

## Anthropological Perspectives of Art and Tattoo: With Special Reference to Bhunjia Tribe of Chhattisgarh

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### Abstract

The anthropology of art focuses on historical, economic and aesthetic dimensions in non-Western art forms, including what is known as 'tribal art'. One of the central problems in the anthropology of art concerns the universality of 'art' as a cultural phenomenon. This study is focuses on to achieve the following objectives: to conserve various tattoo form of the Bhunjia tribe of Chhattisgarh with their scientific documentation and to discuss anthropological perspectives of the tattoo of the Bhunjia. The interview guide was used to collect the primary data. Group discussion technique was also used to collect and cross check the data. The photographs were taken for validation of data based on the given situation and incidents related to the subject. Bhunjia is numerically small and little-known tribes which mostly reside in the Nuapada district of Orissa and Gariaband district of Chhattisgarh. Bhunjia customarily craft tattoos by cutting drawings into the skin and rubbing the resulting wound with ink, ashes or other agents. Tattoo is called as Godna by the Bhunjia. A *Godna* is a form of body modification, made by inserting indelible ink into the dermis layer of the skin to change the pigment. This traditional Tattoo has religious and beauty significance for Bhunjia tribe. Bhunjia people think that *Godna* will accompany them even after their death. Various kind of art including tattoo of the Bhunjia are vanished. The younger generation of this community has forgotten their spiritual and aesthetic sense of tattoos. They don't want to draw the tattoo on their body. Ethnographic documentations should be conducting among the Bhungia of Chhattisgarh for conserve such kind of intangible cultural heritage.

**Keywords:** Art; Tattoo; Bhunjia; Tribe; Chhattisgarh.

### Introduction

Art a diverse range of human activities and the products of those activities, usually involving imaginative or technical skill. In their most general form, these activities include the production of works of art, the criticism of art, the study of the history of art, and the aesthetic dissemination of art, visual arts, which include the creation of images or objects in fields including painting, sculpture, printmaking,

photography, and other visual media. Architecture is often included as one of the visual arts; however, like the decorative arts, it involves the creation of objects where the practical considerations of use are essential – in a way that they usually are not in a painting, for example. Music, theatre, film, dance, and other performing arts, as well as literature and other media such as interactive media, are included in a broader definition of art or the arts.

Boas[1], one of the pioneers of modern

anthropology, conducted many field studies of the arts, helping create a foundation to the field. His book, "Primitive Art"[1], summarizes his main insights into so-called 'primitive' art forms, with a detailed case study on the arts of the Northwest Pacific Coast. The famous anthropologist Lévi-Strauss[4] took Boas' analyses further in his book "The Way of the Masks", where he traced changes in the plastic form of Northwest Pacific masks to patterns of intercultural interaction among the indigenous peoples of the coast.

The anthropology of art focuses on historical, economic and aesthetic dimensions in non-Western art forms, including what is known as 'tribal art'. One of the central problems in the anthropology of art concerns the universality of 'art' as a cultural phenomenon. Several anthropologists have noted that the Western categories of 'painting', 'sculpture', or 'literature', conceived as independent artistic activities, do not exist, or exist in a significantly different form, in most non-Western contexts. Thus, there is no consensus on a single, cross-cultural definition of 'art' in anthropology. To surmount this difficulty, anthropologists of art have focused on formal features in objects which, without exclusively being 'artistic', have certain evident 'aesthetic' qualities. Boas' Primitive Art, Lévi-Strauss' The Way of the Masks or Geertz's "Art as Cultural System" is some examples of this trend of transforming the anthropology of 'art' into the anthropology of culturally-specific 'aesthetics'. More recently, in Gell's book entitled "Art and Agency", proposed a new definition of 'art' as a complex system of intentionality, where artists produce art objects to effect changes in the world, including (but not restricted to) changes in the aesthetic perceptions of art audiences.

#### *Objectives of the Study*

This study focuses on to achieve the following objectives:

1. To conserve various tattoo form of the Bhunjia tribe of Chhattisgarh with their scientific documentation.
2. To discuss anthropological perspectives of the tattoo of the Bhunjia tribe of Chhattisgarh.

#### **Methodology**

To fulfill the objectives of the study, three villages of Gariaband development block in district Gariaband (Chhattisgarh) has been selected. 100

families were chosen by random sampling method. The interview guide was used to collect the primary data. Group discussion technique was also used to collect and cross check the data. The photographs were taken for validation of data based on the given situation and incidents related to the subject. Written consent was taken from the respondents about their information and data are duly obtained prior interviews with respondents. Apart from that prior the interviews, it was discussed our objectives and our interview schedules our written oath with respondents in detail.

