

This manuscript was completely re-written using all the relevant portions of

HARVEST ICONS

Sohrai Village Murals of Hazaribagh

by
Bulu Imam

This manuscript is adapted from Bulu Imam's 1990s large research titled HARVEST ICONS and hence that title is most apt for the present work.

Preface

The village. How many images this one word brings to mind. Scenes of rustic simplicity and unspoiled naturalness and the beauty of the natural world. It is the most precious place for all who have been brought up in a village and perhaps not much less for those who have known the village as a home to return to. Even those who may not have ever been villagers know this and return one day as Tourists!

The story of this book is the story of painted villages in the forest in the beautiful Hazaribagh plateau and its environs. It is a scene of absolute delight made perfect by art- the wall paintings painted by the tribal village women on the walls of their tiled mud houses. To have once experienced it is to never ever forget it.

Born in Hazaribagh seven decades back I have had the opportunity to visit these villages frequently. Where to begin. This book has been over twenty years in the making. Today is a prophetic date for the villages. A new government has been democratically elected. A government which has a new view of the villages. Compromise of the old village way of life is on the cards. The new culture of industrialism stands opposed to the artisanal culture of the villages. Thus this book comes at perhaps the right time as a document for posterity, in one small portion of India's village republic, in particular the unique world of India's forest villages which are the last living link with India's civilizational past.

Bulu Imam

16th May, 2014

“Sanskriti”, Dipugarha village
Hazaribagh, Jharkhand
India

Transition from hunter-gatherer to agriculturist art

A very challenging question has been put forward by Dr Terence McKenna in his book *Food of the Gods* (Bantam Books, February 1993, page 85). He asks,

“What could account for the vitiation (i.e. impairment) of the naturalistic spirit in Archaic art (i.e. primitive hunter-gatherer art, rock art, etc) that accompanies the change from hunting-gathering to agriculture ?”

McKenna thinks that the reason might have been the loss of hallucinogenic mushrooms used by the hunter-gatherers. I think rather that the reason was that hunter-gatherers were (and still are wherever they still exist) closer to wild animals and the natural wild world than agricultural societies which drift away from nature. These agricultural societies developed a different folk art which was defined by stasis, and this art is still very evident in folk society even in these modern times. On the other hand we are aware that hallucinogenic mushrooms were commonly used by agricultural societies (i.e. the so called Soma of the Rig Vedic peoples).

Pilocybin mushrooms were responsible for self-reflection on the pre historic African grasslands during the palaeolithic age tens of millennia ago. Tribes in Africa were familiar with the hallucinogenic mushroom containing psilocybin tens of thousands of years before the Rig Vedic Caucasians discovered it (Gordon Wasson, 1971, *Soma: Divine Mushroom of Immortality*).

The art we are seeing in this book is a folk art which has evolved into a deeply ritualistic context over thousands of years and is far removed from its prototype which is still evident in the rock art of Hazaribagh and I wish the reader a very interesting journey through the diverse elements of ritual and aesthetics which cover the following pages.

The chronology

The Harappan culture was an indigenous manifestation. Many scholars like B.B.Lal the archaeologist, believe that it was an indigenous Vedic civilization. It contained the form of the caste system. The upper castes were the religious and merchant classes. The middle classes were the agricultural and artisan classes. The lowest class were the labouring and forest dwelling classes. It is with these classes this book is principally concerned. Agriculture was a subsistence food source, artisan work was of exchange value, hunting and gathering were connected to this agricultural base. These included the potter or Prajapati and Kumhar, the iron working lohar and iron smelting agaria, in the copper-bronze age of the Malhar and Gadaba, the basket making Turis, the cattle grazing Ahirs, the cloth weavers, leather workers, carpenters, and a host of others who produced wares essential for village society.

The village was and still largely is self administered. Over the course of time many new developments came, many invasions from both outside and within the subcontinent. The fields of culture were ploughed by many alien ploughshares. There were artisan guilds and agricultural guilds that controlled distribution of wares and crops and among them moved many nomadic groups who brought their own subsistence lifestyles. It was a society based on ritual worship and blood sacrifice. The earliest accounts of this society are to be found in the Vedas and the archaeological remains of the culture which produced them. It was a world of differences living in unity and harmony with one another.

Outside invasions have continued for the past nearly three thousand years and Aryan, Greek, Sassanid, and Kushan races came from the west, Tibeto-Mongoloid and Southeast Asian from the northeast.

Much of the art depicted in the forest villages of Hazaribagh belongs to the semi-Hinduized castes but note will be made that no Hindu gods and goddesses appear in the wall paintings. The aboriginal tribes have had a difficult time holding on to their ancient traditions pre-dating the advent of any religion in India and we have with us today the Munda, Oraon, Asur, Agaria, Santal, Kharwar, Ho, Saora, Bhuiya, Birhor, Kol, Korwa, Ganju and other tribal groups, each having a distinctive traditional wall painting art, all of which may be iconographically be traced back to the region's prehistoric rockart which date back to the hunting or Mesolithic period. Their culture and religion may be compared with similar autochthonous groups around the world, but in particular with Southeast Asia which for many millennia must have maintained cultural contact with South Asia. They have their own distinctive beliefs and ritual practices and believe in place spirits and landforms as deities, and Ancestor worship. Their art language and culture may directly be traced to connections with the Aboriginals of Australia.

In this ancient milieu animals are highly respected and at the same time hunted. Owing to totemism a person of a certain lineage will never harm or eat this totem animal, plant or fish. The Buffalo emerged as the first animal to be worshipped and the summer and harvest festivals are connected with the cattle which are the main animals for plough agriculture. During the Sohrai or harvest festival the Buffalo along with the Bull and cow are the main focus of this festival for thanks giving. It is strange that in the Durga Puja festival preceding Sohrai by a fortnight the Buffalo is traced as Demon (Mahesh-Asura) and killed by Durga, while just a few weeks after the village women decorate and worship the buffalo! Here is a key for insight into the ancient village belief and practices and later Brahmanical beliefs and practices. Naturally, being a very old country India is a land of vehement contradictions.

Another dichotomy which I have marked is the Tree in the aboriginal world and among brahminical societies. While it is well known that Hindus worship certain trees as sacred what is not known is the general fear of them. I put this down to trees, the forest, the sacred grove, being the abode of forest gods, both Chandi and Burhi Ma the forest goddess or Shiva himself who was such a pain to later Vedic societies. The tribal love for trees is well known and throughout my home state of Jharkhand the tribes who call and identify themselves as Adivasis- or First Settlers- protect groves which they consider sacred. Such groves are to be found near every Adivasi village and even though they may not be subject to daily ritual and worship they hold a central importance as sacred in the first degree for the Adivasis. It has been observed by some scholars that these sacred groves- "Sarna" as they are called- represent the patches of forest left standing when the forests were cleared for plough agriculture (which is believed to date back to the iron age for the iron plough, and which date is around 1100 BC which also coincides with the end of the so called Vedic Period and the beginning of the Age of the Puranas. Tribal Religion is not mentioned in the Constitution of India.

Khovar is the sacred ritual art of the marriage season painted during summer and in the bridal room it is consisting of mainly plant forms which are connected with fertility, and anthropomorphic forms are painted only on the outside walls of the houses. Both Khovar and Sohrai must be seen as deified art even if we cannot understand the gods and goddesses of the

tribal imagination depicted therein. Shiva is thus deified depicted standing on the back of the bull (Ghoda, or horse) in the Kurmi Sohrai. Such art may not be de-sacralized even when displayed in the profane public gaze. It is an assertion of sacred belief and so must as all times be sacred.

We hear in the tribal villages the oft-spoken word Bonga (incidentally it is also the name of a village near Hazaribagh). The Bonnga is the spirit essence of the deity or god. The offerings and sacrifices are all to these Bongas.

The Archaeological chronology is also of interest to us. The Hoabinhian culture of Southeast Asia showed the earliest domestication of plants as far back as 15,000 BC in north Thailand. Edge-ground stone tools found in Northern Australia have been Carbon-14 dated to 20,000 BC and proved to be of Hoabinhian origin. They are similar to a stone tool culture on the neighboring islands of Timor which whose archaeological record dates back to the Palaeolithic, and it is also of interest that they are also similar to the edge-ground shouldered Celts of Jharkhand which are of the Southeast Asian type and on the basis of which the late Austrian anthropologist Heine Geldern connected the protoaustraloid civilization of Eastern India and Australia as far back as the 1950s. The Hoabinhian was a Southeast Asian culture evolved in Malaysia, Phillipines, Thailand, Cambodia and Vietnam and known as the Dongsonian culture, and it reached as far back as Japan.

The Yangshao culture of China (which had early contacts with the Indus) sprang directly from these developments and a civilization arose in the Brahmaputra valley between Tibet and the plain of Assam. This was the eastern route to India a counterpart to the Khyber pass in the west. Thus we see across northern India trade routes in early times expanding westward across south Asia and down to Australia on the eastern side, and on the western to Afghanistan, Persia, Iraq and Turkey. And from these to the Mediterranean cultures and Mainland Europe.

Modern India has been caught in a cauldron of cross-culture. Bertrand Flornoy the well known French anthropologist once remarked "For races that live in permanent contact with the environment and soil and forests the ideal is not progress but stability and security."

The greatest enemy to this has been missionization and education which have impacted disastrously upon the economy and lifestyle of long established societies designed to destabilize their hold on the land which these missionaries of development are eyeing to acquire and exploit for economic gain. There is no space in this area for the signposts and relevance of the Sacred to survive! Thus the entire aboriginal cultures of Asia have been attacked from north to south through militanotic industrialization in the forms of mining, urbanization, big dams and farming the forests as giant economic plantation. Here there is absolutely no place for the gentle arts of collecting forest produce, or rice and vegetable cultivation, or painting houses. The women as seer and produce provider, seer and priestess, is at an end. If she goes who will carry on the sacred traditions of an early world which she alone knows and understands?

Village traditions are linked to the economy and lifestyle of the tribe and when the economy and lifestyle are impacted upon it has a direct effect on the local culture. It has been said that man does not change, rather he changes his environment which in turn changes him. It is commonly held that the Harappan civilization was an indigenous Vedic expression which spread across India. In my view it was the indigenous cultures of the subcontinent which found expression in Harappa. The various motifs found in the Harappan pottery may be directly traced back to the art

of the Indian forest villages and pre-historic rock art of the Indian and sub-continent. Industrialization and mechanized production have destroyed the village artisan and artistic traditions.

We are fortunate to still have with us in the forest villages ancient repositories of art and culture not to be found elsewhere in India. Each region has its own unique manifestation.

The Comb

The connection between the art of the villages date back to the Vedic times and earlier. The comb art of the marriage is a sacred relic of these times. In the ancient sacraments known as *Samskaras* the third ritual is the parting of the hair of a married women with a comb. The comb is the symbol of a married women and mother. Thus it is the comb that is used to make the unique sagraffito mud wall paintings called Khovar during the marriage ceremony.

The Vratyas

Among earlier travelers through these jungles were the ancient cattle herding Vratyas who were also spinners of cotton thread and used a double-stringed carding bow which was the prototype of the double-stringed clay pellet bow still used by village boys for hunting birds and small animals of the forest. The Vratyas brought with them the long backed and small humped cattle (*Bos indica nomadicus*) of the northwestern parts and so different to the Southeast Asian cattle (*Bos primogenis*) which had not only a small back but less spinal sections to give it this unique conformation and was ideally shaped to plough the small square hilly plots of rice-fields for which they were used in preference to long backed cattle. The Vratyas used the carding bow for fluffing the silk cotton common in our area (*Bombax malabaricum*) and the bow was called Jayaharoda or “the string that roars”.

Stone tools

The ancient Greek historian Ptolemy had heard of our region and referred to the three plateau districts- Ranchi, Hazaribagh, Palamau as “the three cantons”. The major river of this region is the Damodar, which has yielded lower, middle, and upper palaeolithic cultures and which has a bronze and iron-age in accompaniment with a rich megalithic culture and many rockart sites which cover the early Mesolithic hunting period as well as the later Chalcolithic agricultural period. In the region where the rock art has been painted in the shelters high up on the hill sides we find an assortment of stone tools ranging from the palaeolithic to the very fine microliths and include every variety of hand axe, chopper, borer, flake blades, stripper, and microliths. It is clear that the whole region was once a nursery-bed of palaeolithic culture which grew into the tribal culture of present times.

Scheduled Castes

Today 65 years after the Country’s independence from British rule we easily forget that the semi-hinduized aborigines called the Scheduled Castes were not long back listed in the strictly ethnographic British administration records as Tribes. Today they consider themselves non-Tribals. In fact in Modern India to be marked as being a Tribal is considered in some way to be backward or uncivilized. The debt of India’s culture to the Tribes is unrecognized.

Indus Valley motifs

Even a cursory glance at the seals and earlier pottery motifs will strike (even) the casual enquirer with a strong similarity with the rock-art of Hazaribagh and its environs and the local Khovar and Sohrai wall paintings on the village houses. The links between the Indus and the Chotanagpur plateau (now called Jharkhand) have not only been noticed but well proven by serious researchers (i.e. Asko Parpola on the basis of Dravidian linguistics; Ref. Fr. Henry Heras, SJ on the basis of archaeology; and late Prof. Mangobinda Banerjee on the basis of history).

Bronze Age in Jharkhand- Iron age deposits and implements

The main reason for the flourishing bronze age civilization in Jharkhand was the plentiful availability of chalcopryrite ore and tin from which bronze was smelted, and later the rich iron deposits of haematite from which the Asurs and Agarias smelted iron. It was the trade of iron between Rajgriha and the valley of river Narmada which gave the region economic strength and it was iron which earlier gave the Mauryas the power to build an empire stretching to Bactria. In fact without the iron clear felling of the forests of the Ganges and the Jamuna valleys would have been impossible. The Ranchi-Hazaribagh region has evidenced a rich Bronze Age as well as Iron Age culture attributed to the Asurs or iron workers.

Sohrai- The Sohrai Harvest Festival for the Cattle

Sohrai is the harvest festival and connected naturally with cattle. The physical manifestation of the art on the walls of the village houses is an ancient one. A similar harvest art is practiced by the Copts of the Nile Valley and in the valley of the Jhelum river in Punjab. I have found this art practiced during winter in the Jammu hills in Mansar and Samba and also in the hills of Nepal. A similar art appears in the villages of Smardha in Bhopal not far from the famed rock paintings of Bhimbetka. The Sohrai of the Warli tribe of Dahanu north of Bombay is a well known art form now thanks to art enthusiast and it has been found to be a continuing tradition from the rockart of Raisen in Madhya Pradesh (Yashodhara Dalmia, *The Painted World of the Warli*, Lalit Kala Academy, 1988, p.21). The art appears in a form unique to the Dharbanga area of North Bihar painted by the Marthili women of Madhubani with the Ramayana as its main theme. Echoes of the Sohrai first found in the forest villages of Hazaribagh beneath the great pre-historic painted shelters may be seen in the terracotta and bronze horses (Ghoda) found in the districts of Bankura in neighbouring West Bengal, and in the Godaba metal castings of neighbouring Bastar in Chhatisgarh state. In fact the closest offshoot of the Sohrai art forms are to be found in the bronze castings of the Malhar metal casters in the forest villages of Hazaribagh itself. A striking form in the iron plate of horses is to be found among the Saoras of the Eastern Ghats in Orissa, a tradition that has now spilled over into neighbouring Chhatisgarh. The metal castings of the Malhar like the local Kurmi Tattoo on the women is traceable to the chalcolithic rockart of the Hazaribagh region.

