



CRAFT DOCUMENTATION

The Khovar and the Sohrai

A Design Research Seminar Project

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M.Des (Animation)

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Approval

Design Research Seminar

By Nishant Venketesh
is approved as partial fulfilment of requirement of post-graduate degree in Animation.

Prof. Nina Sabnani
[Project Guide]

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 not misrepresented or fabricated or falsified any idea/date/ fact/source in my submission. I understand that any violation of the above will cause a disciplinary action by the Institute and also can evoke penal action from the sources which have not been properly cited or from whom proper permission has not been taken when needed.

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Acknowledgment

I express my thanks to all the people who have been humble enough to find time for me from their busy lives. This project would not have met conclusions without the support of these people.

I would sincerely like to thank my project guide Prof. Nina Sabnani for the guidance and support throughout the project. I also thank her for giving me the opportunity to work on this craftwork of Jharkhand which deserves so much attention.

I would also like to express my gratitude to Mr.Bulu Imam, Mr.Gustaav Imam, Mr.Justin Imam for sharing their pages of life with me. The artists Parwati Devi, Rukmani Devi and Putli have been so cooperative and their engaging with the art has been admirable.

I also thank my parents for their continuous support.

Nishant Venketesh

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Index

The place

Jharkhand.....01

Hazaribagh.....02

The craft

Khovar.....04

Sohrai.....05

Technique and
material.....06**The people**Bulu
Imam.....07Gustaav
Imam.....08Justin
Imam.....09Sanskriti
Museum.....10-13

Putli.....14

Parwati
Devi.....15Rukmani
Devi.....16Experiences from the
past.....17-18Witnessing the
present.....19-20Vision for the
future.....21Documentary
Film.....22Ormanjhi
murals.....23-36Observation and
conclusion.....37

Bibliography.....38



A still from a painting in Art gallery, Audrey House, Ranchi

Jharkhand

When I talk to people and say that I come from the state Jharkhand, the very image that takes shape in their minds is that of the famous Indian cricketer MS Dhoni. And the best place that they could guess to be my hometown would always be Ranchi. Some also seemed unsure about a steel plant being located in the state. However, in this project, we are about to visit the state for a different purpose. The murals done in the state have always been attention seekers to the visitors. Whether one is in Ranchi, Deogarh or Hazaribagh, one would always find some colourful walls along the public roads of these ciites. So, this project is to know the artworks in details, the people involved in it and the insight story.



Hazaribagh

Hazaribagh is one of such privileged cities but the city becomes the prior place for my research because the place is a home to most of the mural artists. Hazaribagh is located at a distance of 135 kms from the capital city, Ranchi. The name Hazaribagh means 'hazaar bagh' in hindi, which means 1000 gardens. The place is well known for it's national park and resort place. The place also becomes important for our project as it is here that the initiators and the artists of the Khovar and Sohrai works dwell.



THE CRAFT

Murals

The Murals that we witness on the public walls of the city are done by the tribal artists. The murals are categorized into two basic types. One is the Khovar and the other is the Sohrai. In simple terms, Khovar is the one which is black and white in colour whereas Sohrai has all the colours. Both the Khovar and the Sohrai show different forms of the birds and the animals.

The most admirable feature of these art styles are that they are not repetitive. One won't find the same painting again because they are not painted again by the artists. And, also they don't copy their pictures so they are used to drawing pictures which are unique in their content and composition.



Khovar and Sohrai

Khovar

Khovar is an art form which is being practised since years by the tribal people of Jharkhand. It is not an art of the men. It is only practised by the women in the villages. They paint their mud houses this way on the occasion of marriages.

The word Khovar means the bridal cave. The art derived its name Khovar when a bridal couple were sent to spend their nuptial night in the forest khovar. They observed the paintings of the cave symbols and drew the same in the interiors. From then, the tradition of painting the houses during marriages has continued among the tribal women. It is practised in the spirit of sacred art since years.