#### *Ethnographic Characteristics of the Bhunjiya*

##### *Etymology*

Bhunja is numerically small and little-known tribes which mostly reside in the Nuapada district of Orissa and Gariaband district of Chhattisgarh. Bhunjias belong to the Dravidian racial group. The term Bhunjia may perhaps signify one who lives on the soil from Bhum, the earth, and Jia, depended on the earth. The Bhunjiya are concentrated in the Gariaband district of Chhattisgarh and in the area around the Sunabera plateau of Kalahandi district in Orissa. They speak in Bhunjia among themselves which is more akin to Halbi, an Indo-Aryan language, and the Chhattisgarhi language for inter-group communication. Many of them also speak in Hindi. They use the *Devanagari* script.

##### *Sub-Division*

Bhujias have been divided into three main sections, Chaukhutia Bhunjia, Chinda Bhunjia, and another one is Khallaria Bhunjia which is sub-division of Chaukhutia Bhunjia. Chaukhutia are of mixed descent from the Halbas and Gonds. It is noticeable, however, that the Bhunjias though surrounded by Gonds on all sides do not speak Gondi, but a dialect of Hindi resemble that of the Halbas and it is a form of Chhattishgarhi which is practically the same as Baigani. Chaukhutia Bhunjia and Chinda Bhunjia are the two ramifications of Bhunjia group of people. The Chinda Bhunjia people are the inhabitants of the plain area while the Chaukhutia Bhunjias reside in the hilly areas of Sunabeda plateau.

The Chinda division of the Bhunjias according to Russel and Hiralal may have been derived from the Binjhawars, a Hindulised offshoot of the ancient Baiga tribe and this would account for the fact that the tribe speaks a dialect of Hindi and not Gondi. As the Chaukhutia sub-tribe appears to be of mixed origin

from the Gonds and Halbas and as the Chindas are probably descended from the Baigas, the Bhunjias may be considered to be an offshoot from this important tribe. Khallaria Bhunjia mostly resides in Khallari of Mahasamund district of Chhattisgarh. Bhunjia tribes are more conservative and traditional. Moreover, it has also been said that the Bhunjia tribal community has a kinship with the Gond tribe. Several myths suggest a close relationship between Gonds and Bhunjias. Even because of the close affinity with the Gonds, the Bhunjias had started worshipping the gods and goddesses of the Gond people. The Bhunjia society is patriarchal and the culture follows the norms and practices of the society, just like any other tribal communities of Indian subcontinent do.

As a consequence of this, they strive to obtain increased social estimation by ridiculously strict observance of the rules of ceremonial purity. If any man not of own caste touches the hut, where a Chaukhtia cooks his food they called it "*Lalbangla*", it is entirely abandoned and a fresh one is built. They do not even eat food cooked by other members of their own community and this is a restriction found only among those of doubtful descent, where every man is suspicious of his neighbors' parentage. The Chindas whose pedigree is more reliable, as for less particular about their social purity and they formed the acculturated section of the tribe.

#### *Settlement*

The Chaukhtia Bhunjias are confined exclusively to the hills of the Sonabera plateau and Chinda Bhunjias are scattered in the plains with other tribal and non-tribal communities. Bhunjia villages vary in size ranging from 8-10 households to 50-60 households. They believe that the village boundary is guarded by many Gods and Goddesses who protect the village from the infiltration of evil spirits.

#### *Housing*

Bhunjia houses are arranged in a peculiar way, two or more households taking a wide open space build their individual houses there. A Bhunjia house, generally has three store room, the second hut built adjacent to it by its side is used as the cattle shed and the third and the smallest one built a little away in front of the living room, is the kitchen shed which is enclosed all round. The houses are made of mud and thatched with wild grass. The houses are devoid of door except the living room and kitchen shed. The floors are plastered with either cow dung or colored soil and the walls with red and white soil. The walls