It is of interest to draw the readers attention to the number of traditional Sohrai motifs found as far away as the Nile Valley in Egypt painted on mud walls traditionally, and a strikingly similar art in the villages of Nepal. To push it further back we can find a similar art being practiced as our Hazaribagh Sohrai consisting of large animal forms in the strikingly similar wall murals of large bulls found in the protohistoric Neolithic village of Catal hoyuk (5000 BC) on the

Anatolian plateau in Turkey. Archaeologists have recognized these murals as having been ritually painted by women.

There is evidence of a world wide common tradition of sacred beliefs and their ritual expressions- for example the so called 'animal wheel' noted in Sohrai is found in other cultures in association with the stag or bull from Indus valley to pre-Columbian traditions in Mexico. In the Sohrai paintings of the Kurmis in eastern Hazaribagh (Bhelwara) we find striking "comb figures" exactly similar to those found in pottery from Susa and Sealk-II in ancient Mesopotamia. In Central India the comb is a sexual statement among Muria youth (Verrier Elwin, Tribal Art of Middle India, OUP, 1950, pp.46-47) and it is apart from its Vedic symbolism associated with marriage and motherhood, a strong symbol of fertility.

I will here draw attention to the significance of *space* in a ritual painting. For a tribal space denotes land, and spaces between ritual figures are believed to give energy to the land belonging to the artist. The motifs are therefore like ritual objects in a sacred landscape. Above all women are the carriers of this sacred tradition. Among the Oraons of Chotanagpur there is a distinct place cult which the great anthropologist Sarat Chandra Ray went so far as to say these Oraon beliefs are so strong that even Muslims and Hindus living in proximity with the Oraons readily subscribe to this place cult! (S.C.Roy, The Oraons, 1915, pp.49-50). In Southeast Asia "spirit houses" are built for deities connected with this place cult. What we learn from our ancient culture is the quest for social harmony and ritual propitiation which was above materialistic and anti-social behaviour connected with possession. The production exchange economy was around agriculture and crafts, and a high standard of cultivation was thus achieved. A clear historical record is found in this observation of the Chinese traveler Huen Tsang in the mid seventh century AD then at the height of Gupta patronage. What we find most obvious is *that since earliest times art and magic were intertwined.*

The hilly regions of central India have since time immemorial been home to aboriginal tribes from eastern Maharashtra in the Deccan to Chhatisgarh, Orissa, Jharkhand and Bengal.

Tribal Religion

Magic and medicines, religion and music, art, song and dance are the inner world of these tribal and semi-hinduized aboriginal groups practicing the Sohrai and Khovar painting tradition. Their lives are plain and uncluttered- the village road, the well and the vegetable patch, further a field the rice-fields and forests these constitute the sum of their world. Buddhism and Brahmanism were the first to enter this closed religio-cultural society based on animus and spirit worship in which woman was Devi or living goddess in her role as mother of the house hold. When Islam entered in the beginning of the second millennium AD it brought with it new values and notions, quickly followed by entry of the British and Christianity. The sacred orientation of the tribal village changed almost overnight. The importance of sacred sites like the sacred grove (Sarna), dancing ground (akhara), burial ground (sasan-diri) and the traditional meeting places of the village council (panch) were under censure as were the custom-superstition connected with the rituals and also the seasonal calendar of the religious festivals. All these were soon Christianized or hinduized. Christianity struck at the tribal customs of dancing and drinking, sacrifices to animist deities and worship of trees, hills, springs all manifestations of the earth mother. Dances were first considered vulgar and then restrained in form, the use of feather and flowers in bodily

decoration along with tattoo were frowned on, having silver jewellery in women and use of scarves and ear-rings and wrist-bands in men were considered effeminate. Tribal songs and folklore was affected, western mechanical musical instruments vied with traditional musical instruments like drum, flute, and iguana-skin violin. All these changes could not help but have an impact upon the traditions from which Sohrai and Khovar art came.

The Karma festival at the onset of the winter is an old village tradition which is connected with the Kadamb as well as Karam. The Kadamba or *Anthocephalus kadamba* is the tree associated traditionally with lord Krishna in Brindavan and the Karam is *Adena cordifolia*. The tree that appears so frequently in Khovar painting is this tree, and it appears in many places of iconic significance as in the pedestal of Ashokan Pillar Capitals (Rampurva) now in Rashtrapati Bhawan. Conversely some believe it is the tree of Shiva called Bilva or *Aegle marmelos* not the Bhelwa or Indian Marking Nut *Semecarpus anacardium* which is also sacred to Shiva. Whichever tree it may be in the imagination of the tribal artist it is essentially the Tree of Life. This is the main motif of Khovar painting.

The main tree of the dry deciduous forests of Central India is the Dandak or Saal tree, known to the Tribals as Saal or Sarjom- *Shorea robusta*. The sacred grove or Sarna is always a group of Saal trees. The goddess of the Saal forest is called Chhalo Pachcho by the Oraons or simply 'Burhi' meaning old woman. The tree in its various manifestations in Khovar painting is a unique possession of the women painters. Ananda Coomaraswamy had traced the origin of the standing Buddha form- as evidenced in Bamiyan to the early sculptures of forest spirits or Yakshas (A.Coomaraswamy, Indian Origin of the Buddha image, Journal of the American Oriental Society, 1926). He also traced the Origin of snake-hooded Buddha figure to the Naga cult of snake worship. Many of the motifs of the village Khovar and Sohrai painting appear as sacred Buddhist symbols. The tree is associated with Shiva and both the human form devoting this deity appear along with the Tree on the backs of animals in expression of Shiva worship from the Indus Harappan civilization to present day forest village house wall murals because Shiva is believed to be 'Lord of Animals'. One of the form of Shiva is the buffalo Maheshasura. After the tree the most common forms which we encounter is the circle denoting the mother goddess. The cupule is the oldest known form in rock art and in India its oldest expression come, from the limestone caves of Central India in Bhimbetka. The cupule in this context is found in the levels containing Acheulian hand axes as far back as the end of the lower palaeolithic thirty or forty thousand years ago. The famous sites like the Chambal valley which have produced 498 cupules at the Daraki Chattan and are associated with the mother goddess. Archaeologists have been universal in attributing cupules to be marks of a mother goddess cult in Europe, Australia and in India. In the megaliths of Hazaribagh rows of cupules have been found. The most celebrated example of cupules are found near Darwin, Northern Australia at a site named Jimmum where no less than three thousand pecked stone cupules appear on a vertical rock face dated by Wollongong University, NSW archaeologists to 100,000 B.P. The circle with cross in it is found in the rock art of Kakadu National Park, Northern Arnhemland in Australia's Northern Territory, dated at 40,000 BP. It has been also found in the rock art of Tasmania as the Eye Goddess (10,000 BP). In these archaeological contexts it becomes clear to us that the circle is a very old human production and when found in a continuing artistic tradition in pre-literate societies in the context of meso-chalcolithic rock art- as for example in Hazaribagh- it must be taken seriously as telling us something. Not only the circle but scores of motifs found in the Hazaribagh rock paintings are found in the village murals. Should we not say then that this must be one of the oldest continuing artistic traditions in the world? The circle with cross in it is one of the primary

contemporary ritual motifs in the Navajho sand paintings of the American Indians, and the same motif is found in Hazaribagh in the Oraon Danda Katta motif which is used in the Sarhul Spring Festival. It is also used by our nomadic forest dwellers the Birhor tribe as a marriage motif known as Bana Sana. When we become aware of these iconic significances should we not stand in humility before the art of the simple forest people and their congeners? Strings of circles are common in our region's rockart at Khandar in Satpahar and Sidpa and Isco. Uptil now these have not been explained. They represent the hooves of cattle in a line and are the floor Aripans made on the floor to welcome the Cattle on the day of Sohrai Festival.

Circles and concentric circles are intrinsic to the painting of the Sohrai bull forms painted on our Kurmi house walls during Sohrai festival. In a different context we find the same forms in the rockart of Isco in Hazaribagh (Central Panel, 3500 BC), and the concentric circle is the Eye Goddess in Taxila. Ancient megalithic societies carried on an ancient cupule cult as well as worship of the moon. The cupule is also connected with small-pox (Mata or the name mother) the dreaded disease. Can there be a connection between small-pox marks on the face and craters on the moon?

The moon was worshipped by the rock painters of Hazaribagh. In the Nautangwa Pahar rock art we find a figure holding the crescent moon or bulls horn and an exactly similar relief figure holding a crescent (either bull's horn or crescent moon) in the 22,000 year old Venus of Laussel in South France is found. A small object in the shape of the crescent moon was found by archaeologists on the altar of the Temple in Ur in the Chaldees commensurate with the time of the Biblical figure Abraham (3000 BC) and the Crescent moon on the pyramid has been found in the Indus and read by Heras as denoting "Queen". This motif is in the central panel in Isco rock art in Hazaribagh. In Mesopotamia at the junction of Tigris and Euphrates rivers the marsh dwellers worshipped the mother goddess as a Pyramidal reed hut with two tufts or pony-tail at the top. Again, the cattle are welcomed on Sohrai into the house over an Aripan with the same motif!



Welcome Aripan with the Latlatiya grass in the clay cone at the head



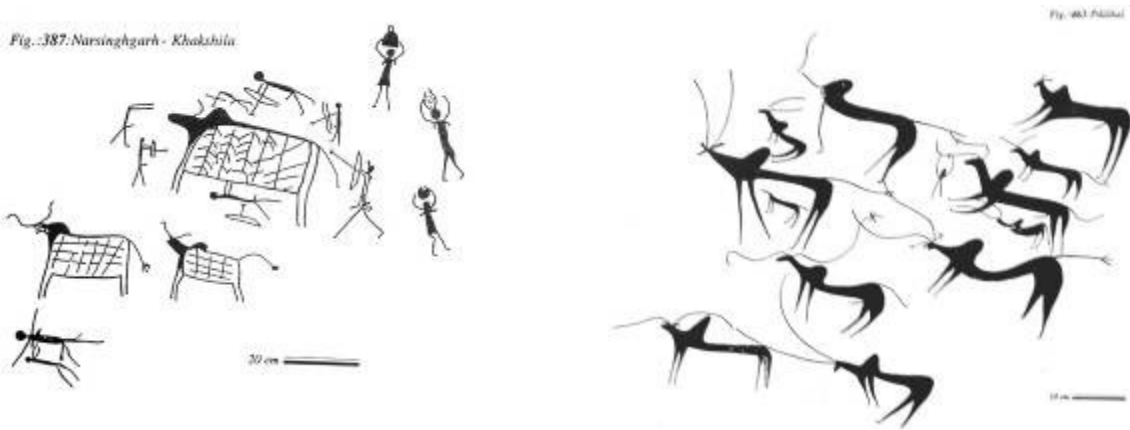
Crescent Moon in the Nautangwa rockart

The oldest meaning of Sohrai is cattle catching wealth dating as far back as domestication of cattle. In the proto-australoid Mundaric language “Soro” means to bolt the door using a short stick. The word “Soh” is used when driving the cattle with a short stick or when chasing away birds or animals. Cattle are the oldest symbol of wealth (Latin *Pecunia*) *L.Pecu*= cattle). In an ancient world the stick and cattle had the significance of wealth and in 2005 I remember giving a well-attended talk on the subject at the National Centre for Performing Arts in Mumbai which had been arranged by Khorshed and Kekoo Gandhi and Mrs. Tasneem Mehta.

I believe that the origins of driving cattle into the corrals during the Sohrai festival with the onset of winter and harvest season go back to the ancient method of driving the wild cattle into *cul-de-sacs* (similar to elephant catching through the Khedda) which we know was practiced by Neolithic societies in the first domestication of animals. This is also why the Sohrai festival follows Diwali which apart from “festival of lights” is the memory of welcoming Lord Ram back in Ayodhya after his long absence. In village consciousness he was the first to bring wild cattle back with him. This is central to understanding the welcome of the cattle, so essential to the agricultural economy of our forest villages which depend wholly upon the cows, bulls and buffalos for their subsistence. Their plough agriculture makes bulls the possessions of the men folk, the milk of the cattle essential to the milk economy of the women’s world, the cow dung so essential for building with mud and as fertilizer for the field crops. Every aspect of village life revolves around their cattle, and this is the reason for cow worship throughout India.

Our village cattle are the South and Southeast Asian short backed, small humped bulls essential for ploughing and turning with the plough in small rice fields. This variety of cattle is descended from *Bos nomadicus* unlike the cattle of wheat growing Northwestern India which are descended from the western European and Central Asia Aurochs or *Bos primogenis* going back as far as seven thousand years. Our cattle are of the Southeast Asian valley whose use in rice farming goes back an equally long or even longer time. The cattle depicted in the Indus seals are the Aurochs long horn variety whereas the cattle of our Central Indian forest villages are of the short backed Manchurian cattle rather than the Zebu type.

The rock paintings of Piklihal on the Krishna river in south India and Narsingarh show animals being caught and tethered which are the long backed long horned north western type.

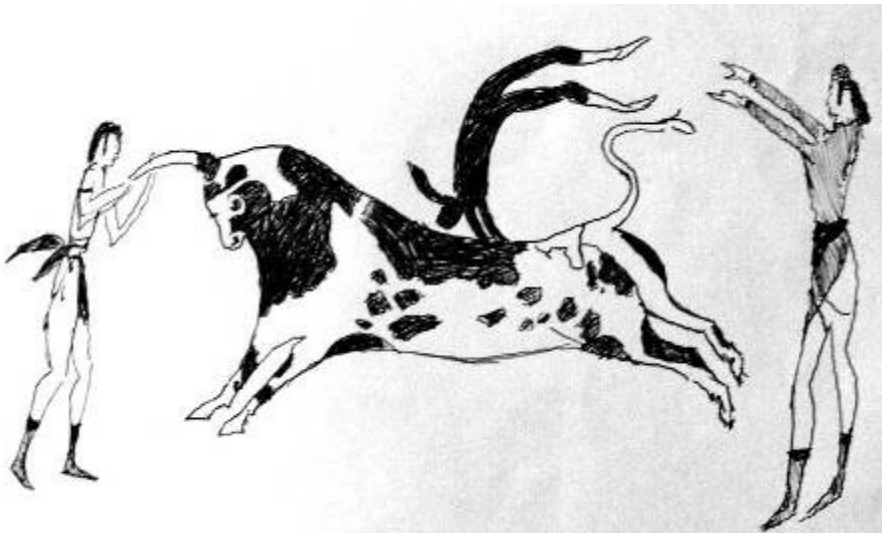


The Khuta-Bandhan or Bull –Fight ***Cattle spotting- Bull Cult***

I have said that the bulls are the particular domain of men folk who do the plough agriculture. But the cattle, both cows, bulls, and buffalos are also the women's world. The day after the Diwali festival the Khuta Bandhan which is the same as the brahmanized Govardhan Puja. The bulls are tied to the stakes and played with. The festival coincides with and has a similar significance to the South Indian harvest festival of Onam (well known for its snake boat races).