During the marriage, the bride leaves her mother's home from the khovar room. She is then received by the husband and the family in a similar room. From her mother-in-law, she learns designs particular to her husband's village. It becomes interesting in a way because she also brings out the designs which she had learnt from her mother and aunts in the home village. (who derived their design patterns from their learnings with their own mother-in-laws in the villages.)





Sohrai

Sohrai

Sohrai is the evolved form of Khovar. The women of the Kurmi tribe are skilled and known for these paintings. During the months of October and November, the women begin painting their wall houses in the name of Ghar Rangna. Their prime preparation for the festival of Diwali includes painting the houses with Sohrai paintings.

On such occasions, the cattle are given a bath in some pond before the village. The children of the village then welcome the cattle by singing songs. Oil is applied to their horns and vermillion is applied at their foreheads. The oxen are taken to the middle of the courtyard and the harness of the plough is placed upon their necks. The calves are taken to the cows and are allowed to drink their mothers' milk.





Technique and Material

Khowar

A thick base coat of dark mud(kali mitti) is applied over the wall houses. When the mud becomes dry, a coat of very light coloured mud called milky mud (duddhi mitti) is layered over it. This layer is then scraped with the help of broken combs to reveal the dark colour underneath and thereby forming different patterns according to the swipe movements.

Forms of human, birds, animals. plants and fish are painted by the artists.

Sohrai

For making the Sohrai, the artists strictly use their own pigments like red ochre(gerua), yellow ochre(pila matti), dark olive(kali matti), commercial blue whitener(neel) and vermillion(sindur). In some cases they use blue and yellow to produce green.





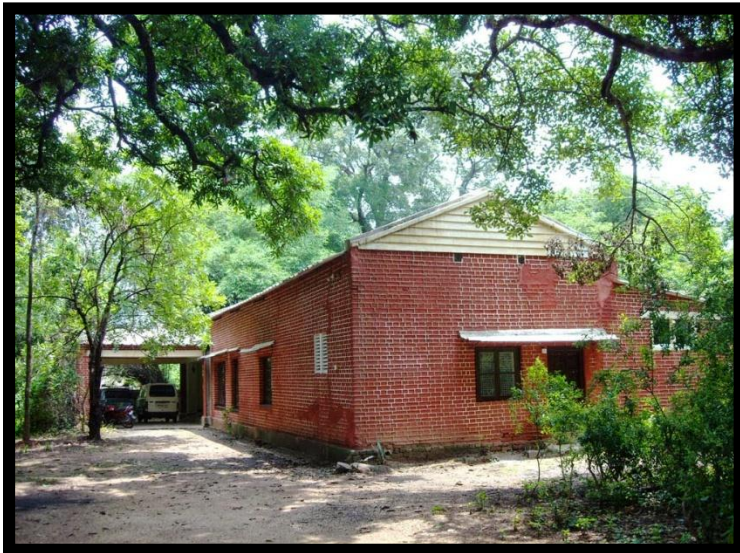
THE PEOPLE

Bulu Imam

Bulu Imam is an environmental activist who works for the protection of tribal culture and heritage in Jharkhand. He received the Gandhi International Peace Award in 2012. He brought into light the Khovar art and then the Sohrai murals painted on the walls of the mud houses of the Hazaribagh villages. In the year 1995, he established the Tribal Women Artists Cooperative(TWAC) to promote the tribal art of the region. TWAC has held over 50 international exhibitions of Khovar and Sohrai paintings in Australia, Canada, Europe and UK.

He established the Sanskriti Museum in 1995. The Museum is a result of his continuous effort to promote and preserve the cultural heritage of Jharkhand. It contains artefacts that simply cannot be replaced. He is assisted in the maintenance of the museum by his sons Gustaav and Justin.

" This culture of rock art is thousands of years old. Destroying it in the name of development would be unlawful. "





Gustaav Imam

Gustaav completed his Museum studies from University of East Anglia, Norwich in 2016. He has been helping his father by making efforts for the safety and maintenance of the Sanskriti Museum. He believes that there is a need to build a culture for the coming generation where we can have a place of learning. And that's where the museum steps in.

“Art has to be looked in the context of archaeology. It's not just art.