of most of the Bhunjia houses are painted with floral and animal designs. The household belonging comprise mats (*Champ*), earthen pots, mortar and pestle (*Musel*), gourds (*Tumba*) for storing water, leaf umbrella (*Mayur*) and some hunting implements, fishing traps (*Chhapa*), digging sticks, sickles (*Hansia*) and axe (*Tangia*). Besides these utensils, they have cooking utensils, clothes, and baskets for storing food stuff and forest collection. Some peculiarities are marked in the dress and ornamentations of the Bhunjias especially in the case of the woman. Men wear mainly a piece of cloth and the better of people wear undergarments and shirts. The women wear only Saris and are not in the habit of wearing blouses and undergarments. They use ornaments like necklaces made of beads and coil, glass and brass bangles, anklets and earrings made of either aluminum. Different pieces of jewellery made of glass; coils, beads, brass, silver, and aluminum adorn the women of this community. Ornaments like bangles, earrings, necklace, anklets etc are some of the jewellery is prevalent among the women. The Bhunjia women comb their hair in a very descent manner and arrange the hair into a massive roll at the back of their head by using a bulky ornament and fix pins into it to keep the roll in position.

#### *Family*

The family is the smallest social unit among the Bhunjias which is of nuclear type. It consists of parents and their unmarried children. The family size varies from 3 to 10 or even more members. After the son gets married, he establishes his own family in a separate place at the same village a daughter leaves her father's house after her marriage and lives with her husband. The unmarried sons and daughters continue to live with their parents until their marriage. In a case of death of the parents, the unmarried brothers and sisters stay with their married brother till their marriage. The head of the family is usually the eldest male member of the family. Thus a Bhunjia family is patrilocal, patrilineal and patriarchal.

#### *Marriage*

They believe that marriage is a union of man and woman for procreative and economic purposes. Cross cousin marriage is prevalent among them. A man can marry either his father's sister's daughter or his mother's brother's daughter. The tribe is divided into two exogamous moieties, the *Netam* and *Markam* and each moiety is subdivided into a number of Barges and each Barge has got a specific designation. The

*Netam* moiety has as many as ten Barges and *Markam* moiety has nine Barges. Marriage within the moiety is strictly prohibited. For regulating the marriage, the Bhunjia tribes have a number of exogamous units or clans. The Bhunjia people have marital relationship with the Gond people. Marriages also take place among the cross cousins of the community. The people of this community are divided into two groups namely *Markam* and *Netam*. Marriages in these groups are not allowed. Generally, the Bhunjia tribal people duly follow the structure of the nuclear family with a monogamous form of marriage. Special marriage rites and rituals are followed. In fact, the kitchen shed of these Bhunjia tribes is believed to be quite consecrated and the entry of married daughters into the kitchen is firmly prohibited.

There is no restriction in marriage between Chaukhutia Bhunjia and Chinda Bhunjia. But in such cases, a rite called *Dudh-pani* is performed when a *Bandhu* washes the mouth of the bride with milk before she taken in as a member of the groom's group. Adult marriage is in vogue among the Bhunjias. A boy marries at the age of around twenty and a girl at the age of fourteen years to eighteen years. An incestuous relationship is a taboo among the Bhunjias.

#### *Livelihood*

Just like any other tribes of the mountainous region of India, this Bhunjia tribe too has adopted the profession of shifting cultivation. Seeing the degradation of the landscapes due to rampant cultivation, in the present day, many of these Bhunjia tribes sustain their living by gathering and also selling various non-timber forest products in the local markets. Their staple food is rice and they eat a variety of wild leaves and tubers. They are non-vegetarians, and though they eat pork they never cook it in their kitchen. Their kitchen (*Lal Bangla*) is considered holy and kept clean and if it is polluted by an outsider or anybody from within the community, they immediately dismantle it and construct a new one. They cook with mustard and *Mahua* oil.

#### *Religious Life*

The pious nature of these Bhunjia tribes has a plethora of gods and goddesses whom they worship them for the sake of well-being and prosperity of the society. Cure and prevention of various diseases, seeking good harvesting etc. are also the reasons for which these deities are worshipped. In the month of *Chaitra*, the tribal people offer a goat and a coconut to

their deity of cholera and smallpox. *Sunadai* is their principal deity and the priest, better known as *Pujari*, carries on the religious rites. Festivals too are a part and parcel of these Bhunjia tribes. There is a legend popular amongst the Bhunjia tribes. Except *Holi*, these tribes celebrate almost all the other Indian festivals with enthusiasm. It is said that the Bhunjia tribes have excelled in the art of dreadful magic and spells.

#### *Political Life*

Bhunjia tribes follow the traditional system with the formation of a village council as the key unit of village administration. All the aged people of the Bhunjia village constitutes the basic unit, while in the top hierarchy, the inter-village council exists. An important aspect of Bhunjia tribal society is the status of their women. In fact, the Bhunjia tribes have a very stringent set of rules in order to govern a woman's life. It is said that women are not permitted to consume food from outside and there is no such limitation for the male folks. Also, only the women folks of the Bhunjia tribes are not allowed to wear slippers they are not supposed to step on the sacred earth where the deity, *Sunadai*, lives. However, no such rule is applicable for the Bhunjia male.