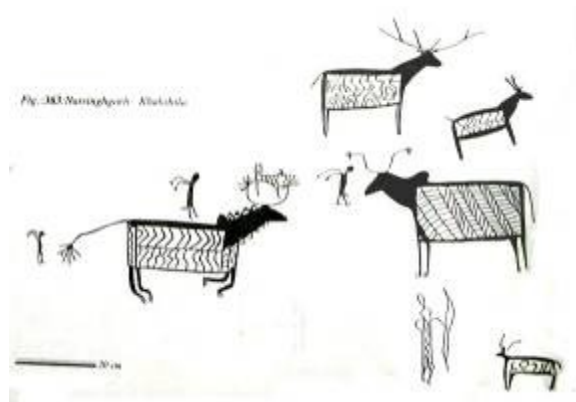
In the Piklihal rockart illustrated we see bulls being tethered. In the villages the women of our area collect the cattle and decorate them with circular spots which are made with the earthen oil cups used to light the lamps for Diwali in a festival of lights. These are dipped in white rice paste or mixed with vermilion and with these the cattle are spotted. Their horns are oiled and hoofs oiled, vermilion is applied to the horns. We have found in the Isco rock paintings these spotted cattle and know they date as far back as five thousand years ago. This proves that the present tradition goes back this far.

In the Khuta or stake festival the bulls are tethered to a stake. This symbol goes back to the days of Meriah or human sacrifice mentioned as far back as Puranic and Rig Vedic texts. This ceremony is common to many parts of Central India including Orissa where it is practiced with the buffalos in the Khond festival of Porha Jatra in Phulbani where I witnessed it. Instead of a human victim the buffalo or bull takes it place. In a typical field where this unique khuta ceremony is practiced in our Hazaribagh area the bulls and buffalos numbering from six to twenty depending upon the size of the field available are tethered to poles in the ground. The drummers and one other man enter the field where the village crowd assembles to witness the play. It is in many ways similar to the Spanish bull fight and Audalucian bull running. Bull jumping by men toreadors are depicted not only in Indian rockart but in the famous *toreador fresco from Crete* now in the Candia Museum on that Mediterranean island farmed for Minos (the Minotaur) bull cult connected with Mycenae on the Greek mainland.



Toreador Fresco, 1500 B.C. (Height 31" inches, Archaeological Museum, Candia, Crete

We have evidence of a similar bull cult involving bull leaping in Central India in the pre-historic rockart of Karnataka.



Bull leaping in Narsingarh

It is also found in the Indus Valley where a man is shown jumping over a bull.



Indus valley bull leaping

The bull cult was practiced in the Anatolian plateau in Central Turkey as far back as 5000 BC in Catalhoyuk where the walls of their ancient city have been exposed by archaeologists to reveal huge painted bull frescos, the now extinct aurochs. The animal is surrounded by figures running toward it, and men with *Mandar* type double sided drums similar to the ones still used in Hazaribagh in the Khuta! Time stops. Seven thousand years is passed in a flash!



Illustration- Catalhoyuk bull and drummers

The bull baiting cult is a relic of the ancient world going back to the Mayans, of Meso America and the Guanches of the Canary Island believed to be descendants of the Atlantians. Plato has recorded about the Atlanteans.

“There were bulls who had the range of the Temple of Poseidon; and the ten kings who were left alone in the temple, after they had offered the prayers to the gods, that they might take the sacrifices which were acceptable to them, hunted the bulls without weapons, but with staves and nooses; and the bull which they caught they led upto the column; the victim was then struck on the head by them; and slain over the sacred inscription.”

This continuing tradition among the Guanches of the Canary Islands even today which is the island chain where Atlantis was supposed to have sunken in the Atlantic is very relevant in understanding the early significance of bull-baiting.

The *Guanche* are a strange ancient cult and even today we find the remains of their Mayan-type stepped pyramids in the vicinity of Mount Tenerife in these Islands. They could be descendants of the worlds oldest civilization.

When considering the role of cattle in the village economy in a rice growing subsistence culture we have to also look at the other factors affecting the rice crop such as the rainy season or monsoon from the middle of June to October. Due to climate change the rainfall patterns to which the planting and growing of rice seedlings upto the time of harvest is essential have altered drastically. Now-a-days the rainy season is not following accustomed patterns. An early rain comes, then a dry spell, followed by heavy rain in July when the seedlings are planted in the flooded fields by the women. Then a dry spell ensures when the fields with the seedlings dry due to a break in the rains, and then a light series of showers hardly fulfills the irrigation which the seedlings require. Then a heavy shower when seedlings may again be planted, followed by a series of light showers when the poor crop of mixed rice seedlings are planted. When the crop ripens heavy rains come unseasonally when not at all expected and the rice crop is damaged just when it is in need of early October sunshine. All these events are detrimental to the village economy which are experiments with hybrids and chemical fertilizers. The Sohrai festival is the culmination of the whole process of rice growing in Central and eastern India and it is at the fulfillment of a good rice crop that this rich cultural heritage can continue.

In the rockart of Hazaribagh we do find early cattle. The hilly terrain of the Chota Nagpur plateau which is now Jharkhand and in the north part of which is the Upper Damodar or North Karanpura Valley is ideally suited for cattle-catching when wild cattle were driven into the gullies where the rockart is found in caves on the hill escarpments. This form of cattle catching by drawing the animals into cul-de-sacs was the method used in the northern Sahara when it was a fertile region five thousand years ago. Similar images of wild cattle appear in the Hazaribagh region even today in the famous rock paintings of the Tassili-N-Ajjer in eastern Sahara..

In the local vernacular in eastern and central India rice fields are called *Khet*. It is very significant to note *Khet* is most likely the root of the word *Kheddar* used to describe driving wild elephants into a stockade common in Mysore in South India. In Assam driving marauding wild elephants from rice crops at night with flaring fire torches is called Khetna. The Kheddar method of catching wild elephants is particular to Burma. In the rock paintings of the Tassili-N-Ajjer in the Sahara the Khadder cul-de-sac is depicted as a U or horse shoe with the opening at the top. This symbol is also found in Egyptian hieroglyphs and the Indus Valley seals and means “to calculate” (S.C.Roy, The Birhor, Man in India, Ranchi, 1978, p.285) when a short line is inserted

at the top which obviously means when the U is closed and the animal trapped which means added value. .

In a military manouvre the cul-de-sac is referred to as “Closing the Ring”. This was the title of the second volume of Winston Churchills “History of the Second World War” when Nazi Germany was tactically routed.

The calligraphic chiaroscuro of Glyptic Khovar art

The marriage murals of Khovar are in black and white. Over a layer of the black earth known as Kali-mati (manganese) a fairley thin wet layer of whitish earth mixture call Dudhi-matti (milk earth) consisting of kaolin clay diluted in water is spread over the half dry black earth, Before it dries it is scraped into black relief motifs which strongly reflects a *calligraphic* style. This art is glyptic and the fine toothed comb used for extracting lice from the hair is used. The edges are sharp and clear, as if cut with a stylus or nib of a calligraphic reed pen. This is basically a potter’s art and has strong affinity with middle first century BC Greek black-on red and red-on-black pottery. I have compared it with the designs on La-Pita pottery of northern Papua New Guinea and Micronesia in which the designs are cut in the wet clay pots before firing. The difference in the Sgraffito comb art of Khovar is the striking contrast between the white over-ground and sharply contrasting black motifs which appear after cutting. To go further back in time it may be compared with the Vince pottery and Linear Band Ceramic (LBK) culture of Danube (5000 BC).

Associated village art-forms

The clay toys made by village children and the children’s houses are also of interest since both remind us of a numinous beginnings of the art of the villages after agriculture began and sedentarization started. I became enamored with the small toy forms when I noticed the beautiful “toffee paper cockbirds” for the first time. Over a small form made of cloth stuffed with rice husk the children sewed on folded toffee papers making birds with real looking feathers. In a similar fashion they made toy animals and birds from clay and sun-dried them. For children who have no market made toys this fills a deficiency perhaps. But what I noted was the great beauty in these simple forms which reminded me of similar clay toys placed in the reliquary of Egyptian tombs of Pharaohs (like for example in Tutankhamen’s tomb (1100 BC). The children based these forms on the village mural bird and animal forms. When the children made small “houses” with square figures of stones on the ground I saw its similarity with the plan forms of village houses made by primitive societies in rock-art. Squares and rectangles divide into indefinite blocks and doors. The children would sit and play in these roofless diagrammatic houses on the bare earth and place their toys around them. From this has grown the practice of making a small house for the goddess during Divali the annual festival of lights before Sohrai and placing toys made of clay and mother goddess figures much as western society makes in a Crib during Christmas.

Child Art

Child art is innocent and close to the work of primitive artists whereas much pre-historic rock painting is highly developed evolution of artistic style and cannot be called innocent or primitive but rather the work of highly evolved and mature individuals and societies. Aboriginal art is a

highly developed art form (in Australia for example) and the art of so called 'primitive' peoples in India is similarly highly evolved and even reaches a 'folk' or developed level. But unfortunately the ancient meanings of zoomorphs and anthropomorphs found in pre-historic rock paintings is now lost in time. They are comprehensively mature art works by any standards.

The Ledra or Embroidered Quilts

During the winter months after the harvest has been brought in a period of calm enters the woman's world in our villages. Women sit in the sun in the cold weather sewing the crib quilts called 'ledra'. The 'ledra' consists of four or five *sarees* folded into five feet sizes to fit the string cot or *Khatia* and held together with a running stitch in a matching shade to the plain saree colour.. Then the elaborate design is made through the quilting technique leaving forms on both sides. The small air pockets created are sources of warmth. A mother or grandmother makes such crib quilts for her daughter, grand-daughter or a niece who will be married in the coming year. A typical quilt may take from six to eight weeks to sew. It is a labour of love, and a treat for the eyes. The permanent colour hand dyed cotton threads are bought at the village weekly market. A crib quilt or 'ledra' is also believed to protect the baby from the 'evil eye' so feared in the village. The timing of the quilting season is the winter months perfect for the marriage season starting in the spring when the majestic black and white Khovar murals will decorate the freshly painted mud walls.

The magical significance of form in the tribal world has to be always kept in mind when studying the art work of such traditional and pre-literate societies. As they become literate he visual excellence of the right brain 'woman's world' is lost.

The village House

If a comparative study is made of so called modern urban society it will be found that the bases are still the same but the socio-cultural or socio-religious significances have altered. The tribal child still has his toys, the little girls have dolls made by themselves; Birhor children make clay cameras and trucks with wheels that can be pulled with a string. Instead of expensive framed pictures the village home has timeless mural paintings made with the coloured earths and mineral pigments of the home hand woven in a fabric of eternal designs. The tribal house is a work of rare craft skills from the carved wooden doors and jointed rafters made of *Saal* wood and the handsome tiled roofs with eaves which acts as smoke vents. The thick earthen walls and clay tiles keep the mud house cool during summer and warm during winter. In the loft made of beams with 'wattle-and-daub' flooring the grains, potatoes and onions find a perfect smoke-house storage space for the smoke rising from the wood fire fireplace below. The smoke goes through a hole in the floor of the loft and out of the eaves! The fresh plastered mud floors are cool and welcoming to base feet happy with the touch of the earth. Our village houses today may be prototypes of Catal Huyuk and Hacilar in antiquity or even the Harappan civilization with similar design- an inner courtyard with underground stone drain leading to the vegetable patch. The toy clay cart from Mohenjodaro (3000 BC) can be found in a child's hand even today! The plan of the house is written in hieroglyphs and cuneiform and chalco-mesolithic rockart, a source of hermetic knowledge and sacred significance of form.



Birhor children with clay truck they have made

The stage of artistic culture in a village in forest areas or strictly rural today may be said to be the 'folk' stage, or *post primitive*. Slowly as the villages become 'developed' the primitive plasticity of the village wall murals are becoming rarer and more 'stylized'. Here I may mention a few form given to the Kurmi Sohrai bull or Ghoda in the work of my artist son Jason who began making wooden forms out of plywood using a fretsaw, and which he also developed into bronze forms using the indigenous bell metal casting process used in our villages by the local malhar bronze casters. His forms made on art paper in the Khovar comb cutting medium are also testimony to a new development in the art. My daughter Juliet also developed the traditional Sohrai animal and bird forms in a series of remarkable paintings on art paper and murals on canvas. Both of them found an appreciative audience in Europe and Australia. Juliet even began making collages of mud treated paper which are unique. Since it resembled origami paper folding I gave this art form the name collagami!



Jason: Wood Fretsaw and Bronze casting - Ghoda



Juliet: Sohrai painting and collage

When our women tribal artists first started working on murals abroad through the Tribal Women Artists Cooperative, they showed no hesitation in displaying their talents in a changed environment although the earth-colour and binder remained unchanged.

The Festival of the Harvest-Sohrai Puja

An Oraon harvest song-

Rosalia Tirkey, my wife Philomina's mother, an Oraon tribal of Jharkhand

For twelve months O bullocks
 We beat you-
 Today we will praise you
 Today we will anoint you.
 Hario! (exclamation)
 On which horn will you take
 The rice sheaf of the harvest ?
 On which horn will you take
 The tassel of the paddy sheaves?
 Come! We will give you rice!

The Sohrai Harvest Festival

There can be no doubt that the Sohrai festival being connected with agriculture is an ancient continuation of the earlier art of the hunting period (or Mesolithic) and the art of the hunting period is widely found in the rockart of Jharkhand. The rock paintings give a valuable clue to the continuity since in the same painted sandstone panels in which we find the art of the hunters we find the later paintings of the agricultural period or Chalcolithic, and hundreds of motifs found in the prehistoric cave paintings are directly found in the village Sohrai murals today, including significantly the use of the custom of “spotting” animals with circles covering the whole body, and sometimes divided into bands, a common tradition even today among our village women painters. It is significant to note that when the Sohrai painting of the Kurmis in Bhelwara was

first brought to my attention by my late son Jason in 1993 the first thing I did was to find out if these Kurmi women had seen or even heard of the rock paintings seventy five kilometers from their village? None had. Later I examined this in all the several villages where we worked with the women wall painters and significantly none were aware of rock paintings with similar motifs as these women painted with so similar technique.

