



Tribal Wall Painting a traditional knowledge: Socio-Cultural study of South Bengal

Santanu Panda¹, Shreyasha Pal², Jhilik Gorain³

Abstract

Painting is the act or process of using paint. The paint can create an artwork known as a painting, or it can be used more practically as a protective coating or form of decoration. Paintings are a form of visual art that captures the expression of ideas and emotions on a two-dimensional surface. Painting is a Bengali folk art style, traditionally practiced by women, and consisting of coloured motifs, patterns, and symbols that are painted on floors and walls with paints made from rice flour and /or various painting colour on religious occasions. But tribals are mainly preparing it through cow dung and dust of waste battery; sometimes they are used white soil/mud. The aim of this paper is to examine the changes revolving around the traditional art forms of tribes of South-Bengal. The focus is on the tribals practicing wall art in the South-Bengal. The main objectives of this study are: to understand the wall art of the tribal people and the relation between cultural expression as well as traditional knowledge and/or ritualistic significance of this tribal art; The research methodology is qualitative in nature and content analysis is undertaken using data from field study and secondary sources such as books, research articles, tribal literature, journal articles and monographs.

Received 15 Jan., 2023; Revised 29 Jan., 2023; Accepted 31 Jan., 2023 © The author(s) 2023.

Published with open access at www.questjournals.org

I. Introduction

India has long been known as a country that displayed cultural and traditional vibrancy alongside conservative arts and crafts. As a result, India's folk and tribal arts are incredibly ethnic and direct, yet colourful and energetic enough to speak volumes about the country's rich cultural identity and past. In addition to folk art, tribes and rural populations pursue a variety of tribal arts. India has a rich cultural folk tradition. Folklore arts, beliefs, rites and rituals, myths, and rural handicrafts are factors that enrich our folk-tradition. Religion has a very important role in the formation of identity of each society. It is the shell of cultural formation. The individuals in a society are born into them. It is through these customs and practices that social solidarity remains. Another element that contributes to the creation of identity is ethnicity. All our folk art and culture forms have an ethnic nature. They remain within a particular geographical region – Bhadu and Jhumur of Bankura, Jhumur and Nanchni of Purulia and Nautanki in Darbhanga.

Painting is the act or process of using paint. The paint can create an artwork known as a painting, or it can be used more practically as a protective coating or form of decoration. Paintings are a form of visual art that captures the expression of ideas and emotions on a two-dimensional surface.

Artists use the elements of shape, colours, line, tones, and textures in unique ways to produce paintings that convey sensations of movement, volume, space, and light – traditionally on a flat surface.

A painting can represent a natural scene or object, describe a narrative, or be wholly abstract. Paintings are one of the oldest known forms of visual expression. The oldest paintings are thought to be approximately 40,000 years old. Some of the oldest paintings from the Neolithic period are those found in caves.⁴

¹ Dr. Santanu Panda, Dept. of Anthropology, Sukumar Sengupta Mahavidyalay, email: panda973363@gmail.com

² Shreyasha Pal, Research intern, Dept. of IPR, WBNUJS

³ Jhilik Gorain, Dept. of Food Technolodgy, Techno main, Salt Lake.

⁴ <https://www.eden-gallery.com/news/what-is-painting>

Wall paintings can be called Murals. They can be created by working directly onto a wall. A characteristic of murals is the way they incorporate architectural elements seamlessly into the artwork. Murals dating right from the Upper Palaeolithic Age to the Egyptian era have been discovered. The word 'mural' became more popularly used after the Mexican 'Muralista' Art Movement.

From all the various styles and methods of creating wall paintings – 'Murals'; the best known technique is the fresco, which combines a lime wash and natural water soluble colours.⁵

The traditions of Indian dance and dance dramas are among the most perplexingly complex and varied theatrical cultures of the world. The geographical vastness, different ecological conditions, multiplicity of races and their languages, the complex religious beliefs and ritual practices and equally intricate social structure have all contributed in creating the most colourful panorama of dance and dance drama traditions. The tribal knowledge and culture gives a different dimension to this district. The people of Purulia uplift their traditions and culture through various works of art and performances. Human and animal images, as well as situations from everyday life are constructed in a loose rhythmic pattern.

India has always been known for its art and architecture. The history of India in terms of art is very immense. Almost every state has its art which has its speciality. And the art by tribal communities of India is the most vibrant. These tribal arts were rich in symbolic aspects as they had very specific rituals and characteristics. Let's find out more about these tribal arts.

Here are 10 Tribal Arts of India:

- **Warli Folk Paintings:** Belonging to the state of Maharashtra, this tribal art is famous for its elementary wall paintings. It is one of the finest examples of folk paintings. In this, basic geometrical shapes are used such as- square, circle, and triangle. These paintings are carved in white colour (bamboo used as a brush) on a dark red coloured background. The painting portrays hunting, festivals, fishing, farming, dancing and other scenes of daily life.
- **Madhubani Art:** Madhubani is an Indian art formed by the women of Mithila. Also referred to as Mithila art, it is originated from Bihar. The paintings are made on freshly plastered mud walls, which generally depict nature or religious intent. It involves pictures of Shiva, Krishna, Saraswati, Rama, Durga, Sun, Moon, trees, flowers, animals, wedding scenes etc. The painting is completed using brushes, twigs, fingers, match-sticks with natural dyes and pigments etc. The main aim of this painting is to cover every inch, gaps with all possible patterns, shapes, designs.
- **Saura Paintings:** Saura is a style of mural paintings which is related to the Saura tribe of Odisha. These paintings also originated from the state of Orissa but it is also found in the states of Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh and Jharkhand. They are also called Icons. The backdrop of the painting is prepared from red or yellow ochre which is painted using brush and bamboo. Very simple figures are used which depict the simple yet meaningful everyday life of a village farmer. These paintings are similar to Warli paintings. The only difference between the two is the use of geometrical figures. These paintings are drawn during marriage, child-birth or any other special occasion.
- **Bhil Art:** Bhils are the second largest tribal community of India. Bhil art is also given by them. Originating from the states of Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Gujarat, and Maharashtra. This art unveils the life of Bhils them self. This tribe used dots to depict life in vibrant colours. They try to connect their art and paintings with their Gods, Goddesses and nature. This includes carving of the Sun, Moon, and nature, Gods, etc. from natural and herbal colours on walls or paper. One can easily understand the story behind the painting.
- **Gond:** Originated from the state of Madhya Pradesh and nearby states, this art is carved on the mud walls. These paintings are rich in details, lines, colours, mystery and humour. These paintings are also drawn on paper, canvas, cloths etc. In these paintings, lines, dots and dashes are important features. This painting is drawn during major festivals such as Holi, Diwali, etc. These paintings are so good in quality that they can last for about 20 years even without any tampering.
- **Khovar Art:** This traditional wall art is done in the harvest season. The word Kho or Koh means cave and Var means husband. This matriarchal art is done by the women of the house to decorate the wedding chambers of newlywed couples. Khovar art originated from Jharkhand. The backdrop is prepared by firstly applying a coat of black mud and then followed by applying a coat of white mud. After this, a

⁵ <https://www.dsourc.in/resource/wall-painting/history-wall-painting#:~:text=Wall%20paintings%20can%20be%20called,Egyptian%20era%20have%20been%20discovered>

tool is used to peel the coating and give the desired design. Usually, tribal people living in the forest carve animals like, Tiger, Snake, Peacock, etc. while those living on plains carve Cow, Goat, Pigeon, etc.

Traditional Knowledge

Traditional culture is a part of traditional knowledge (TK) As per World Intellectual Property Organisation (WIPO), “TK comprises tradition-based literary, artistic or scientific works, performances, inventions, scientific discoveries, designs, marks, names and symbols, undisclosed information and all other tradition-based innovations and creations resulting from intellectual activity in the industrial, scientific, literary or artistic fields.”⁶

Wall Art belongs to the traditional culture as well. It enhances the traditional believes and expresses their cultural promises towards their tradition and custom. Wall Art have its own significance of artistry and expertise. In the ancient times, the indigenous people communities in their villages believed in nature and natural products. Their knowledge was like from ancestors which are being passed from generation to generation. With that knowledge they live their daily life. In fact traditional knowledge means the knowledge based on tradition like traditional medicine they prepared from herbs and leaves of the plants. In the Modern Age, The tradition based “literary, artistic or scientific works; performances; inventions; scientific discoveries; designs; marks; names and symbols; disclose information; and all other tradition-based innovations and creations resulting from intellectual activity in the industrial, scientific, literacy or artistic fields” are all referred to Traditional Knowledge. It is a community based functional knowledge system, which has been developed and refined by the people of generation through continuous interaction, observation and experimentation with their surrounding neighbour environment. It is a dynamic system, ever charming, adopting and adjusting to the local situations and has close links with the culture, civilization and religious practices of the communities.

Knowledge is prosperity in the hands of an individual. It is the broad and general concept that is subject to commercial and public interest. We are living into the world dominated by power of knowledge. It is true that the present generation has better opportunities and facilities to acquire knowledge and transform it into creation of wealth but generations over generations, a great treasure of knowledge and wisdom. It has been created by the people who might not have been formerly educated in class rooms but they have had robust common sense, great understanding of nature, rich experience and selfless attitude. ²³ The indigenous people, local communities, folklore, sages and seers are great reservoir of traditional knowledge. ²⁴ Origin of knowledge can be found in cord of wisdom “advanced over genesis towards a homogenous presence of mankind with key elements such as natural assets and environment comprehensive traditional scientific usage of the lands playing an essential role in the existence and subsistence of this knowledge base”. ⁷

West Bengal serves in as home to numerous talented artisans in India. The novel rural and spiritualist appeal of Bengal makes is appreciated by craftsmanship sweethearts the world over. From weaving to figure and outlining to metal artworks, the state has a one of a kind specialization in numerous types of art. The deep rooted customary artworks of West Bengal have been so well moulded as indicated by the current day requests that it appears that these craftsman’s, aside from their conventional aptitudes, have a skill in the specialty of endurance too. Regardless of whether you have small comprehension of expressions and artworks, you will surely be dazzled by the interesting handicraft works of West Bengal.

Historical /Cultural aspect of wall painting:

Purulia district is one of the 23 districts of West Bengal state in Eastern India. People of tribal communities live in villages. They belong mostly to the Proto-Australoid groups with dark skin colour, sunken nose and lower forehead, being mostly ‘SANTHALS’ and ‘GONDS’.