It is the museum and the curators who bring the objects into context to tell the story of the past. Apart from the past, it is the pride for the younger generation as well.

We created the museum to give voice to the region which still needs support from governments, institutions and universities.

There's always a possibility of improvement. We need a good team. We need good minds. “



Justin Imam

Justin has been into caring of the Sanskriti Museum for a long time. The family also gets encouragement and support from friends living in abroad. With the help of funds that they collect, they distribute mud to the tribal artists for the paintings. The red ochre or the yellow ochre are bought in sacks where each sack carried 25 kg of mud. Each sack of mud is available at around Rs. 250 in the market.

Justin has been a part of every important project assigned to them. The Khovar and Sohrai art became popular in 2015. The art got immensely highlighted when 15 artists painted the Hazaribagh Railway Station. 25 little platform murals added much to the beauty of the station. The Honourable Prime Minister Narendra Modi in his 'Mann ki Baat' programme mentioned about this art as an inspirational thing to the 'Swachhta' and 'Saundaryakaran' of the place.

Under Justin's supervision, the team also got an opportunity to have murals painted at an area of 18,000 sq. feet. The walls belonged to the Ormanjhi Botanical Garden which lies at the outskirts of Ranchi.

"The art has immense potential. The more people see it, the more they feel for it."

In the time to come, the art will be used as an indicator to identify Jharkhand with in the world outside. "

The Sanskriti Museum











Putli Devi

Putli Devi is a Sohrai artist who has been practising the art for around twenty years. In conversation with her, she talked about the preparation that has to be done before the painting. On the walls of the mud-houses, first the Burli Mitti is applied. Over it, layers of cowdung and black ochre(kali mitti) are put on. Lastly, milky mud(Dudhi mitti) is pasted and then the painting on the wall is begun. She has been an active member of TWAC and has exhibited her works in Ranchi, Delhi, Patna, Chaibasa and Gumla. She also got the opportunity to exhibit in other countries like Australia, Germany and Italy.

Apart from good painting skills, she happens to be a very good singer. I requested her to sing a song for me. And, the song that she sung was so engrossing. I could easily connect to the rhythm of the song. I have used the song as a background piece in my short documentary film.



Parwati Devi

Parwati Devi lives in a village named Bhelwara in Hazaribagh. She is a Sohrai artist and the picture of her house walls talk enough about her skills. She has worked as an artist for 40 years. She teaches the younger generation of the family so that the girls can carry forward this art in whichever family they settle.

The conversation I had with her was interesting. She talked about the training they had in the early days in Khelgaon, Ranchi when they were asked to paint blind-fold. She said she was very good with that and she always used to win prizes.

But what differentiates her from others is the capability to paint the pictures without having any references. She says things come to her casually and her hands move gradually on the wall to create the picture. She never takes any references from any pictures, nor does she take copies her own pictures. She takes care of the composition of the painting before she begins. She makes sure of the boundary that the painting will have so that the space on the wall is properly utilized. She said she always gives importance to the horse in her paintings. She charges Rs. 500 for every mural.

“ Government bhi humko bolta hai. Ee joh Sohrai painting hai na. Isko aap mat chodiye.

Sohrai painting jinda rakh be na toh tum jinda rahbe. “



Rukmani Devi

Rukmani Devi is a Khovar artist and is also one of the most experienced artists among the tribal women. She has both her sons engaged into Sohrai paintings. Their sons have been practising this art for around 20 years. In a conversation with them, I came to realize that the khovar is not much in demand. They believe that Sohrai is still prevalent because it has more colours and therefore appears appealing to the people.



THE STORY

Experiences from the past

In 1991, Bulu Imam discovered the first rock art in ISCO, Hazaribagh. Two years later, the Khovar and Sohrai was brought to the newspapers. The exhibitions by TWAC begun in the year 1998 and the artists received great appreciation from the people worldwide. A very less number of exhibitions were done in India.

The year was 2008 and Jharcraft was made. It was a Government of Jharkhand undertaking and it intended to create job opportunities in the Handloom and the Handcraft sectors. So, they marketed the art created by the tribal artists. The artwork became a product for Government's promotion of art.