In his book on famous Indian artist Nandlal Bose who captured in his paintings the folk spirit of Bengal, Dinkar Kaushik (NBT, 1985) writes with regard to the murals in the Nandan Museum in Shantiniketan painted while Rabindranath Tagore was living over there, “Miniatures were primarily objects of art for private delectation and reverie while murals were a kind of social art, examples in group culture and thus in tune with the Poets (i.e. Rabindranath’s) ideas of education through climate and atmosphere. At least one authority on the rock art of Isco in Hazaribagh (D.N.Kesura) who finds in it similarities with the Indus script, claims the rockart was a ‘Gurukul’ or place for demonstrating lessons to students!

I have many times drawn comparison between the Indus Civilization or Harappan remains of their ancient cultural heritage and that of our forest villages of Jharkhand. The more we explore the more we find deep rooted similarities between the worship, art, architecture, social organization and culture of these widely separated but anciently connected places. The migration route was from Sind and Gujarat through the gap between Satpura and Vindhya ranges and up river Narmada to its source on the Maikal plateau then down the Sone river to Rohtas. The memories of the Oraons are full of these traditions and the linguist Asko Parpola has shown how the Harappans were a Brahui speaking people whose remnants are today found among the Kurrukh speakers of Jharkhand in the Mal Paharias of Rajmahal and Oraons of Hazaribagh and Ranchi-Simdega-Gumla districts (Asko, Parpola, Deciphering the Indus Script, 1994, p.160-175, Cambridge Univ. Press) in Chotanagpur, which is the new state of Jharkhand.

The Sohrai or harvest festival is as old as agriculture itself from the fertile Crescent in Mesopotamia to South America. It seems to have grown in varicosity, When the harvest began in ancient Egyptians mourned because they believed they were killing the ‘spirit of the corn’ and Didorus Siculus recounts how when the first handful of grain was harvested they beat their breast and called upon the god Isis. Both Isis and Osiris were identified as spirits of the corn. Osiris was worshipped in Memphis as the great bull Apis called Serapis by the Greeks. Apis had a *white triangle on the forehead*, winged eagle on its back, under its tongue was a lump like a beetle, and it had two tails and was “a fair and beautiful image of the soul of Osiris” (Herodotus). In the Sohrai art we find the white forehead mark, figure on the back, and double tail in the ritual portrayal of the Bull of Sohrai. Osiris was the symbol of resurrection and the beetle signified by the white triangle is the dung beetle (*Scarabeaus cacer*) believed in ancient Egypt to be self regenerative and on the bull representing Pharaoh was the disc of the Sun, symbol of resurrection.

The Forest village

What I refer to as the forest village need not be in a jungle but it is never far from a forest or in a large clearing of several square miles surrounded by jungle abounding in all the big and small animals, central Indian Saal forests are home to, and these include elephants, tigers, panther, bear and lesser animals. The fields are either upland or low land. The low lands where water collects in the rainy season are the prized *dong* fields in which transplanted paddy is grown. During the

summer when the Mohua calyx is collected (*Bassia latifolia* / *Madhuca latifolia*) often fires sweep the low hills and during the rainy season the ashes flow into the *dong* fields carrying nitrogen for fixing the soil. Cattle dung is also a common manure applied to the fields during ploughing before the rainy season in June-July. Cattle dung is also used in the building of mud floors and walls as it is a good binder. This is collected in a pit in the corner of the household's field and even old and infirm cattle are valued for the dung they provide. Spreading liquid dung over a mud floor with a bamboo broom keeps it free of dust and in a village home people take off their sandals before entering the house. The floor is very often the place where people eat, sit and often sleep after spreading hay with a palm mat over it to form a mattress. The courtyard is the centre of the house and opens onto the rooms in which the family live, a room for the cattle, a verandah in which there is a wood-fired fireplace where the cooking is done. The courtyard is richly decorated with wall paintings for there the ceremonies related to decoration and worship of the cattle is done by the women- and later the men on the Sohrai puja day. In a corner are the ploughs which are given a coat of lime-wash and anointed with vermilion on the Sohrai day. Later on I will describe the ceremonies performed during the Sohrai. The family's bullock cart stands outside in a field adjacent to the house and is the only means of transport for bringing in the harvest, carrying poles from the forest for house-building, or as a form of family transport when visiting. The wheels are of wood with heavy spokes. Another smaller cart pulled by bullocks or buffalo is the solid-wheeled saggur, a light low vehicle on which long logs with their branches trailing behind. It is identical to the toy carts found in Mohenjodaro five thousand years back and tell us things in the Indian village have changed but little much to the discomfort of a government advertising rapid development for the past sixty years !

The house is fitted with mill-stones (Jatha) for making wheat and rice flour and grinding pulses. It also has an oil press, the larger type turned by a pole pulled by bullocks. There is a rice pounder called *Dheki*. There are large bamboo bins covered with clay for storing rice, and a special floor in the attic beautifully covered with clean clay mixed with cowdung (lepo) where vegetables are stored.

The village is self contained. It has its own carpenter (barhi), iron-smith (lohar), potter (kumhar). The blacksmith makes the iron reins for the bullock cart , hinges for doors, and the heavy jointing bolts which hold the roof beams together. The carpenter is skilled in jointing the heavy roof beams made from saal poles. He is also a skilled craftsman in making rice pounders, wooden cots, carved doors and door frames (choukhat) in themselves works of fine art. The potters are a fixture in every village for apart from making the earthen pots used by the village women for cooking they also make the fired clay tiles used for roofing. During Divali festival they are busy making small mother goddess figures and the small toy pots and pans and toy stoves children all over the world love to play with. Divali is very specially the festival of the house. I will explain the various details of the ceremonial aspect later on. One important feature of every well to do family is the hired farming assistant called the *dhangar*. He is usually a young lad from a neighbouring village who is paid in cash and kind and lives and eats with the family in return for grazing the cattle and helping with the farming work. In Jharkhand there is a special class called the Ahirs who are professional cattle grazers and help look after the village cattle which go to the jungle in the morning and return only in the evening after watering the animals in a nearby pond or in the fields if they are filled with rain water.

I think with this small sketch the reader will get an idea of that unique world which I have referred to as the forest village. There is much which requires to be added such as after the hard

work in the fields how the people relax, their songs and dances, and also the hard work and yet gaiety filled ritual of the planting of the rice seedlings in upto knee-deep water of the flooded fields. All these form the background of the need to complete the ritual wall paintings during the Sohrai or harvest festival.

No matter where one looks at a mural the first motif that catches the eye is full of a hundred significances. Just now while writing I came across in my manuscript the depiction of the Ghagra Mandala by the late Chamni Ganju a sacred motif of the engagement ceremony and every aspect could be explained- which is not my purpose in the present book, since this motif has thousands of variations and each one has a separate meaning. Not only that but the engagement songs of the Ganjus refer to this Mandala which carries the brass pot (*gagra*) of water exchanged by the bride and bridegroom's relatives in so many contexts and ways that it could be the subject of a separate monograph itself! The *gagra* or *lota* is a brass pot containing water (female principle) and another containing sugar or jagree water (male principle). As the *gagras* are exchanged between the prospective brides father and uncles with the father and uncles of the groom the marriage- including 'bride-price' is discussed, the girl standing self-consciously behind a door looking on. Marriage is the second great crisis of life and it will take her away from her mother's home to an unknown, distant place, to live with a man and family she doesn't even know. All this requires expression and that expression is done in these pre-literate societies through the language of mural paintings on the walls of their mudden houses! This is a magic if ever there was!

The caves in which the rockart is painted are called 'Khovars' (or *Kohbar*) and the word itself means the room in which the marriage will be consummated, and this is in the bride's home. *Koh* is a word meaning a cave and *Ver* is the bridegroom.

Transliterate of "The Ganju Engagement Song"

The entire words including in inverted commas are sung.

The bride's grandfather comes into the courtyard and with a brass plate (*thali*) having some *arwa* rice, five clumps of *dhoob* grass; five pieces of Turmeric. He puts the *thali* in the middle of the courtyard before the bridegroom's representatives. He weeps and weeps, "O! I have lost my grand-daughter!"

Then comes the girl's uncle and weeps, "O! I have lost my little niece!"

Then comes the girl's father who weeps, "O! I have lost my beloved daughter!"

Then comes her elder brother who weeps, "O! I have lost my darling sister!"

The groom's family sit on one side, the bride's on the other.

The bride-to-be comes into the courtyard dressed in a new saree and carrying the brass *gagra* filled with water. Her bridesmaid (Lokni) comes behind her carrying the second *gagra* containing the sweetened water. Again the grandfather, father, Uncle, elder brother cry they are losing her. Both the brass *gagras* are circulated to all the seated members each taking a little in the *Saal* leaf. When they reach the bridegroom's father he places five rupees in the brass plate (*thali*) on which the *gagra* containing the sugar water is placed. The girls father likewise puts

five rupees in the brass plate on which the *gagra* containing the plain water is placed. The boy's father now says "I have paid for your daughter, she is ours."

The song continues,

"The *thali* in the courtyard
Is trembling like the girls heart;
The *gagras* are trembling like the girls heart;

The bridegrooms brother is shouting
"O we have won our brother a beautiful wife!
O we have won our brother a beautiful wife!"

The girls brother is weeping-
"O! we have lost our darling sister!
O! we have lost our darling sister!"

The women of the girls family are crying and singing, the song which replies to say that it is not the bride who is lost but the bridegroom who is now the victim of the hunt!

Beautiful and poignant as these songs are, they sing in chorus,

"I went into the forest, into the deepest forest (runa-bon)
Who has made this hunter's hide here in the forest?
Who has made this hunter's hide here in the forest?
Who has made this hide next to a water hole (Chua)
Where the deer come to drink?

"Grandfather has made this hide in the deep forest (runa bon) near the water hole (Chua)
Grandfather has made this hide in the deep forest (runa bon) near the water hole (Chua)
Where the stag comes to drink!
Grandmother has brought water from the water-hole (Chua)

"Father elder brother (bara) has made a hide in the deep forest (runa bon)
Father's elder brother brother's wife (Bari) has brought water from the water-hole (Chua)

"Father has made a hide in the deep forest (runa-bon)
Mother has brought the water from the water-hole (chua)
Elder brother has made a hide in the deep forest (runa-bon)
Elder brother's wife has brought water from the water-hole (Chua)

"A small deer comes to drink at the water hole (chua)
His horn's are flashing "rigi-bigi" in the moonlight!
The hunters are sitting quietly in their hide beside the water-hole!
They wait quietly and patiently for the small deer to drink at the water-hole (Chua)

"Its horns are flashing "rigi-bigi" in the moonlight!
As it drinks his whiskers make ripples in the water

Bright ripples shinning in the moonlight “rigi-bigi!”

“The small deer’s horns are flashing in the moonlight “rigi-bigi”!
Its whiskers are making silver ripples in the water “rigi-bigi”!

“Bright ripples shinning in the moonlight! “rigi-bigi”!
Grandfather sits silently bow-in-hand
Seeing the ripples flashing in the whiskered water
He shoots his arrow which pierces the small stag’s heart!
Father’s elder brother sits silently bow-in-hand
Seeing the ripples flashing in the whiskered water
He sends his arrow straight into the small stags heart!
Father is sitting silently beside him bow-in-hand
Seeing the moonlight flashing in the whiskered water
He sends an arrow straight into the small stag’s heart!
Elder brother is sitting silently bow-in-hand
Seeing the moonlight flashing on the whiskered water
He sends his arrow straight into the small stag’s heart!”

The marriage and traditions

Now we can go over the events in which this mandala or magical motif signifies. How the bridegroom is drawn from a long way off to the water hole (chua) given water to drink, thinking he is safe, when suddenly the arrows fly into his heart and he is the victim of a game-plan! The bride rejoices because grandfather, elder uncle, father and brothers are famous hunters and they have selected a good trophy for the lucky bride.

In the village society unlike elsewhere, the girl is brought up from young age to know that one day her husband will be selected for her by her elder relatives, and unlike as in some primitive tribes where the girls are free to fall in love and choose husbands (famously among the Dhumkuria- Ghotul practicing tribes like Oraon and Maria) the girl accepts her husband will be chosen for her and she is brought up to accept this fact. That she will one day in the not too distant future have to go away from her mother’s house is engraved in her young mind. The more so when she will leave her mother’s house what will she take with her to remind her of mother’s house (Maiki). The things she will take will be the skills her mother taught her- the art of painting the walls, of embroidering beautiful quilts (Ledra or Kantha), the different arts of cooking and farming and working in the house. Her abilities and pride in them will be her lifelong connection with her childhood house even as she brings up young daughters of her own, brings them to marriageable age, *then sends them away*. It is enough to break a mother’s heart if she has not imparted to them the knowledge and traditions which her own mother taught her and which gift is her greatest treasure and love. This then is the background to the mural paintings we are going to survey in the painted forest villages of Hazaribagh.

These two seasons- marriage and harvest- complete the two halves of the cycle of the tribal year. The marriage or Khovar is from April to June and the Sohrai with the onset of winter. In between are several festivals like Karma after the rainy season and Sarhul in the Spring before the summer sets in. Both the Khovar and Sohrai have their independent village mural art forms and

repertoire of festive songs. I give a typical song sung at this time by Manjhi Santal women of Hazaribagh.

Manjhi Santal Sereng

In river, ravine, and field,
On top of the paddy there is husked rice;
In river, ravine and fields,
On top of the paddy there is husked rice.

There the wild geese have made their nests
The wild geese of the Hansda clan;
There the wild geese have made their nests
The wild geese of the Hansda clan.

When you cut the paddy, friends,
Do not disturb their nests
For there the geese of the Hansda clan
There the wild geese have made their nests.”