Humans have been painting for tens and thousands of years to express themselves, before there were scripts or languages. Tribal wall painting is an age old tradition in Purulia also which are carried across generations. The forms and types have evolved over time with changes in lifestyles, economic structures. It also differs among communities and is shaped by the occasions during which the paintings are done. Ideas behind the art are almost same, being fertility, marriage, birth, farming and harvest. Paintings are also done to please the Gods and ancestors. Tribal women decorate their huts using natural pigments mixed in mud, using cloth swabs or chewed twigs of local sakhua/shal tree. The walls of houses are painted with natural and artificial colourings and designs are made with fingers. This fresco relief or murals on clay walls – a long practice in rural Bengal is the true form of art by women folk who are the creators. The subjects depicted are representation of a strong bond between women and her immediate environment. Banana groves, lotus forms intermingled with images of

⁶ Intellectual Property Needs and Expectations of Traditional Knowledge Holders, WIPO Report on Fact-finding Missions on Intellectual Property and Traditional Knowledge (1998-1999) (WIPO Publication), p. 25.

⁷ Puranik Pranjal, “TK Rights and Intellectual Property Rights: The Tale of Two Rights”, R. K. Diwan & Co

domestic and wild animals and birds forms the artists' world. The personal experience of the artist and her interaction with nature are the biggest influences on this art form.

The old cave paintings of ALTAMIRA or BHIMBAITKHA have been carried forward to this tribal art form but of course with few changes. While the forms dealt with depiction of images of wild animals and daily activities, the latter deals with geometrical shapes, patterns and floral designs.⁸

They say 'a picture tells a thousand words'. Since the pre-historic era, long before mankind found a way of expression through scripts, wall paintings were the only medium of expressing thoughts and ideas. In this context, the tribal wall art of the 'Santhal' community dwelling in the Birbhum, Medinipur, Bardhaman and Purulia districts of West Bengal, part of the chhotonagpur plateau, has been an example of this amazing tradition. With time, this art form has undergone impressive transformation according to the lifestyle, economic condition and geography of the region. The main creators of these paintings are the tribal women, who through their paintings express numerous ideas ranging from womanhood to harvesting or social life, implying a strong bonding with Mother Nature. Natural pigments and twigs from the local 'Sal' trees are only used to decorate the hut walls. These frescos or murals on clay walls are also presented as homage to their deities and are a treasure trove of traditional wisdom, knowledge and folklore. This 'Santhali' art form has a striking resemblance with the famous 'Bhimbaikha' cave paintings of Madhya Pradesh. Sadly, off late, with the passage of time, with rapid modernization or economic constraints, this beautiful form is fast losing its originality.⁹

Apart from a variety of decorations on clay walls, there was a long prevailing practice in rural areas of Bengal of displaying paintings on walls. These forms of folk art were introduced and have been taken primarily by rural population. Even today, folk paintings can be seen on the walls of clay-built houses in many villages of Jhargarm, Paschim Medinipur, Burdwan and Purulia districts. Village women use sheer skill of their fingers in producing these wall paintings with a rare simplicity and honesty reminiscent of the spirit of ancient times. Although these wall paintings are mainly seen in villages inhabited by tribal groups like Santhals as well as by Sadak and Mahato communities, wives of farmers, blacksmiths, potters, ironmongers and scavengers are also deft at this art form.



Among the scheduled caste or people of mixed Hindu origin, this work of wall painting starts every year before Durga Puja or Kali Puja. The colours used for wall paintings are gathered locally, for example red ochre, white chalk, yellow banak, ink made from soot and red dice and indigo purchased from local shops are used in the job. In addition to this saffron and blue are mixed to achieve a green colour of painter's choice. Brushes prepared with jute are used for applying paint on the wall, while final work is done by wrapping a torn piece of cloth around the finger. A coating of white chalk is first applied on the wall as a base over which designs are drawn as per plan with the use of different colours. The main thing of this painting comprises creepers, flowers, trees and birds. A blooming lotus is commonly seen among the flowers. Apart from this, various geometric patterns are also another attractive feature of these wall paintings.

Santhal tribe plays a big role in development of this art. It is to celebrate their Bandhna Festival during Kali Puja that this tribe undertakes fresh paintings on the walls. Large contingent of this Santhal tribe dwell in various areas of Birbhum, Bankura, Burdwan and Midnapore districts of West Bengal. Despite many changes in their ways of life, after shifting from isolated areas surrounded by hills and forests, more civilized environments, there has been no break in their dedicated attachment to the art of wall painting handed down by their past generation.