It was found out that in the rural areas, the mud houses had been vanishing. It was being encroached by the cement construction. As a result, the art was brought onto the walls as murals. It could find space on the urban walls, boundary walls, interiors of certain buildings. The painting was done with commercial colours using plastic emulsion paints.



In the year 2015, the Hazaribagh Railway Station got painted. And eventually, eight of the artists were invited to the Indira Gandhi Museum. Their work was appreciated and they got recognition from the Government. As a result, the overall impact was not just employment but also the recognition.

So far, 15 international exhibitions had been done. But, the remuneration was still a concern for the artists. The funds were not enough to generate incomes. There were 8-10 villages in Hazaribagh practising this art and were doing this on annual occasions.

The art saw a little set back. When children in the family were growing up, the aspirations of the family were tending to change. So, there were only few artists who were still into this and they became the mascots to carry the art forward.



Witnessing the present

In the past one year, the art had begun finding space on the urban walls. The whole of Ranchi had prominent walls painted. The hazaribagh villages have had also a lot of foreign visitors. As Justin says, there was a sense of pride that could be felt when people from outside come to see the villages.

If one is visiting Ranchi or Hazaribagh, one would easily get to see the murals on the walls in the cities. But, there's also something of much concern regarding the dilution of the art form. In some places of Ranchi, where one would see the long stretch of murals on the walls, other artworks on the same walls also gain the attention. It is because the art form and style seems to have been diluted. Although, this stretch of paintings were not supervised under Justin and others. On having a talk with one of the Sohrai artists regarding this, the answer that I got from him was modification. He said there are artists who are being trained to practise this art and they don't mind copying it from mobiles and other sources. The change in the style of the art, he said must be an attempt to beautify the artwork which is certainly not acceptable.





On the other hand, Bulu Imam has been for years, been taking care of the artefacts in the form of a museum. The Sankriti Museum has a good collection of the Khovar and Sohrai paintings. He has also been into archaeological studies and the museum also has collection of small stones and tools. But over the years, the maintenance of the Sanskriti Museum has been a thing of concern.

The Hazaribagh Administration has given permission to sell the land and measures are being taken by the property developers for their building construction. Mr.Imam has been continuously contacting the State Government asking them to look into the matter. Efforts are being made asking the Government to refuse the permission to sell the land. His proposals are also regarding shifting the museum to a safer place so that no damage is done to the artefacts.

In the month of February,2017, a new project has been assigned to the tribal artists to paint the Ranchi International Airport.

On the other hand, the State Government has notified that it would be funding for a new University which shall be constructed near the Sanskriti Museum. The setup would be have a new museum constructed which shall have all the archives of Mr. Bulu Imam. They include all his research papers, books, poems and other literary works. The Government has also agreed to fund the Imam family in the renovation of the Sanskriti Museum.



Vision for the future

The idea for the future is to help in the promotion and preservation of the cultural heritage of Jharkhand. As Gustaaav puts in, it's important to consider a museum as a sacred place to live in. Not only the renovation of the museum but to also the promotion of the art because the promotion eventually leads to the preservation of the art.

The Imam family has been trying and attempting to have possibilities of rural tourism as well. The proposal for a new museum with new objectives to the state government has been made by them and things are appearing to be favourable. The villages in Hazaribagh are huge and the paintings on their walls are beautiful. Influx of people as tourists is a distant dream for everyone.