These songs are entwined with ritual, and where the sacred vermilion casts its spell and the rice paddy is spread upon the threshing floor, there the house sparrow and the little brown dove gather in their tiny beaks the fruits of the harvest. Khovar the season of marriage is behind us and the harvest season of the Sohrai is ahead. The fact is the people we are among in the villages are of two types generally, the primitive animist tribal groups and the Pashupati worshippers. The sect of the Pashupatism was founded in the first Century AD by the Saint Lakulisa (Skanda Purana, Kedara Khanda, Chapter 69). Pashupatism is believed to be closely associated with Jogis or wandering mendicants, Tantrism, and magic. It is the worship of the deity Shiva who is seen as Lord of Animals. Naturally this religion appealed to agricultural societies. The Sohrai is the time of rebirth and creation of plenty so it is naturally associated with the harvest. Many of the villages belong to the tribal religion of *Sarna* or sacred grove which is the oldest religion and dates back to the rock painters. Both the marriage art and harvest art are connected with the pre-historic paintings. The painted art is earlier of course as it is in evidence in the rock art several thousands of years old, whereas the comb-cut art used by small groups such as the Prajapatis, Telis, and hill Kurmis are more recent forms of painting. We find in the finger paintings of the Mundas a distinctly ancient form of depiction and in the village of Isco with its great painted rock shelter we have still before us finger paintings done during the harvest season. The motifs follow an overall common pattern but have their own unique identity. After the walls are covered with the black manganese earth they are covered with cream coloured kaolin earth and scraped with the fingers and decorated with white rice and vermilion daubs denoting sacredness. Finger painting is done mainly by the Bhuiyas and in the entire walls covered with finger-cut arcs in the wet yellow earth..



Munda wall paintings in Isco village



Oraon Basera finger painting

Not very far from Isco in the village of Barhmaniya we find the art of the Telis who are oil extractors. They cut the black designs with a heavy broad comb and the effect of the larger black images on the walls has a different quality.



Teli Khovar in Barhmaniya village

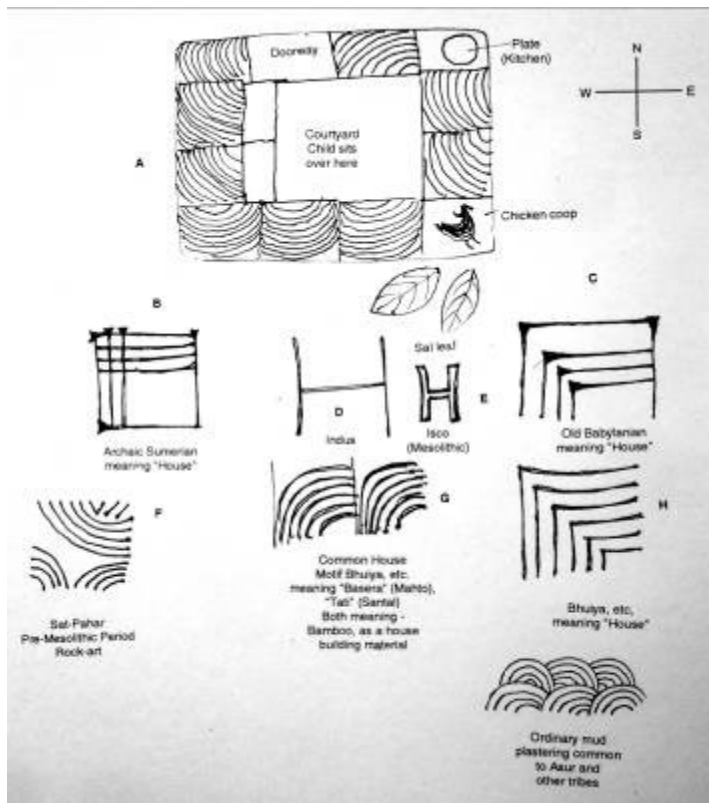
Here and there in all the villages we find small groups of Bhuiya houses. The Bhuiyas are a primitive people akin to the Baiga and the nomadic Birhor who are local authorities on magic and witchcraft and worship of stone forms in the forests. Their art is entirely finger painting and their designs are closest to the rock paintings.

During the harvest murals Ranas or carpenters like the Mundas decorate their comb-cut murals with dots of white rice-paste which are stamped using corn cobs which are dipped in the liquid. Then they apply vermillion dots. Sometimes a sieve is dipped in liquid rice paste and stamped on the black Khovar designs. The white and red give the Khovar a harvest significance.



Rana house painting

In all the walls we find that at the top under the eaves of roof tiles the “Basera” or arc shaped series of parallel lines which are representatives of the bamboos, *bas* being bamboo, and *era* meaning goddess. The goddess is supposed to protect the house. This may date back to a time when houses were made with bamboos and covered with earth clay which is a far more primitive form of housing than the solid mud walled house. The Bhuiyas paint a Basera with angular lines identical the Babylonian hieroglyph for a house.



Basera of the walls, (Illustration) B.Imam, Bridal Caves, INTACH, 1995

The art we have seen is an expression of female authority in the realm of the sacred which with the rise of patriarchy was threatened. The married woman is called *Devi* which literally means goddess. During the marriage of a couple an old woman blesses them by sprinkling water with mango leaves, and generally a Bhuiya woman of the low caste is called to perform this ritual.

Turi Sohrai

The Turis are traditionally bamboo workers making baskets and mats from bamboo splices. They are not very numerous and their art is decidedly hard to find. They paint the walls using cloth swabs dipped in earth colours red, black, yellow. Their forms are generally large floral forms.



Turi Sohrai in the North Karanpura (Damodar) Valley

Basera

A typically Oraon motif, although one which may be said to be basic to the art of mud plastering by hand, is the Basera I have referred to. As stated, the design represents bamboo (as bas means bamboo and Era is goddess). This is in the Oraon (an Bhuiya) mud wall designs particularly enhanced when a lighted coating of earth is cut using the fingers on a darker background, and when the design comes out in high definition. The process of creating the design is a natural one. Starting at the left top corner of a wall with the fingers of the right hand in sweeping curvilinear strokes of the tracings in the soft wet mud leave this as a perfectly natural, although seemingly intricate, design which covers the entire wall. The Oraons neighbours the quite primitive Bhuiyas also make use widely of this pattern when mud plastering their house. I have drawn attention in my book *Bridal Caves*- p.64 (1995) to the Bhuiya motif of a square in a similar form that is the Babylonian hieroglyph meaning a house. It will seem that these are very ancient cultural mementos from the distant past when the two regions (i.e. Mesopotamia and India) were connected with migrations.

Oraon painting in Sohrai

The Oraons as noted are a Dravidian people who settled on the Jharkhand plateau sometime during the first millennium BC (S.C.Roy, *The Oraons*, 1915). These agrarian people, who are said to be closely related with the Harappan culture and originally from Baluchistan according to some authorities, also have a rich tradition of Sohrai painting. They are an animal keeping tribe, and are fond of keeping buffalos and goats. The art of these people is animal forms and forest plants. They also practice a unique totem pole design in horizontal bands (at top) and vertical bands below which are related to their familial ancestors (purkha).



The Oraon Khuta by Philomina Imam



Philomina Imam and Dulari Ekka

Santal decoration, woodwork, etc.

The Santals on the Hazaribagh plateau are called Manjhis, which refers to Headman or village elder (much like the term Munda). The Manjhis are mainly found to the east of Hazaribagh along the northern end of the plateau and south of this in the vast forests of the Konar watershed which follows the course of this river and further south of the Konar dam in the Lugu hill range worshipped as Marang-Buru or “mountain god”, and in the Bokaro river valley further south. The Manjhis are different in their art to other villages, their art being more restrained and confined to broad patches of red and black along the bottom of walls, and if colour is used, delicate small motifs surrounding doorways or door panels. Also observable is the practice of using cowdung liberally on both floors and walls. The Manjhis mainly keep buffalos although they have cows for milk and bulls for ploughing. The Santals have a common lotus pattern carved in all the doors and it is very similar to the circular kamalban design of the Kurmis who draw the design with a makeshift wooden compass since it is comprised of intersecting circles. The Santal carpenter merely chips the motif out of the saal waad with chisel and hammer. This motif was also observed by Verrier Elwin in the wood carvings of the Saoras of Orissa.



The marked difference between ritual modes between groups of the same classification is sometimes immense. For example the Oraons who keep buffaloes for dairy purposes have certain

designs not found generally among other members of the tribe. They use cowdung heavy on the floors and walls and heavy patches of red, black, yellow, motifs also found among buffalo keeping Manjhis in eastern Hazaribagh. I will refer later to vast differences in style between the Kurmis of eastern and southern Hazaribagh plateau.



Kurmi Painting during the harvest season of Sohrai

In the extreme end of the Hazaribagh plateau we have the now famed Kurmi village of Bhelwara, famous for its beautiful Sohrai paintings. When it was first drawn to my attention one October morning in 1993 by my late son Jason who had seen the vivid painted houses while returning from Calcutta we drove down to the villages and found the most exotic display of village painting in red, black and white, which I had upto then seen.



Kurmi House, Bhelwara, 1993

The design referred to as Kamalban which directly translated means “forest of lotuses” is as noted drawn using an improvised compass, the women (and even small girls) expertly drawing

the intersecting circles scraped in the earth of wall. Later the stems, fronds, and other details are drawn with nails, the lines being always in triplicate, the outer and inner lines being in white and black respectively and the middle line in red. The white is for rice, red for sacrifice or puja, *black for Shiva*. Shiva is depicted in his female form as a drum or “damru”, the same form being found on the side of doorways of Manjhi Santal houses filled in with black ink of the Indian Marking Nut (*Semecarpus anacardium*) sacred to Shiva. He is shown standing on the back of a bull. The broad expanses of earth on large Kurmi houses in Bhelwara are ideal for this fantastic floral art with large animal forms representing cattle.



Kamalban (Forest of Lotuses), Bhelwara, 1995

The red colour (lalka-mati) dominating the art is a red earth found in certain fields in the adjacent village of Kharna. The earth is soaked in water overnight and in the morning is ready for use. A cloth is wrapped about a dry stick to make the “Kuchi” or brush, which is dipped in the coloured liquid and used to draw. The Kurmi Sohrai of Bhelwara is almost entirely drawing as only the lotus itself is filled with colour. The artist stands before the wall and draws the outlines with a dry stick or nail in the dry earth of the wall which has a specially smooth surface. Then she applies the red line. Afterwards the black (Kali mati) and white (Sadka-mati) outer lines are applied. The result is startling! When and how this beautiful artform first appeared it is hard to tell and the closest thing to the parallel red and white lines used to define a form is the rockart of Hazaribagh itself!



Kamalban painted by Parvati Devi in her house in Bhelwara

In fact it might be said with justification that this art is directly descended from the rock paintings. But the village is seventyfive miles from the Damodar Valley where the rockart is found high up on the hill scarps flanking the valley of which these simple women had never heard let alone seen!

The Lotus in the Kurmi Sohrai of Bhelwara

The lotus us one of the major motifs in the Sohrai wall murals of Bhelwara group of villages in eastern Hazaribagh. The round circles which form the pattern are drawn with a forked stick used as a compass by the women artist. These lotuses have upto fourteen petals each and are comparable to the so called “Rosettes” of the Indus painted pottery. Sometimes these lotuses are connected with flowing stems when the whole is called “Kamal-ban” or forest of lotuses. As I will note the lotus is an essentially Indian village flower found in all village and forest ponds. These flowers are also described in the Indian Tantras as *energy centers*.



Malti Devi painting the lotus in Bhelwara, 2005

In every tradition the lotus of the heart-source of life- is seen as the home of God. This is the Lotus Sutra of Buddha and the central Chakra is in the lotus. Brahma the creator is born of a lotus. It is the very essence of spiritual mysticism in India. The lotus in Tantra is implicit with sexual significance. The Kundalini is the energy centre of the human body- the whole spinal-Tantara and Kundalini body work is a sacred tradition dating back thousands of years. Kundalini is a representation of Cosmic energy and Shiva lying coiled at the spinal base and awakened flowers as a lotus in one of the Chakras (energy centres) up the body finally reaching the lotus Chakra in the mind. The 14 petaled lotus motif has been found in Mesopotamia as far back as 5000 B.C. and the 16 petaled and 3 petaled lotus (Kamaldhara) is in the Indus valley as far back as 3,500 B.C.



Girl painting the Kamalban in Bhelwara

Kurmi glyptic Sohrai wall and floor painting, Bhelwara



When one enters a darkened room in a Kurmi house which has a fully decorated glyptic floor at first one is startled with the painting of dark and light (red and white, black and white) geometric spaces that create forms which shift between figure and back-ground, creating a “division of the plane”, while the planes can alternatively detach themselves, which is extremely depictive, and which has been described as a “glide reflection combined with rotation” (M.C.Escher, *The Regular Division of the Plane*, 1972) when one encounters it on walls the effect may be less dramatic.

Kurmi Sohrai glyptic floor painting (Bhelwara)



*Kurmi Sohrai glyptic wall painting
(Bhelwara)*

A similar use of space is found in the rock art of Hazaribagh and Chatra in which the white and red alternate leaving spaces in between of a darkened sandstone. As in Sohrai of the Kurmis of Bhelwara (whose chief exponent is Parvati Devi) the differing contrasts between red, white and black as a natural space makes it problematic to understand the line itself! This peculiarity of the Kurmi Sohrai of Bhelwara is common with the pre-historic rockart of the region.

The Kurmi Sohrai art in Bhelwara and its adjacent villages is also practiced in a glyptic form both on the walls and on the floors using these three colours- Red, White, Black. On the walls sometimes Blue is used, a new development ever since the blue whitener (Neel) used for washing became available in the market. The white colour (Sadka-mati) is found in the village fields bordering the nearby jungle, and in the same area the black karia-mati (or Kali-mati) is found. The liquid earth is poured into bowls which the artist holds in one hand painting with the cloth swab or chewed tooth-stick of young Saal called *datwan* so common in India for brushing teeth. The background wall is the plain yellow pila matti which word also means a very young boy child. This is the old palaeolithic strata found in deep ravines and gullies and lovingly brought in baskets to the village by the women.

Sohrai mural by Parvati Devi

Bhelwara village is on the highway from Hazaribagh to the national highway at Bagodar, and half a dozen kilometers before the block office village of Bishungarh which is the roadway to the Konar watershed. If one follows the road south and west into the watershed village after village of painted houses will be met and during the season of Sohrai thousands of women will be found decorating their houses with these fantastic murals. Everywhere on looks are huge bull forms leaping across the mud walls and on their back



stands Shiva holding the reims! Many of the bulls have wheels. The bulls are covered with “spots” in the form of concentric circles, sometimes enclosed in bands across the bull’s body. The earliest type of this form is to be found in the central panel of the Chalcolithic rockart of Isco dated at 3000 BC! As I said, this rockart is seventyfive miles away and no woman of the village has ever seen it. Thus it must be conclusive proof of a living memory tradition.



In the Konar watershed straddling the Konar river flowing peacefully amidst rocks and boulders and sandy beds flanked by verdant green *Saal* jungles with blue hills of the Konar range and other smaller hills in the background is the great glyptic art of the Ghatwals, the traditional tribe of “keepers of the passes” who held out against so many invasions of the Chotanagpur plateau (now Jharkhand) from the west along the Old Benares Road, and other hilly scarps from Sherghatty to Chatra and Palamau in the south. The art of these people is completely different to what we had seen in Bhelwara and its adjacent villages just described.