In the paintings drawn on walls by Santhal women, it is observed that barring some variations in the application of colour, the subject matter of these pictures are related in most cases to geometric figures such as triangles,

⁸ <https://pinkibiswassanyal.wordpress.com/2019/08/12/wall-art-of-purulia-an-nearly-extinct-tribal-art-form/>

⁹ <https://www.getbengal.com/photo/details/deoal-chitro-wall-art-of-purulia>

squares, parallelograms and trapeziums. In some cases, we see trees decked with flowers, leave and creepers accentuated by floral displays of many colours like a lotus in full bloom. At times, the entire wall is covered by a single colour without any design, while deep ash colour is applied to the plinth level, sometimes the entire exterior walls including the plinths is painted in a dark black shade which is obtained mingling ash with water. It becomes easy to identify cottages of Santhal tribes from the typical colour of their walls. Another type of wall finish is found in Santhal villages where there is no application of colour. Thick coats of clay blended with water are first applied on the walls with torn pieces of cloth. Then while coating is still damp, the selected design is carved on it with use of fingertips. Later when the wall becomes dry, the finger carved design comes out clearly on the surface which becomes an exclusive display of art without colour. These wall painters may not be experts in the art of drawings, but the simplicity with which they bring out philosophy of their uncomplicated lives through their work make their creation worthy of consideration as singular instances of folk art. Regrettably no steps have been taken till now to identify or collect specimens of the large variety of wall paintings prevailing all over West Bengal despite their strong influence in portraying the strength and simplicity of rural folk art of this state.

Some exquisite fresco paintings in colour have been found on temple walls in two different locations of West Bengal. One of them is a painting on the divine activities of Krishna drawn on the walls of Shyamsundar Temple in Bohodu village of South 24 Parganas and the other on the walls of Vrindavan Chandra Temple of Guptipara, Hooghly. Both display the picture of many deities amidst assorted flowers and creepers. It is debatable if these paintings conform to the prevailing style of the time when they were drawn. Rather they were drawn in the form of traditional art with application of commonly used ingredients, as was the practice in those days which itself was a special feature of the art of folk painting in West Bengal.¹⁰

Santhals are the third largest tribe in India and are known for their unique form of tribal paintings known as Santhal Tribal Paintings. Santhal tribes are sustained by the forests and their occupations - farming, fishing, and hunting - revolve around the forests that they live in. After a long day at work, they retire for the day and find relaxation in music and dance. The inherent love of dance and music forms an important part of Santhal fairs and festivals. Themes in Santhal paintings revolve around this community life especially celebrations and rituals. Paintings depict dancing, harvest and merry making through enchanting minimalist images in muted shades.

The paintings are drawn by a special community called *Jadu Patuas* or magic painters in the Santhal Paragana district of Bengal/Bihar borders. The painters are called magic painters because they paint to preserve the crops, avert diseases, honour the dead and so on. *Chakshudaan Pata*, for example, a painting made for a bereaving family, is shrouded in magic and mysticism. When somebody dies in a village, the *Jadu Patua* visits the family with an image representing the deceased, but the pupil's in the eyes of the image are missing. After the family makes a gift offering or *daan* to the *Jadu Patua*, he then performs the *Chakshudaan* or "bestowal of sight" by painting of the iris in the blank eyes of the portrait in order to free the dead person's soul and send it to heaven.¹¹

Religious aspect of the Art:

Though largely observed in tribal areas, *Bandna* has many Hindu observances, practices and rituals, reflected in the veneration of symbols of fertility and prosperity. *Bandna* essentially celebrates the initiation of a new phase, not just through a new crop cycle, but metaphorically expressed in many tasks performed within each family. For example, each household makes new *rangoli* during *Bandna*. This task is carried out by females of all ages in the family, irrespective of their class status. The art form is simple. It is striking to observe their natural talent for making patterns, which are made spontaneously from memory. They don't have any recorded history about the practice, and whatever they make, has been handed down from mother to daughter. One way they have passed the skill down generations is allowing children to make their own designs from an early age.

Bandna is an occasion for cattle veneration as well, having origins in Hindu mythology. It is believed Lord Shiva provided cattle to help humans in agriculture with a condition that they be treated well. In course of time humans broke the promise and cattle were ill-treated daily. Fed up, the

¹⁰ <https://www.getbengal.com/details/a-tribal-tale-folk-paintings-by-santhals-in-bengal>

¹¹ <https://ofindianorigin.com/blog/tribal-art-bengal-santhal-tribal-paintings-jadu-patua-kalighat-folk-art>

cattle complained to Lord Shiva about their miserable condition. Lord Shiva planned a surprise visit during cover of Amabasya (Lunar phase of the New Moon) in the month of Kartik. However, news of the complaint leaked to villagers and before Lord Shiva arrived, everybody cleaned and decorated the cattle shed, bathed the cattle and fed them special food. On seeing the arrangements, Lord Shiva was satisfied and he returned, ignoring the allegations. Every year this cycle of complaints and Lord Shiva's visit is celebrated during Bandna.

Because cattle are held sacred, women collect cow dung and apply a fresh coat on floors and walls. This way, a new canvas is made available each year. Next, they prepare the paint (chawk). I was lucky to witness the making of the white color; this is done by mixing finely pounded rice powder and glue extracted from the Gamhar tree, which makes the solution viscous, allowing it to drip freely. No brush is used in the whole process; the only tool is gravity. The paintings are executed fast, almost in one seamless free-flowing motion, always starting from the house entrance. In the house I visited, they took less than 10 minutes to fill up every inch of a large courtyard. Earlier, minerals or plant-based extracts were used for making colour, which were limited to mostly earthy tones. To provide contrast, white or black (made from charcoal) was used. Colors were applied only on walls, not on floors. Painting of the walls involves different techniques. First, the wall is made wet, to ensure the paint is absorbed. Textures are added by carving into the wall with the use simple household tools. The iconography is also more elaborate than floor art, which consist mostly of geometric patterns or drawings of flora and fauna inspired from nature. In comparison, wall art may include complex narratives depicting religious themes and daily life.