Documentary Film

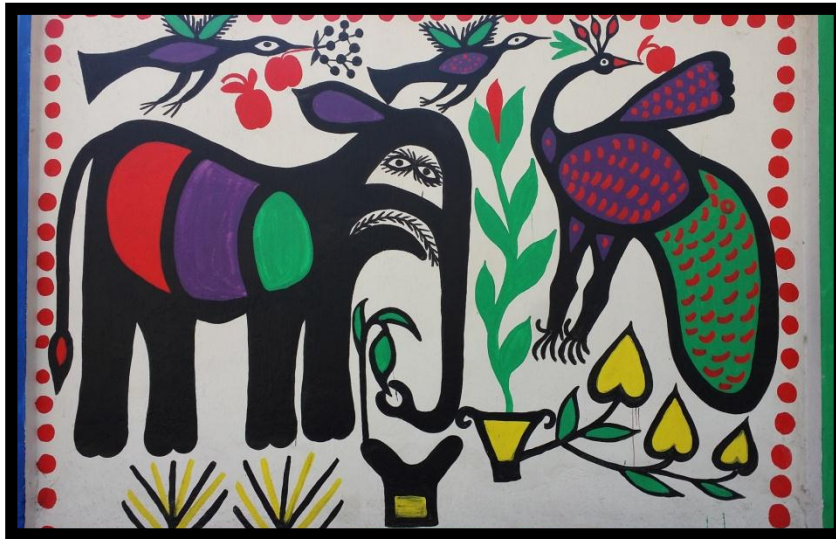
I made a short documentary film titled “Murals of Hazaribagh”. The film has short interviews and their experiences of the Khovar and Sohrai artists. The link for the film is

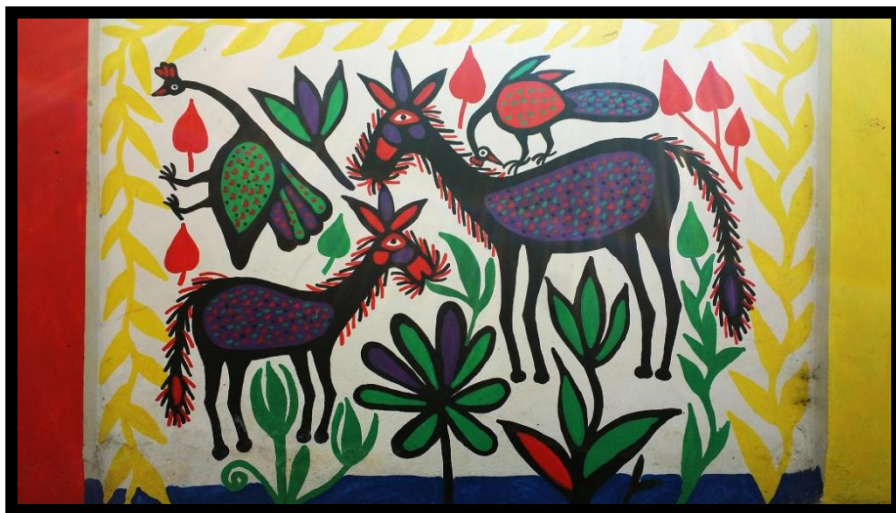
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=At-C3zb4lO8>



Murals

The following murals were painted in the year 2015. And the walls belong to the Ormanjhi Zoo in Ranchi. The project was done under the supervision of Justin Imam. The entire area that the walls cover is around 184 sq. feet.