Ghatwal Painting, Oriya village

The Ghatwal art is a unique artform in itself. Leaving the highway fifteen kilometers before Bhelwara and taking the asphalt road south we cross the Konar river and reach the village of Oriya in the clearing amidst vast jungles. The road continue to the Block village of Churchu and then southward to the highway connecting Hazaribagh and Ranchi. This areas has villages of Manjhis, Mundas, Oraons, the Kurmis, and Koeris who are peasant agriculturalists. The Ghatwals practice a dramatic glyptic art comprising large Pipal leaves and the three leaf Teenpatiya, Bulls, and other animals, in stark relief of red, white, black and blue on their mud walled tile roofed houses. They also practice a different form of comb cut Tree of Life forms painted on a cream coloured earth background which is in very sharp contrast to these large glyptic motifs. The Tree of Life represents the forest god Shiva, shown on the back of bulls but in some instances on the back of a dog since the Ghatwals are of Shiv-Bhairav cult which worship the deity accompanied by two dogs Bhairav and Bhavani. The cult temple is in nearby Bishungarh. Bishun represents the buffalo (Mahesh) the vehicle of Shiva. In an abandoned temple near Bishungarh I found a stone stele depicting Shiva and his two dogs in high relief. The Oraons have a deity named Dharmes who created the tribe and Charmes also is accompanied by two dogs called Bhawra and Bhawri.



Tree of Life on back of dog

Glyptic Ghatwal Art



Ganju painting

In the summer of 1992 after we had brought to light the Isco rockart, My daughter Juliet, Cherry and I were driving in the forest above the rockart when we came upon the wonderful Sohrai painting of the now well known artistic phenomenon, Putli Ganju in Saheda village. This was my first acquaintance with Sohrai mural painting and a never-to-be forgotten experience.



The Ganju village of Saheda is apart from the little village of Isco next to the rock the closest village to the rock shelter, being above the escarpment behind it on the Hazaribagh plateau. It is not surprising that the Ganju mural art is full of wild animals found in the rock paintings. They are directly painted on the mud walls in natural colours. It was after this awakening to the connection between the village murals and rock paintings that I began a systematic research into the village art as a means to establishing the indigenous identity of the village people. The Ganjus use the haematite stone of the hill streams in their paintings which is a direct continuation of the rock-paintings technique. A peculiar aspect of the art is showing wild animals and birds in interaction with one another and natural objects.



Rare examples of Ganju black & white murals at Fatah near Hazaribagh about 2012

Not far from Sahda is the village of Chapri and between the two villages is the source of the Dudhi stream flowing down a precipitous gorge filled with eroded shelves in the nooks and crannies of which are found upper palaeolithic stone tools. The whole area of Chapri is an important stone age site. Not far from Chapri is the village of Jorakath famed for its Khovar painted houses, the work of the Kurmi women artists. I have called these the Hill Kurmi because their art is so different in technique and form from the plains Kurmi of eastern Hazaribagh and Konar watershed earlier described.



Ganju wall paintings, Jorakath



The Kurmi Art of Jorakath

It was in 1992 when we were camping Chapri during the winter that I was attracted to the Khovar comb painting of Jorakath. The season was of the marriage and the houses were being decorated in the middle of the village, and subsequently again during the harvest. I have written about this art in *The Hill Villages of Hazaribagh*. The women were at work like dervishes and a peculiar atmosphere of the sacred significance of the art imbued the whole place. The ground is prepared by covering the earth walls with the black kali-mati and before it is fully dry over it a coat of the greyish-yellow earth of this region also called "pila-mati". Then they cut with pieces of comb large animal forms which are unique in that they are almost exclusively wild animals forms such as elephant, tiger, deer. They also have a wide repertoire of wild forest birds like the peacock, moorhen, egrets, jungle-fowl. The most striking attributes of this particular art is the X-ray forms in which young animals are shown inside their mother, animals with holes in them typical of rock paintings, and man-animal conflict such as tiger attacking man etc. This play between wild animals and their natural environment is found in Ganju and Oraon art also.



The floors of these large mud houses of the Kurmis in Jorakath are hand plastered with mud (lepo) with the same cream colour earth used for the walls for Khovar comb cutting. Like the Kurmis of Bhelwara noted earlier, the mud floors are decorated, but somewhat more sparingly. Black or red earth is spread leaving silhouette designs on the cream coloured earth which remind us of the glyptic art. This use of large coloured spaces is also typical of Santal house decoration. Anthropomorphs are a common design, primarily the Triangular forms of the forest god Shiva which first appears in the seals of the Indus valley, and rightly believed to symbolize the Virgin goddess (female principle) and Sisin (male principle) by the late Mrs. Pupul Jayakar *The Earth Mother, Penguin Books, India, 1989, pages 111-112) Shiva in the form of two triangles is universal and common to the tribal art in Orissa (Saora) and Madhya Pradesh (Gond).

We can see every where the sign of an old Pashupati-ism in all these expressions, and the only concession to modern Hindu-ism is via media of the forest god Shiva worshipped by these forest villages. One may even go as far as saying that Shiva is a Chief deity ever since Harappa.



Jorakath Walls, Kurmi comb-cutting



Agricultural Mandala



Kurmi artists working on painting left- Malo Devi; right- Rudhan Devi

Prajapati Khovar painting in the Barkagaon Valley

Perhaps the last great tradition of Khovar comb cutting is to be found exclusively in the two hundred villages of the Upper Damodar valley also known as the Barkagaon valley in the east, and North Karanpura Valley (after an infamous opencast coal project that threaten to destroy the entire valley through opencast coal mining). The valley is strategically located between the plateau of Ranchi in the south and Hazaribagh in the north in an ancient rift valley which has evidenced the birth of human civilization from a continuous palaeoarchaeological deposit from the Lower Palaeolithic to the Present, and which I have described in detail in my book (Damodar Valley Civilization, 2000). This region even today despite several opencast mines is the richest forest and village part between South and North Jharkhand. For nearly thirty years I have been studying the natural and cultural heritage of the region, and have brought to light its palaeolithic sites, Mesochalcolithic in fourteen prehistoric painted rockart sites, megalithic sites, Buddhist-Mauryan sites, and rich tribal and artistic heritage. The important Khovar villages in the eastern-central part of the valley are Punkri-Barwadi, Bhadul-Pipradih, Kharati, Nayatand, Napo, Barhmaniya. Most of the villages are predominantly the Prajapati caste which is an agricultural community, but also an artisan castes such as Kumhar or potter, Rana or carpenter, Teli or oil extractors, Turi or basketmakers and bamboo workers, and the internment wandering groups such as the Malhar metal-casters (akin to the Gadaba of Chhatisgarh) the semi-nomadic Birhor (both Uthlu, settled; Bhuiya nomadic who live entirely by trapping and food-gathering; ethnobotany practices etc.)



Houses in the Barkagaon Valley

Kharati and Napo villages may be said to be the epi-center of Khovar painting of the Prajapatis in the eastern valley on the way to Isco rockart from Barkagaon, a Block headquarters town from a village. The entire region is littered with mounds of iron slag painting to an ancient Asur or metal-smelting culture in the past dating back to 1100 BC. These villages are flanked to the east by Bhaduli Pipradih, an exclusively Prajapati village, and Barhmaniya an exclusively Teli (oil-extractor) village with some Rana (carpenter) settlements on the fringes. I have described some of these villages already.



*Ghamni Kumari
of Bhaduli
Pipradih, one of
my favourite
artists*



The Prajapati Khovar comb cutting reaches its height in Bhaduli-Pipradih, Nayatand, and Kharati-Napo where every house both inside and outside is an artistic delight. The subjects are exclusively plant forms and also a lot of aquatic creatures, fish, lotus, crocodile, tortoise, beetles, etc. This is natural if we consider we are about twenty kilometers from the river Damodar. Unlike the art of the Ganju and Kurmis on the Hazaribagh plateau in the north in Saheeda and Jorakath, here in the art of the Prajapatis (basically a potter caste, but now connecting themselves to the Creator deity Prajapati who created man from mud). The whole life of these people in scores of villages is wholly bound up with the Khovar art from the making of beautiful large mud houses and their decoration, to the stitching of crib quilts and the tasks required of an uptil now wholly subsistence agricultural economy depending on rice cultivation and seasonal leguminous cropping. The valley is famous for its sugarcane; and therefore its product the gur or jaggree (brown sugar) while cattle are central to the plough agriculture practiced nowhere is their evidence of a painted cattle cult such as we have witnessed in the Sohrai wall murals of Bhelwara village.



Sugiya Devi's house in Kharati



Interior view of Jasodha Devis house in Kharati

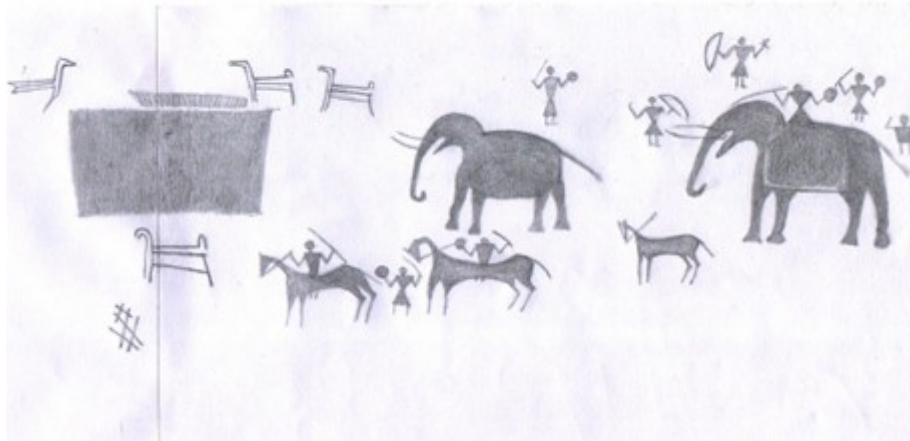


Exterior view of Prajapati houses in Napo

Oraons

To the south of the central line of the valley where all the agricultural villages are in a mountainous forested territory forming a major wildlife corridor linked with Palamau in the southeast. Here the small villages of Oraons is to be met with, the reminders of Oraon migrations into the Jharkhand plateau by way of the natural passes formed by the North Koel and Damodar river via Omedanda, to the south Jharkhand regions of Khunti, Simdega, Torpa, Basera and Mahuadarn; to the north to the forested and fertile expanse of the Hazaribagh plateau which lay on the way to the Rajmahal Hills in the Santal Parganas in Jharkhand's northeastern border of Bengal where the Kinsmen of the Oraons, the Malpahariyas, took up residence in a primarily Santal territory over two thousand years ago. The migrations which brought the Oraons to Jharkhand from their homeland in Sind three thousand years ago was by way of Gujarat, the

Satpuras and the Narmada river then down the Sone to Rohtas where the remains of Kabrakala still speak of their occupation.



Likhanya rockart in Mirzapur of the same series as the North Koel rockart

From here they went up the valley of the North Koel river to Omedanda, traditionally accepted by tradition as their first major settlement in Jharkhand, and from where they settled the plateau at a period which is commensurate with a pre-Mahabharata date i.e. 1600 B.C.

The art of the Agaria, the first ironsmiths

The Agarias it seems are the remnants of the earliest ironsmiths of Jharkhand similar to the iron-smelting Agaria Gond of Chhatisgarh but not to be conferred with the iron-smelting Asurs. They are obviously connected with iron age peoples like the Lohars, Kurmalis, etc. who still occupy the forested fringes of the settled populations of the Hazaribagh plateau and the Damodar valley. The name Agaria comes from the root word “Aaag” meaning fire. Their worship is totemic and ancestor worship is practiced. Their art consists of large rectangular ‘chouks’ or mandalas interspersed with large floral motifs painted in red, yellow, white and black earth with ‘kuchis’ (crushed stem) and cloth swabs. Their art is not exactly glyptic like the Ghatwals and some Kurmi villages as noted earlier, but from a distance gives the same effect. The house murals do not feature cattle which is the major Sohrai motif of the Kurmis and Ghatwals. The Agarias I have interacted are in the northern fringe of the Hazaribagh National Park between Daoji Nagar and Kutipisi on the way to Dato.



The ritual Diyas of Divali precedes Sohrai

While the Divali or 'festival of lights' was celebrated the previous day with fireworks and oil lights and candles in the towns a very different Divali was practiced in the Sohrai villages. Two days before the traditional town Divali a small oil light made of cowdung mixed with 'ghee' with a small wick was lit in the cowshed. On the day before Divali in the shrine of the cattleshed a diya was lit for Lakshmi which was made only of 'ghee'. And on the Divali day a special oil light made up of flour mixed with milk and ghee is lit and one each put on either side of the entrance to the cattle shed. A *Bhoot-Tikkas* or omen to drive away evil spirits are made with vermilion. The first days of oil lights were for purification, the second for Lakshmi, and the third was for the Ancestors.

I was struck by the similarity between the village Khovar and Sohrai floral motifs painted on the mudden house walls as the ancient Mauryan forms such as on the base of the bull pillar Capital from Rampurua (now in Rashtrapati Bhavan, New Delhi) and the Buddhist motifs used in sacred significances found for example under the statue of Lord Buddhain the Mahabodhi temple in Bodhgaya. Obviously the Buddhist sacred symbols (i.e. lotus, wheel, fish, elephant, labyrinth, king and queen, square with crossed diagonals, etc.

Also, these plant forms are reminiscent of the tree of life in the Indus seals (see *Henzle illustration Aug-Oct. 2010*). In fact I even found he village women explaining the Tree of Life- the Kadam or *Anthocephalus kadamba*) or conversely Karam (*Adina cardifolia*) as the form of the Tree God (Shiva) himself! It was a deeply tantric and Buddhistic view to my imagination.

(illustration opp. Page 379, Harvest Icons)

Rituals connected with the Sohrai festival observed in Bhelwara village in eastern Hazaribagh

The first thing to note is that all puja is done by the man who is the head of the family in a household shrine, no puja associated with the festival taking place in the shrine temple on the hillock overlooking the village. The Piplal leaf, symbol of the mother goddess is significantly spread over the shrine.