However, making wall art is not the central event of Bandna, which takes place over a week, interspersed with many rituals and observances. Buying of new items for the household precedes the week-long events. The first day is called Jagran, when household cattle are taken for a bath in a nearby water body. In the evening lamps are lit around the cattle shed, in front of entrances and the *tulsi manch* (holy basil shrine). Freshly made *pitha* (rice cake) is eaten by the whole family. Music and dance is performed throughout the night to ward off evil spirits.

On the second day, called Gohal Puja, female family members purify the floors of the house, the *tulsi manch* and *angan* (courtyard) with cow dung solution in the morning. Only women take part in rituals because they are symbolically associated with fertility. The women observe a day-long fast. Early morning, they go to a nearby waterbody, carrying *arwa chaal* (rice) in a container where it is washed properly in water. After ablution, the women return to their home and dry the wet rice. It is then crushed using a *dhenki* (wooden rice mill). The rice powder is collected and strained through a sieve to collect the fine dust, later used to make paint. On the same day, puja is offered in the name of family ancestors at the *tulsi manch*. The women make palm impressions and apply *sindoor tika* (vermilion dot) on agricultural implements and the doorframe. *Arwa chaal* and *dhup ghashare* also sprinkled. This is the only time of the year when women are allowed to touch agricultural tools. Goth puja is performed outside the village, where a live chicken is sacrificed or an egg is broken. On the third day, called Barad Bhidka, bulls are tied to a pole. Here they are teased with a dry skin, accompanied by loud applause by the villagers and music.¹²

Community perception regarding painting and its varieties:

- Folk art is almost on the verge of extinction. Due to mass urbanisation this culture is almost in the end. Our new generation has very little knowledge on this scenario. This fine form of art can be helped spread throughout with the help of a photographer.¹³
- Folk arts heavily reflect upon the culture and traditions of a region. Mostly, dependent on agro-based livelihood, their art forms mirrors the colours drawn from nature.
- Deoal Chitra, is painting of the wall as a ritual where the walls are cleaned, a coating of a mixture of cow-dung (considered pious) and mud and then decorated with different patterns and motifs that are inspired from nature itself. The women are mostly involved in these paintings and uses materials that are also a part of the nature. They create paintings which are sometimes based on their beliefs and sometimes and abstraction that satisfies the creative urge. The vibrant colour is quite contrasting to their life style which is monotonous. The art of Deoal Chitra is practiced in few interiors part of Purulia, Bankura and Mednipur yet the art is different in each region and varies from location to location.

¹² <https://www.sahapedia.org/bandna-decor-floor-art-purulia>

¹³ <https://pronobghoshphoto.wordpress.com/tag/tribal-village-of-purulia/>

What is Deoal Chitra (Wall Painting) of Purulia?

Relief or Ornamentation of clay walls of houses and huts of rural Indian hutments have been prevailing for a long time. This ornamentation on walls is known as Deoal Chitra (Wall Painting) in Bengal. Predominantly found on the walls of Santhals (Murmu, Hembrom, etc), which is the largest tribal community across Birbhum, Purulia, Bankura And Medinipur.

Origin of Deoal Chitra Art:

Deoal Chitra can be traced back to pre-historic rock art dating back to 13th -14th century A.D. around the Stone Age period in Bhimbetka rock shelters, M.P., India. In Purulia, these wall paintings are generally painted during Kali Puja, "Bandna" being the most important part of the celebration.

All decorative design, as in all folk art draws heavenly on geometric, plant and animal motifs- swastika, lotus, and tree of life are a few predominant motifs widely used in Deoal Chitra. The subject depicted has a strong bond between the rural women and her immediate surroundings.

The Deoal Chitra is executed on two main portion of the hut: The Pinda or the Plinth or the Kanth or wall above the plinth. The Pinda, generally thicker than the remaining portion of the walls and is used as a seating place. It is coated thickly with cow dung to give it strength and to keep in strong to withstand erosion by rain or water.

It is painted black. To add variety, it is sometimes found that a relief of white earth is also used. Pinda itself is not Deoal Chitra but its importance in creating diversity of colour and limit to the canvas accounts for its special mention.

It is the Kanth part of the wall that is the real canvas for the ornamentation either as frescos (the drawing made on mud or plaster while they are still wet) or as reliefs. Since wall is the canvas elaborate layering and preparation is taken to give it a proper finish.

Method and Materials used in the painting:

The colours used in Deoal Chitra are drawn from Nature itself. Some of the Natural source are-Black is obtained from the soot of burning tyres or other material like dry cells. The best way to obtain black colour is by pouring water over half burn straw.

White Katkhori, khorimati or Dudhi-mati, are naturally occurring soil that they get from their field or can be bought from the market. White can also be obtained from lime.

Yellow-Alaya Mati or turmeric.

Red- Khari mati and it is also obtained from 'Alta' (a red coloured liquid used by women to redden their feet)

Blue- The cheap Blue used for whitening the cloth is sometimes used. The colour blue is also obtained from blue vitrol, colloquially known as 'nil bari'.

Green-Obtained from the leaves of a vegetable called 'Sim' (broad beans). It is also made from the leaves of a lemon plant called 'Jambir'.

