt in einer zukünftigen Sozialtheorie. *Soziale Welt*, *50*(4), 373–382.

Randeria, S. (2007a). The state of globalization: Legal plurality, overlapping sovereignties and ambiguous Alliances between Civil Society and the Cunning State in India. *Theory, Culture and Society*, *24*(1), 1–33. https://doi.org/10.1177/0263276407071559

Randeria, S. (2007b). Global designs and local life-worlds: Colonial legacies of conservation, disenfranchisement and environmental governance in postcolonial India. *Interventions*, *9*(1), 12–30. https://doi.org/10.1080/13698010601173791

Randeria, S., Fuchs, M., & Linkenbach, A. (Eds.). (2004). Konfigurationen der Moderne: Diskurse zu Indien. *Soziale Welt Sonderband, 15*. Nomos Verlag.

Ranjit, H. (1996). Situation and Symbol: A ritual identity and mode of expression under bourgeois cultural appropriation, with special reference to Warli art. In *Indian Journal of Social Work (special issue on 'The Social Construction and Expression of Ethnicity and Identity*. Tata Institute of Social Sciences, *57*, No. 1.

Rao, V. Narayana, Shulman, David and Subrahmanyam. *Sanjay*. (2001), *Textures of Time: Writing History in South India*, 1600–1800. Permanent Black.

In Resnick, L. B. (Ed.). *Knowing learning, and instruction: Essays in Honor of Robert Glaser*. Erlbaum, and in Brown, J.S., Collins, A., and Duguid, P. (1989). "Situated Cognition and the Culture of Learning." *Educational Researcher*, 18(1), 32-42.

Ribeiro, G. L., & Escobar, A. (Eds.). (2006). *World anthropologies: Disciplinary transformations within systems of Power*. Oxford, Berg.

Saran, A. K. (1969). Gandhi's theory of society and our times. *Studies in Comparative Religion*, *3*(4), 177–179.

Saravanakumar. AR,(2017),Paper presented entitled "Mindfulness in Contemporary Education –An Over View" in an International Conference on Focus on Mindfulness: Glimpses of Neuroscience Education-2017(ICFM:GNSE- 2017) organized by Department ofPhysical Education and Health Sciences, Alagappa University, Karaikudi on 7th & 8th December 2017.

Scardamalia, M., & Bereiter, C. (1985). Fostering the development of self-regulation in children's knowledge processing. In S. F. Chipman, J. W. Segal & R. Glaser (Eds.), *Thinking and learning skills: Research and open questions*. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Scardamalia, M., Bereiter, C., & Steinbach, R. (1984). Teachability of reflective process in written composition. *Cognitive Science*, *8*(2), 173–190. https://doi.org/10.1207/s15516709cog0802_4

Sherbaniuk, K. Working towards partnership with indigenous communities. https://www.academia.edu/11011494/Working_Towards_Partnership_with_Indigenous_Communities_Collaborative_Research_as_Decolonizing

Shils, E. (1961). *The intellectual between tradition and modernity: The Indian situation*. Mouton.

Simpkins, M. (2010). Listening between the lines: Reflections on listening, interpreting, and collaborating with aboriginal communities in Canada. *Canadian Journal of Native Studies*.

Singh, M. S. (2004). Journey into distant land: Poetics of *Mithila* painting. *Indian Folklife*, *3*(4).

Singh, R. N. (2015). Roma Chatterji, speaking with pictures: Folk art and the narrative traditions in India. *Society and Culture in South Asia*, *1*(2), 208–210. https://doi.org/10.1177/2393861714556428

Sundar, N. (2010). Vigilantism, culpability and moral dilemmas. *Critique of Anthropology*, *30*(1), 113–121. https://doi.org/10.1177/0308275X09360140

Swaminathan, J. (1987). Submerged archipelago, orig. in Swaminathan ed. In *Lalit Kala Contemporary* No: 40 (March 1995), *The perceiving fingers*, catalogue of the Roopankar Museum (Bhopal: Bharat Bhavan, 1987), rpt (pp. 57–59).

Swaminathan, J. (1987). *The perceiving fingers. Catalogue of Roopankar collection of folk and Adivasi art, Bharat bhavan, Bhopal, India*.

Swaminathan, J. (1995). Pre-naturalistic art and postnaturalistic vision: An approach to the appreciation of tribal art. orig. in Ashish Bose. In *Lalit Kala Contemporary* No: 40/ Special Issue on J Swaminathan U. P. Sinha & R. P. Tyagi (Eds.) *Demography of Tribal Development*. New Delhi (*New Delhi: B R publishing corporation*. 1990), rpt.

Thakur, M. (2017). *Mithila-A globalized art form.* International Journal of Research – Granthaalayah: 5 pp. 208–212.

Tilche, A. (2015). Pithora in the time of kings, elephants and art dealers: Art and social change in Western India. *Visual Anthropology*, *28*(1), 1–20. https://doi.org/10.1080/08949468.2015.973255

Turner, V. (1969). *The ritual process: Structure and anti-structure*. Hawthorne.

Tyler, R. W. (Ralph Winfred). (1902–94). *Basic principles of curriculum and instruction*. University of Chicago Press, 1969.

Uberoi, J. (1987), "The other European science of nature?" Pal Singh. *Journal of Indian Council of Philosophical Research*, *5*, 121–135.