The village is a buzz with the painting of the mud walls of the houses. There is every reason to believe this form of wall painting is several thousands of years old, going back to the art of the painted rock shelter. The art itself is a deep, matured and highly evolved expansion of traditions rooted in spiritual beliefs and daily village life in an economy based on subsistence agriculture compiled with collection of forest produce. Young girls from the ages of five or six stand beside their mothers and aunts painting the designs on the walls swiftly, dipping their 'kutchis' in small bowls of liquid earth colours. We who are witnessing the fluent visual language and its transmission to younger generations are indeed fortunate to be witnessing a wonderful cultural expression practiced in the deep past in a living reality before our eyes. The courtyard is mud and cowdung swept with water and a broom on which concentric circles are quickly drawn by the elder women with their fingers, when oil lamps (diya) are placed in the center of the circle and it. The time is about eleven in the morning and the cattle come home from the forest freshly washed and their coats gleaming. The men hold them as the women serve them with burning incense and plaintive songs. Their hooves and horns are washed and anointed with mustard oil. Vermillion is applied to the horns in bands of bright red by the man of the house. Later tassels of fresh rice sheaves with the ripe grass on them are tied to the horn with the sheaf covering the entire forehead. Rice is sprinkled on them by the women of the house. The mudden oil lamps called diya used in the preceding Divali festival are then dipped by the women in pots and buckets which contain liquid white rice paste or red vermillion and with these the village women stamps her familys cattle while chanting prayers for the animals good health. Both cows and bulls as well as the buffaloes are covered with these circular spots until they look like decorated toys.



Cattle entering the house on the welcome aripan



Men bringing cattle in from the jungle



The bulls garlanded

Rice for welcome and sheaves from the harvest to be tied on the forehead of the bulls

The Santals in the nearby villages in the forest also celebrate the cattle but according to slightly different customs and without the circular spotting. A Santal Sohrai song goes like this-

Where was the cow born?
 Under the Khasi tree the cow was born.
 For what was the cow born?
 To keep the land the cow was born.

(Dusshera Sereng, Song. no. 94, The Flowering Branch, B.Imam)

In the Kurmi house where the cattle are decorated the walls and pillars are being simultaneously painted and an atmosphere of sacred energy is evident. I will now describe the welcome aripan over which the cattle were welcomed into the courtyard.

The Welcome of the Cattle into the house over the Sacred Aripan

M.K.Gandhi beautifully summed up the importance of the cow in a talk given at Maganvadi Ashram, Wardha on August 27th, 1925. He said:

“Man through the cow is enjoined to realize his identity with all that lives. Why the ancient rishis selected the cow for apotheosis is obvious to me. The cow in India was the best companion, She was the giver of plenty. Not only did she give milk, but she also made agriculture possible. The cow is a poem of pity- one reads pity in the gentle animal. She is the second mother of millions of Indians. Protection of the cow means the protection of the whole

dumb creation of God. The appeal of the lower order of creation is all the more forceful because it is speechless.”



The aripan welcoming the cattle

I have written a poem on the welcome of the cattle, titled Pashupati for the Lord of Animals,

Pashupati

When the oil lamps of Divali are over
Then the Lord of Animals comes home.
On the backs of the cattle, from the jungle.

This report we are reading tries to place the reader in a forest enclaved sweep of rice fields in which are scores and sometimes even hundreds of little or large villages of mudden homes housing a population entirely dependant upon rice agriculture, vegetable cropping and forest produce. Times have no doubt changed much in the village since my notes in the field were made in 1995. The woman's role in Sohrai is a sacred one hearkening back to a matriarchal society and the art on the walls is their power manifest in a patriarchal society. The mens role is strictly related to cattle grazing, the ploughing of rice fields, and washing of the cattle. Feeding is the womans role.

India in the north has long evidenced a pastoral society based upon cattle. The Rig Veda makes it clear that the Kols or protoaustraloid aborigines between the Beas river in Himachal and Tous river at Awadh were a pastoral race. In my opinion the matriarchal society preceded the pastoral patriarchal period and when agriculture was practiced through pick agriculture. Womens early role as a provider of the family unit through gathering food to its production continued into the period of plough agriculture farming which was ad remains male-dominant. But from the transplanting of the rice seedlings to their harvest and threshing it is the woman's role that has been predominant and continues this way in our villages.

The story and background of the 'welcome aripan' as I have called it, is specially made by the women of each house on the mud floor leading directly in a flat level from the mud road outside the house in to the courtyard where the cattle have to pass before entering their stalls which are

placed along the verandah of the house beside the family's living quarters. The Aripan is made of rice gruel dripped on the ground through the fingers and when dried it assumes a startling white colour against the mud plastered floor. The types of Aripans are endless and will require a separate book to explain them but basically they are composed of intricate designs depicting the hoof imprints of cattle with spots of red vermillion here and there at strategic points to sacralize them. The Aripan is a welcome carpet. Invariably therefore they are long rows of parallel lines with clearly define semi-circles denoting cattle hoof-prints. These have been found generously distributed in our region's rock art and uptil now not understood for what they actually represent. The 'string of circles' in rockart are the work of cattle keeping society.

At the head of every aripan is a large triangle, suitably decorated, with in the middle a clay cone having at the top a tuft of the 'Latlatiya' grass found in the jungle, a sort of grass which catches onto clothes. The Triangle represents the mother goddess. This is the same symbol of the tuft of grass we found in the top of pyramid roofs of shrines in the worship houses of the reed dwellers of the Tigris-Euphrates delta. It is an ancient expression of the "pony-tail" of modern times.



Typical Aripan motifs



Aripans of Sohrai in Bhelwara village

The Aripan is a sacred design drawn in natural colours on the ground to mark a sacred event such as festival, marriages, etc. In Bengal Aripans are drawn during marriages in white in many floral motifs. Recently an interest in the Mandanas have been taken by European scholars like Chantal Jumel. The design may be made with almost anything, milk and rice, vermilion and ochre, flower petals and coloured sand, or etched into the ground even. In Hazaribagh these are known as Mandalas and specific cones drawn with rice gruel to welcome the cattle into the houses on the day of the Sohrai harvest festival are called 'Aripan' by the village women who draw them on the brown earth by dripping the white rice gruel through their fingers while drawing the mixture from a bowl. The rice gruel is considered sacred and the woman anoints the plough shares with it and a daub of vermilion. The sheer number and diversity of Aripan form is mind-boggling but one feature is consistent and this is the repetition along the edges of the semi-circular shape of the cattle hoofs. The semi-circular shape recurs again in the "Basera" or bamboo motif used above the walls on which the sacred harvest murals are painted. The semi-circle appears in the earliest shell inscriptions in Mauryan period. The curve linear form reappears in Brahui script. Above all these strings of lines and circles for welcome of cattle are found in the Chalcolithic rock-art of Hazaribagh which are connected with the agricultural age. Forms of cattle on wheels with spotting as even today found in the village at Sohrai show an unchanged sacred tradition. It would be no exaggeration to say the welcome Aripan for cattle in the *Sohrai festival takes thousands of individual forms*. As I have been documenting the festival for decades it is no exaggeration to say that years ago I had to stop documentation of new designs of Aripans- which is also a big lesson in understanding all tribal art forms, which though seemingly similar are all different! This principle may be stretched to folklore, songs, etc.

A simple string of circles connected with a central line creates the original line of cattle hoofs and when such lines of vertical circles connected by a single central line in rock art no explanation could be given by the rock art experts and some even gave the extra territorial origins (Eric von Dainneken)! At the head of each Aripan is a Triangle or Yoni which represents the mother goddess and it is significant since before entering on the aripan the cattle have to trample over it. In the middle of this Triangle there is a cone made of clay and cowdung in which is stuck stems of the Latlatiya grass (the grass that sticks to cloth when you enter a meadow). The Latlatiya grass is supposed to be broken by the cattle's hoof for good luck. The single line clearing the circles in half creates the cleft hooves of the cattle. Among the Oraons there is the custom to place an egg on the path of the home-returning cattle and whom-so-ever cow or bull crushes the egg is considered will have good luck. I could not find for certain of the same superstition applies to the lat-latiya grass and clay-dung cone. The egg is also used in the Danda-katha ritual of the Oraons. Concentric circles are drawn around a mound of rice on which an egg is placed and *Bhelwa twig* and a red-black, and white circle chains round it and the blood of a white cock and the egg are broken on the rice by the pahan (village priest). It will be found that many symbols, rituals, and customs are common to differing tribes and hinduized sub-castes all pointing to a common tradition of belief. Their approach to life and the future is through signs and symbols. It is also important to note that the Oraons, a Dravidian tribe, keep cattle and celebrate the Sohrai festival in their own different way as do the Santals of our area. But we are here concerning ourselves specifically with the Sohrai Cattle Festival of the Kurmis a semi-Hinduized caste of Eastern India.

The Chuman and the Dhuman (incense) on the Sohrai day

When the cattle come home from the forest on the morning of Sohrai they pass over these Aripans before entering the house. The cattle are tied to a post in the courtyard called the 'ggoraya khuta' which simply translates as 'cattle post'. In the meanwhile even as the women are decorating the cattle and painting the walls the men go off to do a puja of their own involving blood sacrifice of a black cock (sometimes I am told a piglet) or a black goat. The Santals have a similar practice during Sohrai . Blood from the sacrifice is smeared on the goraya khuta on which the favourite bull is tethered.



The woman of the house is sprinkling rice on the horns of the bulls which have been garlanded with sheaves of young rice in Chuman or welcome of the Cattle

In the evening the cattle are taken to the fields out of the village by the women after applying vermilion to their forehead with a Saal (*Shorea robusta*) twig in a special ceremony called the Chuman ceremony. The Chuman is kissing the fire as a blessing, and the women dress in and come out of their houses leading their cattle with incense in mudden bowls or **Dhuman** (smoke), plates decorated with offerings from the puja and an oil light in the centre burning incense, and they take the cattle out of the village to graze, the scene is a picturesque with the smaking incense and cattle led by the women... In the Chuman (which means to kiss) the palm of the hands are kissed and turned palm outward to the object as an act of blessing and thus the cattle are blessed. It is a strange site to see women taking cattle out to graze!



Women taking the cattle out in the Dhuman (incense) ceremony



Animals turned out to grazing in the fields

Sweetmeats ritually made

While these rituals with the cattle and the paintings of the walls have been going on some of the women devote time to cooking the traditional rice fritters fried in oil called Ghatra which is not sweetened like the 'Pua' made during Diwali. The rice fritters just being blended with ghee oil (butter milk) with some salt and the sweet brown sugar jagree (gur) of sugarcane. The pua is deep fried in big pans of boiling oil and form a savory part of the festival.

Khuta Bandhan Festival

The head man of the family would come and from the outside loudly enquire of his wife if the animals to be staked were ready. In the old days the sound of drums would come from the direction of this house in the otherwise quiet village and the first two bulls would be brought out and two posts would be planted before a house at a cross-roads. The woman of the house upto now was the chief figure- making the oil lights and lighting them daily, painting the house inside and out, decorating the cattle, making the Ghatra flour fritters fried in oil... Now she hands over to the man- the matriarchal tradition giving over to the patriarchal one. The plough is the man's world in the agricultural period even as the bow as during the hunting period.

The man brings a bowl of red liquid made from *alta* which he pours over the stakes. Then he brings the bulls pulling them by the braided rope around their necks called Jumath (an which is traditionally made from the fibres of the *Chope* (*Bauhinia scandens*) creeper by the local nomadic Birhors. It is an unbreakable rope. The same rope is used to harness the plough to the bull's neck when ploughing.

Meanwhile the drummers have had a few drinks of the distilled liquor made from the calyx of the Mohua tree (*Madhuia latifolia*) and the tempo of the drumming increases, and a shiver of excitement goes through the crowd which has begun to assemble. The drums are generally three, and the drums used are the double ended drums called "Mandar" made of baked clay with leather diaphragms on either side which are tightened by leather strings, the whole drum being covered by a roll of cloth and hung from the drummer's neck. With the drummers is a man in a dhoti who will "fight" with the bull. He carries a dry skin of a wild cat or jackal the smell of which is supposed to frighten or enrage the bull. He will rush at the animal with it and put it at the bull's

nose while the drummers increase the frequency of the drumming pitch. It is as if the skin, be it of wild cat, hyaena or jackal, is his cape, like a Spanish bull-fight. The rope tether of the 'Jumath' is not more than two feet of double or triple rope, and so the bull is perforce lead to ground and in a quite defenseless position from the start. But as he goes back and forwards, stomping and charging and snorting he has enough space to do serious damage to this "bull fighter", and sometimes the latter does get hurt by the bull's horn, particularly in his legs. But the act is highly entertaining for the small village crowd! The "bull fighter" wears anklets with bells and as he jumps and leaps before the bull these tinkle loudly especially when he lands after a flying leap! He becomes like a dervish as the bull attacks him repeatedly as he attacks the bull, and they move round in an anti-clock-wise circle around the post.

Bull fighting is an ancient tradition since the earliest times from the Ibenan peninsular (Spain) to the Mediterranean (Crete, Mycenae). The story of the domestication of cattle unfolds in these rituals. The house holder now brings a tray of burning embers from the kitchen fire and lays the glowing coals before the tethered bull, while telling them they have been tamed to be useful to maen, which he does in a sing-song manner. It is a ritual song as old as the domestication of cattle from the wild. Then after this he returns to his house while the drummers approach led by an elder man who will fight the bulls. In the instance described he carries a stick with a silver handle with which he prods the bulls gently singing to the animals how they must now obey the owner. The he walks away and returns in the same semi-circle of drummers which now approaches the bull with five men singing,

“Where have I seen such as beautiful horse (*ghoda*)?
Where have I seen such a beautiful bull (*bail*)?
Where have I seen such a beautiful family?
You are the beautiful sacrificial bull
Such a beautiful horse, such a beautiful bull.
Such a beautiful family, such a beautiful bull,
Such a beautiful horse, such a beautiful bull,
Such a beautiful family bull.”

Although the scene above seems peaceable enough uptil now as the tempo increases and the drumming becomes louder and the circle of people fighters around the bull and drummers, a tension grips the whole scene as the bulls flanks quiver and nostrils dilate as it snorts in fear, lowers its horns and stamps the ground with its hooves. It has visible become suddenly frightened by what uptil now were the loving humans it was uptil now used to. I have actually seen bulls faint and lie on their sides in fear. It is a sacrificial event and no sacrifice is without cruelty. The drummers sing,

“O wild creature you have come
To us from very far away.
The gods have sent you to us,
And we are thankful.”

After this has been going on for some minutes the drummers and bull-fighter (who has begun prancing about with the animal skin in one hand and stick in another) begin to move in a clockwise direction around the bull. The bull keeps turning on its tether facing the drummers. Two men rush at it from the rear waving skins to alarm it and the animals turns and attempts too

charge restrained by its short tether. Now the bull-fighter begins to rush at the bull waving the piece of animal hide and his stick. He pushes the hide in the bulls nose and the animal getting the scent reacts violently. A highly charged atmosphere preludes the whole scene. The men begin their well-rehearsed act, jumping waving the hides and sticks and rushing at the confused tethered animal waving the hides in front of its muzzle, turning and cast wheeling as it attempts to attack, much to the applause of the assembled village crowd. The animal is snorting and quivering with its tail up and one is reminded of ancient Cretan frescoes depicting similar bull-baiting and wonder if there might not be some link in the distant past with the legend of the Minotaur! Sometimes, only very rarely a man gets injured by the bull's horns. Finally, the men place the hides and sticks behind their backs and approach the bull and the animal gets calm. The change is remarkable.