Brush made from straw ends, small rags, cloth swabs or chewed twigs from the local sal tree or jute fibres, sometimes synthetic brushes even fingers are used to create patterns.

Different types

Two dominant kind of Deoal Chitra are visible in the rural huts-The first is the use of colour on the walls. After the white mud or lime dries up, different designs are painted on the walls. The designs are mainly arched structure, geometric pattern and different animal and floral motifs using white, black, blue, green colour mainly.

Sohrai walls are often monochromatic. A layer of wet, cream-coloured earth (dudhi mitti) is pasted over an undercoat of black earth and designs are etched with bits of comb or fingers, exposing black patterns against white. These paintings also have fertility symbols celebrating union and breeding.

Another pattern sometime seen in few houses are embossed designs on the walls. These attractive bas-relief designs on the walls are created during the construction of new hutments. A layer of clay is first smoothed on the wall and a border is made. Inside the smoothed border a preliminary draft of the theme is created and an additional layer of clay is added on it. Then with bamboo slit or fingers, the subjected is retrieved out of it in full grandeur.

Sometimes a hybrid of fresco and relief work is used to enhance the overall effect.

Different patterns and Motifs Used in the painting

Most of the motifs are from Nature. The motifs of trees, plants, creepers, flowers, animals, birds, fruits and the five elements of nature (fire, water, soil, air and sky) are very common. In most of the cases these motifs takes an abstract form. An artist makes art playing with these forms. The original shape of the source of inspiration is maintained while the artist touch of the regional culture is added to it.

Lotus is one of the most common motifs in the wall paintings of Purulia. With the passage of time the shape of Lotus has also changed. There is very plain and ordinary lotus flower as well as few round structures like the flower which also resembles lotus. The shape varies from class to class and locality to locality. In India, lotus has the most significant use amidst mango leaves, 'osotto' leaves; it stands as a token for peace, auspiciousness and piousness.

The Lotus also being the national flower also has its own importance. Religiously, it is the flower on which Lakshmi sits, being the goddess of wealth has its own symbolic importance.

Sometime it is attached with a creeper resembling, 'Tree of Life'- concept of sacred tree more generally, metaphor for Phylogenetic tree, also a symbol of eternal tree, Akshaya Vata, that remained unaffected when the whole earth was enveloped by water.

Bird is another very common motif, it is used to maintain rhythm in between creepers and sometimes it takes the shape of a particular bird like the peacock, while most of them have never seen a peacock in their whole life, and have taken inspiration from their ancestor drawing the same pattern

The depiction of animals is generally based on their beliefs. The owl stands for good omen, 'Lakshmi Pecha', bahan of goddess Lakshmi. Cow is believed to be a symbol of good harvest. Often animals and birds are drawn in pairs, Kopot -Kopoti, a pair, or couple, husband and wife, this stands for a symbol of happy family, togetherness, happy conjugal life.

This comes from the Hindu belief of pairs and belonging to the society, binding individual to society even god appears in pairs like Lakshmi- Narayan, Shiva-Durga. Elephants, birds, cow are thus drawn in pairs.

The birds and fish scattered between creepers add a new dimension and rhythm to the paintings.

A geometric pattern is also a dominant strain used. The symmetry and balance of simple figures like square, circle and triangles with the proper treatment of light and shades, and different colour added heightens the beauty of the wall. Sometimes the artist urges to break the symmetry to add a new perspective while other times embossed or 3-D illusion forms are also found.

Each geometry form has its own meaning linking them to the five elements of nature – according to Buddhism Earth is depicted by the four corners of the square. Circle is water- which when falls on earth or surface forms concentric circles. Triangle is fire- the shape of a burning flame in the absence of flowing air. The half lunar structure or similar pattern is the air, and sky is oval-Half visible to eye and half of it unknown.

The symbol of self-consciousness or 'atma', the knowledge about the existence and nature of Brahma, is also depicted in few walls which have the hand impression of family members.

Deoal Chitra's survival as a Folk art

According to research of Folk culture the mystery of creation is hidden in the paintings of the tribal, their lifestyle inextricably intertwined with nature; in these paintings are hidden thoughts of generation of people of these areas. Though these art forms show enormous skill—conveying socioeconomic status, faith and rituals in the daily life of tribal communities—the artists struggle to survive.

With the increasing effects of urbanisation, the influence of nature is gradually fading and the reluctance of the younger generation to continue with their traditions, there are only a handful of villages left where people still paint their house.¹⁴

History of Folk Paintings of West Bengal

The history of 'patachitra' or scroll painting in Bengal goes back to more than 2000 years. Rustic bards and story-tellers in previous times would use these scrolls which had pictures representing a variety of events and themes of the stories they would tell. It was the only school of painting which flourished in Bengal in the 19th century and was the traditional art of scroll paintings which was admired in the rural areas. These paintings were done on cloth or patas. They depicted conservative images of gods and goddesses and scenes from epics like **Tulsidas's** 'Rama Charita Manas'. The artists were villagers who travelled from place to place with their scroll paintings and sang the scenes commencing the epics depicted in the paintings in village meetings and **festivals**. These artists, called patuas or 'painters on cloth' were said to be half **Hindu** and half **Muslim** and practised Islam.