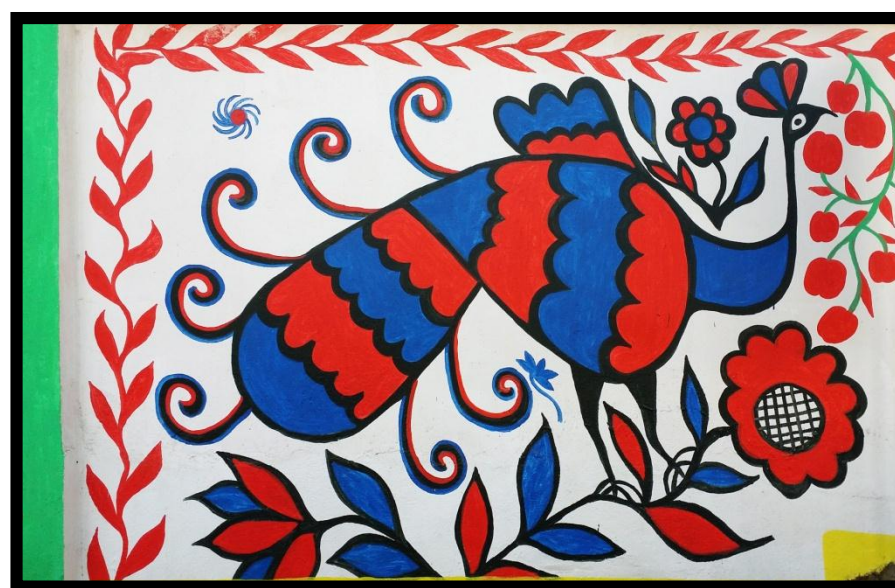














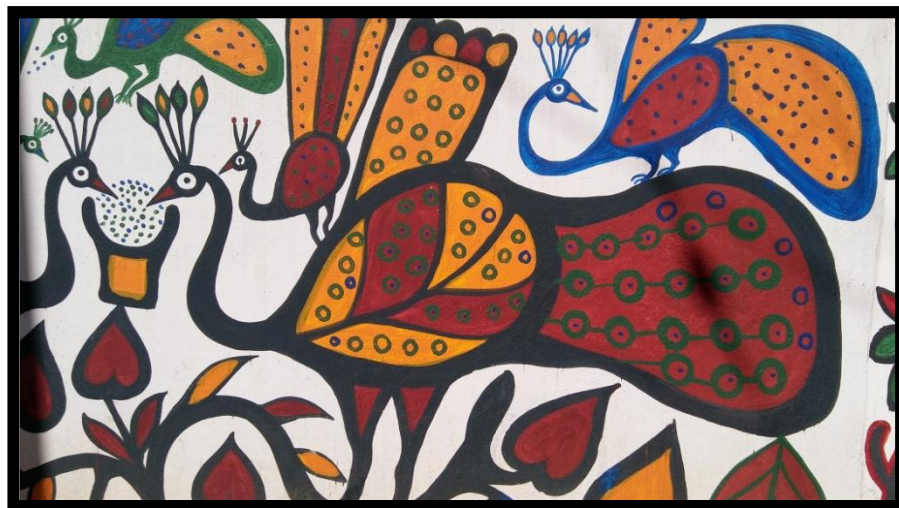














Observation and Conclusion

The craft of Khovar and Sohrai paintings is expressive. Most of the murals have animals, birds, fishes as their elements. And each of them conveys a story. The murals are all painted in the public walls of different cities and they are so engaging that any art lover or even any kid probably would stop and gaze at those images for some time.

But, the matter is that if an artist creates some artwork, he might get appreciation for the work. But he shall get money in return only if someone needs the work for some purpose or desires to have it. So, our artists are falling short to satisfy themselves financially because it is the responsibility of the artists here, to create a want (if not need) for the artwork. Not only the creation but the promotion of the artwork also has to be done by the artists themselves and this is where we are tending to fail. At the same time, many tribal artists have discontinued the profession and the dilution of the artwork by new artists is a concern. But Mr. Imam deserves credit for being able to generate income for the tribal artists in the form of exhibition.

The works and efforts of Mr. Imam and his family have been remarkable. For all these years, they have not only tried preserving the cultural heritage of the state. The museum is the sum total collection of his artefacts and all his research in the field of archaeology. I was completely unaware of his contributions towards the State art before I even started this project. They have been continuously trying their best to propose the objectives of the Sanksriti Museum and the immediate responses from the State Government are expected to be supportive. However, it's sad that a person having spent so much of years, has been sincerely trying to promote and preserve the state art and still he needs to make

convincing proposals to the government of the same state to cooperate in the matter. The matter which deals with the preservation of the state's cultural heritage. In the early months of the year 2017, there have been some positive response from the Government and which has been a reason of relief for the Imam family.

The life of the tribal artists, I feel is like every other artist. They have the skill but they need projects. And because they don't get projects regularly, they are in a dilemma whether they continue this profession or halt this very pursuit. The professional pause between the projects is sometimes so long that it is natural for one to lose hope. I sincerely feel that the artists' work should be recognized to an extent where he is able to meet his financial needs.

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THANK YOU