Uberoi, J. P. S. (1968) Science and Swaraj. *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, *2*(1), 119–123. https://doi.org/10.1177/006996671968010 7

Uberoi, P., Sundar, N., & Deshpande, S. (Eds.). (2008). *Anthropology in the east: Founders of Indian sociology and social anthropology*. Seagull Publications Books.

Vajpeyi, A. (2012). *Righteous republic: The political foundations of modern India*. Harvard University Press.

Veena Das and Shalini Randeria, "Social sciences and public debates: The case of India", *Socio*, 5 | 2015, 81-98.

Valdimar Tr. Hafstein, V. (2018). Intangible heritage as a festival; or, Folklorization revisited. *Journal of American Folklore*, *131*(520), 127. https://doi.org/10.5406/jamerfolk.131.520.0127

Verrier, E. (1964). *The tribal world of Verrier Elwin: An autobiography*. Oxford University Press.

Wakankar, M. (2010). *Subalternity and religion: The prehistory of Dalit empowerment in South Asia*. Routledge.

Yadav, Y. (2000). Understanding the second democratic upsurge: Trends of Bahujan participation in electoral politics in the 1990s. In F. Frankel, Z. Hassan, R. Bhargava & B. Arora (Eds.), *Transforming India: Social and political dynamics of democracy* (pp. 120–145). Oxford University Press.

Acknowledgements

I'm am grateful to my entire community that I lived with, interacted with, learnt from, worked with and most importantly shared my experiences with. It may not be possible to acknowledge of every single being from that community in this written document. Nonetheless, I would like to share my gratitude to everyone who were a part of my lived reality.

I would sincerely like to thank all the artists individually, who helped me and introduced me to their culture and art. I would specially like to mention my teacher and artist, PadmaShri Bhuri Bai, and other Bhil artists Sher Singh, Gangu Bai, Subhash Bhil and Dabbu Baria who welcomed me to their lives and practices. I would like to thank all the child artists who sat through the long sessions of interviews and drawing classes while I did my studies. Young artists from the Bhil community: Anand Baria, Anisha Baria, Anita Baria, Anjali Baria, Manisha Baria, Nirmala Baria, Reeta Bhuria, Sangeeta Bhabor and Suman Baria. Roshni Gond and other artists from the Gond community also helped he take the study forward.

At IGRMS, I would give my sincere thanks to the Director, Prof Sarit Chowdhury, Mr R. Jharia, Mr. Shakmacha Nongmaithem, Dr. Mohammed Rehan and all the other officials and staff. Some of the interviewees from IGRMS were of the Head librarian, Dr Rehan Mohammed, Assistant curator of the photography section, Mr Anand Tehenguria, the video librarian, Mr Hemant Parihar, Vikki Sidharth and Bhagvan Borde. Similarly, I am grateful to Mr Mishra and Nidhi from Tribal Museum and other staff at Tribal Research Institute and Bharat Bhavan. I would like to especially mention Ms Sudha Bhandari who collaborated with me on my first workshop with the young Bhil artists. I also received a lot of support from local teachers, NGOs and private institutions from the field to whom I am thankful. My fieldtrips in Gujarat were guided by actors Vanraj Sisodia and Satchit Puranik to whom I shall stay forever grateful.

I would especially like to thank my institution and all teachers, seniors and colleagues from IDC School of Design, IIT Bombay who made my learning experience and research journey, a memorable one. I would especially like to thank Prof. Uday Athavankar, Prof. B.K. Chakravarthy, Prof. Prakash Bokil, Prof. GV Sreekumar, Prof. Phani Tetali, Prof. Nina Sabnani, Prof. Shilpa Ranade, Prof. Mandar, Prof. Jayesh, Prof. Raja, Prof. Alka, Prof. Rowena and many others for teaching me the values of a researcher and for all the incredible support in my research and funding. I would sincerely thank each one of you for believing in me. My sincere regards to all my RPC panel members, Prof Prasad Bokil and Prof. Anjali Monteiro for

going through my work repeatedly and sharing their insightful feedback. I would also like to thank my seniors and batchmates at IDC who guided me through thick and thin; Prof. Sharmila Sinha, Anita, Bhavna, Chetan, Devanuj, Khusboo, Shaleen, Pankaj, Priyanka, Sandeep, Lavanya, Seema, Sushmita, Swayamsiddha, Dhanashri, Amrita, Deepshikha and many others. Sincere thanks to Rishab, Ashwin, Piyush, Snigdha and Shyam Sundar who travelled with me for the fieldtrips to Bhopal, Jhabua and Alirajpur and who were kind enough to let me use some of their photographs for this thesis. Thanks to Shinjini Sanyal for helping me with writing, Sayantan Halder and Dijoy C. Boral with whom I often discussed by work and insights, and for their valuable feedback.

I would forever be indebted to my supervisors, Mazhar Kamran and Prof. Disha Nawani for not just mentoring my research subject but also revealing the characteristics of a fantastic human being, teacher and a role model.

And last but not the least, I would like to thank my incredible family; my parents (Gautam and Tapati Mukherjee) and in-laws (Chittaranjan and Swapna), my aunt and uncle (Jayanti and Subir), my siblings (Debjit Mukherjee, Sinjini Bandyopadhyay, Prasanth Nair) my husband (Shayok Banerjee) and daughter (Tisha Banerjee) who went through some of the hardest days with me, during the lockdown, without a complain. I wish I could share my degree with my mother, without whose support I would have never been able to complete the work.

Thank you for all the love and support.

Debjani Mukherjee
Email: debjani.animate@gmail.com
https://debjanibol.myportfolio.com/work