¹⁴ <https://isitadesign.com/symmetry-and-rural-india-deoal-chitra/>

There are different types of Folk Paintings of West Bengal and these are mentioned below: **Patachitra:** It is the painting generally made on tasar silk cloth. The traditional colours used in the patachitra art are red ochre, indigo, green, black and white all obtained from the usual sources like Hingula, Ramaraja, Haritala, lamp black, and shells. Though, all draw pictures in a traditional way unusual to them about Hindu mythology and different social issues.

Bengal Pat: The original art form which developed in Bengal came to be recognized as Bengal Pat. Paintings are made with dyes made from spices, earth, soot, etc. and replicate the life and times of the society and myths. The usual colours used in Bengal Pat are red, indigo, green, black and ochre. Bengal Pat has a very exciting approach to it. Some paintings represent spoofs on traditional social practices, hence attempting to highlight them for change. Some of these artists started depicting these stories on cloth scrolls for conservation and beatification.

Kalighat Pat: Kalighat Pat was invented in the 19th century Bengal, in the locality of Kalighat Kali Temple, Kalighat and Kolkata and from being items of reminder taken by the visitors to the Kali temple, the paintings over a period of time developed as a separate school of Indian painting. From the interpretation of Hindu gods and other mythological characters, the Kalighat paintings developed to reproduce a variety of themes.

Batik paintings: These are very popular in West Bengal and artists create some striking paintings depicting village life and Hindu Gods. Artists now produce colourful Batik paintings not only as paintings but also as designs on Sarees, Kurtas and other clothing.

Kantha: It is a traditional embroidery form of Bengal which is done both on cotton and silk materials and involves mainly floral, birds and animal motifs. It is used mainly on Dhotis and Sarees which form the traditional male and female attire of the locals. Apart from these, Kantha motifs are also used on blankets, bedspreads, table cloths, etc. The folk paintings of Bengal represent a sense of collective identity of the artists of Bengal beyond the barriers of cultural racism once faced by Bengal. Folk paintings of Bengal truly express such.¹⁵

Materials and Method

Mixed-method cross-sectional research design has been followed and both the quantitative as well as qualitative data have been collected. This cross-sectional study has been carried out at Jhargram, Purulia, Bankura and Paschim Midnapur district in West Bengal. The study area has been selected based on more concentrated Lodha/Sabar blocks in three districts. Another criterion was a block is situated very near to or attached with forest. Primary data has been collected through a household survey from the respondent households. Certain qualitative data has been collected through case study and Focus Group Discussion (FGD). Apart from that, in-depth interview and participant observation have been conducted with key informants like village heads (formal or informal), villagers, for qualitative data collection. Additionally, the required number of case studies from each village has been collected to capture the qualitative data. The data has been collected based on random cluster sampling. The data has been collected from various villages in the three districts of Jangalmahal region. The survey unit was a village and/or para. It depends on the availability of the participant. Those who are available during the survey, all are supposed to be our participants.

Cultural Aspects:

The diversity of Purulia mirrors the art, culture and the religion of the various tribal communities. Even the festivals celebrated in Purulia have been derived from the different celebrations and faiths of the tribal's. The region is rich in cultural heritage and often we can witness a confluence of the culture of Bengal, Jharkhand and Orissa. The mix of all these cultures, have influenced the life, cuisine and the festivals of the natives of Purulia in West Bengal.

Almost all the festivals of Purulia have originated from various tribal communities. The natives are closely attached to nature and all the festivals are celebrated with a lot of singing, dancing and triumph. The festivals are extended out over the various seasons and months. The most important festivals of Purulia are: Hunting festivals celebrated during the month of Buddha Purnima, Makar Parab in the month of Poush, Bandhna Parab in Dewali and Karam. A visit to Purulia during the festival season is a real treat. It is the time to know about the various art and dance forms, that many a times we are unaware of and does not get the needed encouragement and publicity and end up dying.¹⁶

Shiber Gajan is one of the longest and most famous festivals held at Purulia from the middle of March to the end of May. You can, however, find other names for this festival. The local Santhals calls it Shiber Gajan while the other notable tribesmen like the Kurmi and Korhas name it as Chait Puja and Charak Puja. The festival marks

¹⁵ https://www.indianetzone.com/47/folk_paintings_west_bengal.htm

¹⁶ <https://www.puruliaonline.in/city-guide/culture-of-purulia>

the divinity of Lord Shiva and you can see the tribal people dressed as Shiva and his other devotees involved in jatra or natak. Disum Sendra is also known as Shikar Parab. This festival primarily involves hunting wild animals that reside in the jungles of Ayodhya Hills. The tribes say that it is a means to complete the cycle of life and pay tribute to Mother Nature. The hunting is accompanied by drum rolls and dances around the hunt. The music and dance during Baisakhi Purnima is the main attraction of people. Rohini Utsav is one of the most beautiful festivals celebrated by all the tribes of Purulia in unison. On the 13th Jaishtha of every year, it is said that the God of Harvest and a new season comes down to Earth for blessings the cultivation. So, all the farmers and cultivators get together and sow seeds on this occasion. The dance and music are worth every camera shot. Another form of Rohini Utsav is the Erok Sim festival which is celebrated in the month of Asad. With the showers of monsoon darkening the contrast, you can view the beauty of Erok Sim from 15th June to 15th July. The Munda tribes, however, celebrate the Batauli festival which is another form of Rohini Utsav. Chata Parab is the night out of the tribal people. In the initial days, the Gaur king patronized this festival along with the rich chieftains to celebrate the beauty of their land. The tradition has been well-maintained and to date, rich people in Purulia contribute to organizing the festival. Throughout the night, you can enjoy music, dance and unlimited taste of tribal food, which is so lip-smacking that you have to taste it yourself to know.¹⁷

Objectives of the study

1. To know the ground reality of the wall art of the tribal people.
2. To know the relation between wall art and cultural expression.
3. To understand the conceptuality of Traditional knowledge and Traditional Cultural Expression of the indigenous people.