#### *The Different Tattooing Methods*

Inserting ink into the skin has been in practice since the Neolithic era, which so far has been proven from preserved human remains found during archaeological excavations. As the modes of human artistic bodily expressions vary, so do the methods in which tattoos have been and are still applied. Though many are used to the deadlight shops with designs littering the walls and the sterile smell, different societies have employed not only their own method of ink injection, but also their own rights and rituals behind tattooing an individual, signifying a milestone or rite of passage in their life. The following are all tattooing techniques that have been recorded throughout the globe.

#### *Tattoo Machine*

It has become a wide spreading standard, especially throughout Western cultures, to use an industry made electric tattooing machine. The needle(s) is placed inside a tube and the tattoo artist uses a foot pedal to operate the device that inserts the needle into the skin hundreds of times per second. Different needles are needed for outlining, coloring and shading, which vary in size and number. Using

a machine is the quickest tattooing method, but requires a license to use and handle.

#### *Bamboo Handles*

Most commonly used for full body Japanese tattoos, the bamboo handle is a way to punt ink into the skin by hand. The handle has about two dozen needles embedded in its end and the tattoo artist stretches the skin with one hand while pushing the needles in and out multiple times to create the cohesive image. This tattooing technique can take hundreds of hours to complete a full body tattoo and most often requires dozens of sessions for each person.

#### *Rake and Striking Stick*

One of the most primitive and oldest methods in tattooing is using the striking stick. Most prevalent in the South Pacific today, the artist uses a tipped rake, most often bone, dips it in ink, and hits it with the striking stick to puncture the skin. The puncture then contains the ink from the rake and over time the consecutive punctures form a pattern. An assistant most often stretches the skin while the artist works on the pattern. This technique has been used to form the world's most elaborately patterned tattoos found in Samoa and Papua New Guinea.

Bhunjia customarily craft tattoos by cutting drawings into the skin and rubbing the resulting wound with ink, ashes or other agents; some cultures continue this practice, which may be an adjunct to scarification. Several cultures create tattooed symbols by hand-tapping the ink into the skin using sharpened sticks or animal bones (made like needles) with clay formed disks or, in modern times, needles. The tattoo makers have to clean his or her hands and must also wash the area that will be tattooed.

#### *Different designs of Godna (Tattoo) in the Bhunjia*

Tattoo is called as Godna by the Bhunjia. A Godna is a form of body modification, made by inserting indelible ink into the dermis layer of the skin to change the pigment. This traditional Tattoo has religious and beauty significance for Bhunjia tribe. Bhunjia people think that Godna will accompany them even after their death. Only Bhunjia women can have Godna on their skin. According to Bhunjia people, only a "Godnin" can make Godna. Godna is made only in the winter season. Because in the summer, it can cause a lot of pain if they sweat reaches skin in the process of Godna. Godna is made among the Bhunjia at the age of 13-14. Godna is made

at the time of "Kaanabaana", a ritual where a teenager girl has to marry with traditional Bhunjia "Bow and Arrow". Bhunjia women apply "Andi oil" after tattooing their skin.

Bhunjia Women generally have designs of different Flower in their Godna. Designs like "Mandar flower", "Ritual flower", "Bodenda flower" are generally used. However, it is up to a Bhunjia woman what kind of flower design she wants. They have Godna on their foreheads, hands, and their legs.



Godna on hands is called "BAHA SHOBHA"



Bhunjia woman showing "BAHA SHOBHA"



Godna on palm is called "TEEN TAPKA"



Godna on leg is called "CHUDA PAIRI"



Godna on forehead is called "MUHU MUTKI"



A Bhunjia Godna of "Mandar Flower"



A Bhunjia Godna of "Sunflower Design"

### Conclusion

At the end of the above exploration, it is concluded that the various kind of art including the tattoo of the Bhunjia have vanished. The younger generation of this community has forgotten their spiritual and aesthetic sense. They don't want to draw the tattoo on their body. Although, older women have tattoos but they don't acquaint with their purpose and the meaning. On the light of the present study, it is suggested that ethnographic documentations should be conducted among the Bhungia of Chhattisgarh for conserve such kinds of intangible cultural heritage.

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