II. Discussion

In the South Bengal, Bengali folk art style, traditionally practiced by women, and consisting of coloured motifs, patterns, and symbols that are painted on walls with paints made from rice flour, on religious occasions. It is common to the Bengal region in India. Amongst Hindu families, alpanas may contain religious motifs with symbolic designs that relate to religious austerity, festivals, and specific deities. Amongst Santal tribal communities, alpanas often contain geometric or symbolic patterns drawn from nature. Although traditionally the domain of rural women, Alpana motifs have been very influential in modern Indian art, and are incorporated into the works of artists such as Jamini Roy, Abanindranath Tagore, Devi Prasad, and in the early illustrations of film-maker Satyajit Ray. In contemporary Bengal, alpanas are created as part of religious festivals such as the Durga puja, in public and private spaces.



Apart from a variety of decorations on clay walls, there was a long prevailing practice in rural areas of Bengal of displaying paintings on walls. These forms of folk art were introduced and have been taken primarily by rural population. Even today, folk paintings can be seen on the walls of clay-built houses in many villages



Figure 1 Wall painting in a village of Binpur II block

¹⁷ <https://www.whatshot.in/kolkata/purulia-land-of-tribal-festivals-west-bengal-c-14264>

of **Midnapore, Bankura, Burdwan and Purulia** districts. Village women use sheer skill of their fingers in producing these wall paintings with a rare simplicity and honesty reminiscent of the spirit of ancient times. Although these wall paintings are mainly seen in villages inhabited by tribal groups like Santhals as well as by Sadak and Mahato communities, wives of farmers, blacksmiths, potters, ironmongers and scavengers are also deft at this art form. Among the scheduled caste or people of mixed Hindu origin, this work of wall painting starts every year before **Durga Puja or Kali Puja**. The wall painting and/or art has been going on in various rituals whole year ; it is found in the Badhnaparab, Makar Sankranti, Tusu Parab, Maghi Purnima, Akhan Jatra, Chaitra Sankranti rituals in the study area of South Bengal. The colours used for wall paintings are gathered locally, for example red ochre, white chalk, yellow bank, ink made from soot and red dice and indigo purchased from local shops are used in the job. In addition to this saffron and blue are mixed to achieve a green colour of painter's choice. Brushes prepared with jute are used for applying paint on the wall, while final work is done by wrapping a torn piece of cloth around the finger. A coating of white chalk is first applied on the wall as a base over which designs are drawn as per plan with the use of different colours. The main thing of this painting comprises creepers, flowers, trees and birds. A blooming lotus is commonly seen among the flowers. Apart from this, various geometric patterns are also another attractive feature of these wall paintings.



Figure 2 picture collected from Binpur II block



The white paste created from rice symbolically represents wealth, prosperity and grace or Goddess Lakshmi. The motifs primarily consist of flowers, fruits, leaves, branches, vegetables and other ideas handed down through generations and those inspired by Mother Nature.

‘Atap’ rice, non-parboiled form of rice, is used to make the powder. The short-grained variety of ‘Atap’ is the widely used one. The rice is soaked in water to soften for 5 to 6 hours and it is then dried. The rice is then ground to a fine powder. This powder is used in Alpona. The artist drawing the pattern will have a design in mind. The powder is held between the thumb and the index finger and is sprinkled on the ground to create the designs.

Another method of drawing is by creating a paste from the rice powder. The rice powder is mixed with water to create a thick paste. A small piece of paper or cloth is folded to form a wick and is dipped in the rice paste to draw various designs. Occasionally, coloured dyes are also added to the white paste. The designs are

drawn on wood, earthen floors and terracotta. They are left to be dried and when dried the designs show up vividly.¹⁸

A Leo of ending word

- Around 65 families living in the area are involved in the study. It's a family based tradition where both men and women have key role to show their own identity and ethnicity.
- They are not fully dependent on tradition wall art and paint as well as their traditional knowledge. It's depend on own initiative or traditional rituals.
- Each family has an own traditional art on the basis of rituals. These arts show their own ethnic identity in the region. In the study area we are found very few people who are engaged in the art culture, both men and women. They are also invited in home for alpona making and wall painting in various occasions like marriage, rice ceremony, Badhna parab, Chaitra Sankranti, Makar sankranti, Maghi Punnima etc.
- The traditional art and wall paint is now has been going too lost the own culture and knowledge.
- Need strong initiative to protect the traditional art and culture of the Tribal

¹⁸ <https://www.hindu-blog.com/2007/10/alpana-white-patterns-or-designs-in.html>