Presently the Khuta Bandhan is practiced in the Bishungarh block of eastern Hazaribagh district by the Kurmis, but early I am told it was practiced upto a hundred kilometers eastward by the Kurmis of Dhanbad district where it was called Balad Khuta in Manbhum but now the ritual is no longer practiced there. Balad refers to the bull, and khuta refers to the post.

Now-a-days the Khuta Bandhan is no longer practiced in the village and takes place in an open field next to the village. As many as a dozen posts may have bulls tied to them and the drummers with their entourage approach singing while the bull-baiters fly their craft as the crowd encircles them, after a few minutes moving on to the next bull and in this way the whole event may last an hour or two. The time is generally between 3:30 pm and 5 pm. After the show is over the bulls are untethered and taken to the fields to graze after which they return to their stalls in the village homes. The Kurmis keep their cattle in rooms in their houses and live alongside them.

In the central panel of the meso-chalcolithic rock art of Isco in Hazaribagh we find an image of the bull on wheels, complete with spots (central panel) which speaks to us of a living tradition. This is surely one of the longest continuing traditions in the world.



Isco Ghoda



Sohrai Ghoda

It is a heady sensation which one is left with to stand there at the end of the Khuta Bandhan next to a village decorated with murals of painted bulls, to think that here are we at the edge of

timelessness- a tradition we have witnessed alive in these forested hills and valleys for over five thousand years. It is an unforgettable experience.



Spotted bull on the Sohrai day at Bhelwara village, east Hazaribagh

Khuta Bandhan

The day after the Sohrai festival is the Khuta Bandhan (tying the bull to a stake) or Bradh khuta, the name Bradh meaning a bullock. Twenty years ago the post would be dug at cross roads within the village itself. This is a significant spot since cross roads are supposed to represent the goddess and are called therefore “devi-sthan” (‘Devi’ meaning goddess, and “Sthan” meaning place of). Now the bulls are tied to posts in a field outside the village as the village roads have been made concrete. This represents a huge cultural and spiritual change in the traditional orders.

From the flooding of the Black Sea in 5600 B.C. and its later events we may conveniently shift our focus to the archaeological site of Catal Huyuk on the Anatolian plateau in Turkey 7000 B.C. and see the house wall mural painting traditions incorporating bulls, hunting scenes, mother goddess, and techniques such as sgraffito clay cutting and finger clay cutting which we find today in almost identical patterns in the village mural paintings of Jharkhand of which Bhelwara is a typical example with its Sohrai festival. In the murals of Catal Houuk there is the painting of an enormous red bull (the now extinct aurochs *Bos primigenius* in which the bull is 6 feet long. The animal is surrounded by people including drummers identical to what we find in the Khuta bandhan bull-fight which I am here describing in the village of Bhelwara near Hazaribagh. The art of Bhelwara is linked to the rock art of Hazaribagh and Chatra in our region dated to the Meso-chalcolithic 3,500 B.C. These rock art sites have drawings of cattle both wild and domestic and they have ritual motifs related with the cattle harvest festival of Sohrai which are being described over here. As we have seen during this festival the welcome of cattle is made by drawing strings of circles with rice gruel representing cattle hoofs on the path to the cowshed which are called aripan, and these aripan or string of cattle hooves are found with paintings of bulls in the rock art of Hazaribagh and Chatra. In the Catal Hoyuk mural we have seen the drummers with the bull and we pay attention to it when looking at the photographs of the bull fight given here in Bhelwara. Spotting of cattle is done on this day and the spotted bulls are drawn in the rock art.



The great red bull mural from Catal Hoyuk 7000 B.C. in which the three drummers can be seen clearly in the top left hand corner where the animal is surrounded by people. In the following photographs we see the same scene enacted in Bhelwara and villages around Hazaribagh even today in the Khuta Bandhan festival.



Khuta bandhan or staking of the bull the day after the harvest festival of Sohrai in Bhelwara, east Hazaribagh

The following may be read in reference to the Catal Hoyuk archaeological site in Turkey 7000 B.C. described earlier and other related events

Effects if Pre-lactate Cultures of South Asia on Central European Neolithic

We are commensurate in imagination with a little pre-historic settlement whose lifeless remains still lie scattered on the Anatolian plateau of central Turkey. For nine thousand years ago on these plains and at a town they built there now called Catal huyuk consisting of no less than two thousand houses covering 26 acres we find a cattle cult and bull murals similar to what we have just witnessed in the Kurmi villages of eastern Hazaribagh. Catalhuyuk has been the subject of intensive archaeological examination which has confirmed a matriarchal tradition including a mural painting tradition representing the catching and worship of bulls.

Catal huyuk lies on any route overlaid from South Asia to Central Europe (*See my paper B284 (13) Indo-European Influences on Alpine Rockart, May 2011, Making History of Pre-History,*

Valcamonica Symposium, Sept.2013, B-288) which connection was imperative o the founding of the Linear Band Culture in the Danube and other rivers during the Neolithic. Without such a connection they could not have appeared because I believe that the lactate cultures if South Asia during the Neolithic period were the source of earliest Danubean Linear Band Culture and those of the Rhine, Elbe, Neckair, etc. (*Making History of Pre-History, 25th Symposium of Valcamonica, Sept.2013*). If my belief is correct then the cultural development of Central Europe owes its existence to the pre-lactate cultures of South Asia (i.e.India) and places such as Catal hoyuk were originally South Asian settlements on migrations north west after the end of the last glaciation in Europe around 10,000 B.P. This is a talk thesis but not too tall to be considered.

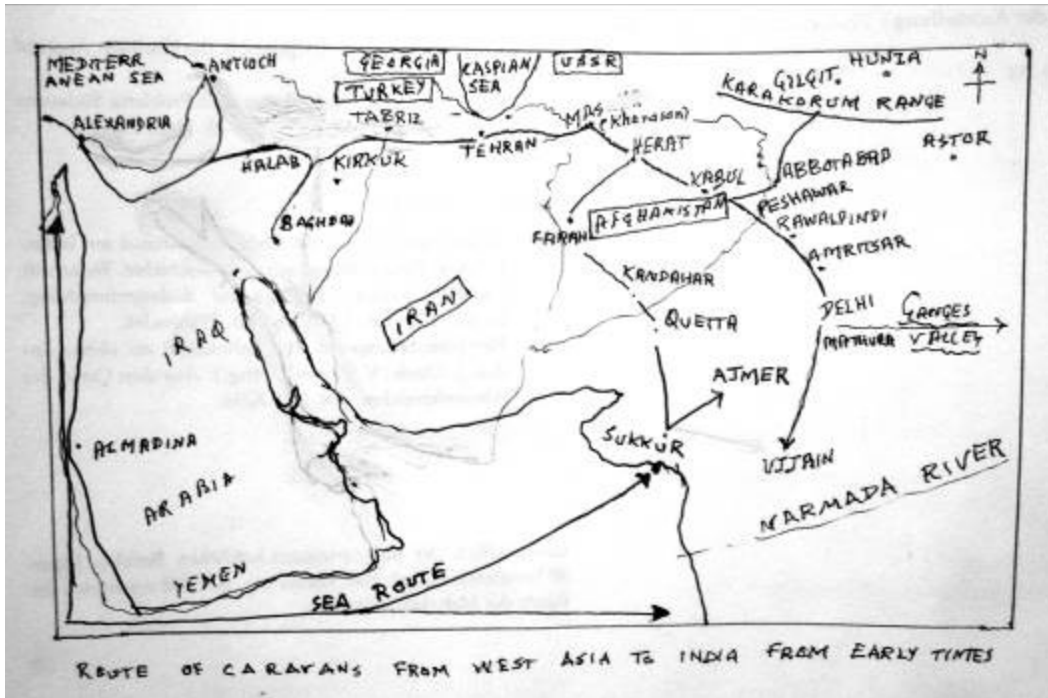
It could well be that the South Asian (i.e.Indian) connection with Turkey came through Chinese Turkestan or East Turkestan (Tashkent in Russian Turkestan) moving westward along the southern shore of the Caspian Sea via the Ferganaha valley. This region is significant not only from Neolithic times but it is an important part of the Silk Road, the highway between Europe and Asia in the region of the Aral Sea drained by Amu Darya (Oxus) and Syr Darya, the two great Central Asian rivers.

The alternative route could be the one described by me as the Caravan route (Map-ii).

Map I- The old Silk Road from China to Europe



Map II -Caravan route from West Asia to India in the time of Christ



The old Silk Route (top) and the route taken by caravans from the eastern Mediterranean to India in early times (bottom). These routes would have their origins in neolithic migrations from South Asia to Europe

The Upanishads are the first texts of importance after the Vedas. In the first Chapter of the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad it is written the sky is the horse and the bearer of night and dark spanning the north of India from Bay of Bengal to the Arabian Sea. Thus the horse enters Indian myth and cultural heritage just about the ending of the Vedas and replaces the earlier Vedic cult of the bull and it is the first symbol of the Aryan man on the sub-continent during the time of Mahabharat and Lord Krishna.

Contest motif Parallel



The approx. 6000 year old relief from Catal Hoyuk of two animals called tigers but resembling leopards because they have spots are of interest when compared to the contemporary Sohrai relief in Hazaribagh (right) made by Putli Ganju. The contest motif between bulls is common in Mesopotamia and we have seen it in other forms such as the dogs in the handle of the Knife of Jebel-El-Arak etc. What I find of interest here is the motif of the tiger so similar in form although separated by 6000 years and thousands of kilometers.

The Harvest Icons

We have seen in the animals of the first agricultural societies the long horned long haired goats Ibex (*Capra idex*), Markhor (*Capra falconeri*) from Iran to the Tien Shan and in the plains of the sub-continent the Buffalo (*Bubalus bubalin*) and Gaur (*Bos gaurus*) among the first wild cattle depicted in the rock-paintings in the Meso-Neolithic when early hunting societies were beginning the first agriculture. In the early rock paintings of Central India including Chhatisgarh and Jharkhand we encounter deer of various types primarily and in the emergent ritual forms cattle appear in stylized rectangular forms and ritualized forms specially having on their backs some forms indicating a sacred relationship, a leaf, tree, bird, flower, or human form. This is a unique expression, especially where a dog is found indicating Bhairav cult of Shiva-ite worship. The idea of animals carrying something of great religious or sacred value on the back is ancient Mesopotamian. The Bull of the Egyptian Zodiac carried the sun on its back. This is important to note if we are tracking cultural migrations because we can ask where it appeared first- in pre-historic Neolithic India or the much later Mesopotamian civilization during the iron-age? I would think the latter because the Neolithic ritual ideas were not complex or developed. In the Bronze age wheeled animals of Jharkhand excavated in 1915-18 by S.C.Roy or the Mohenjodaro wheeled animals we find no sign of later evolved Brahminical significances in Raur, cow, bull, elephant etc. The idea of animal as *vimana* or vehicle of deity had just not evolved. Although students of pre-history will note the ancient Indian idea of the goddess of the forest riding the wild stag (i.e. Aynav, etc). It is significant that in the Sohrai bull form the long hairs of the wild goat or Raur are present and date back to similar motifs in archaeological levels commensurate with Sialk and Sumer.

Porhos Jatra or Sacrifice of the Buffalo among the Dongria Khonds

In south India the bull is worshipped in the temples both in its female (Nandi) and male (Siva) forms as Tamil literary sources it is established this was in significance of agricultural fertility as A.L.Basham remarked on bull-fighting there “A similar sport was practiced by Cretains, and this fact like many others links the Tamil with the earliest civilizations of the Mediterranean. Wrestling with bulls is a favourite passtime of some other peoples of India (A.L.Basham, *The Wonder That was India*, page 211). I have been fortunate to have witnessed one of the last Porho Jatras of the Khonds of Phulbani district of Orissa in Feb.1979. The earlier victim used to be a man when it was called ‘Meriah’, but the British administrators put an end to it in the nineteenth century. In my talks with the members of the tribe conducting the brutal sacrifice it was in honour of Dharani Penu their Earth Mother. The animal which was tethered to a stake was teased and stabbed with short triangular knives (yoni?) to the sound of wild drumming. Then it is tether was loosened and dragging the rope in to which its tormentor were hanging it ran blindly into a nearby forest where it was cut up alive and meat distributed in Saal (*Shorea robusta*) leaf cups as *parsadi* to the groups from different villages attending the Jatra. Unfortunately in those days I did not own a camera so have no photos. It was the first article I wrote in my B-Files, now numbering thousands.

The porho jatra was practiced I was told every third year on a Friday, the preceding rituals leading upto it go on for one week. A traditional umbrella (chhatri) made by the priest (pujari or pahan) covers the *Dharnvi Penu*.

On the Friday the men associated with the sacrifice gather at an appointed time beneath a Saal tree with their small knives and an iron plate , three brass bows, two iron chairs, which are placed before the *Dharani Penu* which is placed on a small altar which is called *Kudi*. The local tribals are Dongria Khonds. The place I witnessed the ceremony with my wife Elizabeth, Philo and our children is within sixty crow-fly miles of the present famous Niyamgiri Hill.

On the third night the sacrificed buffalo is bathed with Turmeric and red earth. Towards dawn on the fourth morning the animal is ready for the sacrifice. We saw it thanks to our friend Gandhi Patro of Phulbani on 19th February 1979 on the road from Naugaon (where we were staying) to Baliguda Tehsil.

We arrived before the excitement started. The ritual incantations and drumming soon reached a crescendo with the men who are attacking the wretched animal (who are called Bejuni, or out of senses, prance about in a frenzied in area in a circle around the post it is tethered to. These men have imbibed sufficient alcohol and are asked questions by the three priests (pujari) very much as in the Sohrai puja in Hazaribagh. They give replies supposed to be endowed with oracular meaning. Five men then attack the animal with short, flat, triangular knives.

In the incident which I am describing the buffalo gored one of these attackers in the thigh and he had to be taken away. The domestic water buffalo (*Bubalus bubalus*) has wide sweeping horns and can be dangerous if provoked. The bejuni wave a red cloth before the animal to enrage it further. We may see the significance of the prizing as trophies of buffalo heads from Mycenae and Crete , and the Urnfield Celts of Ireland to the Nagas of India and other ethnic societies in Indonesia and else where.

The crowd (including ourselves) are pressing these Bejuni closer to the buffalo. The animal breaks its tether and rushes through the crowd down the village road to a small nearby wood with people hanging onto its tether. Once in among the trees it is dragged down and instantly slaughtered in the most brutal manner imaginable, humans entering its living carcass for cadavers, its eyes rolling, tongue hanging, bellowing. It is cut up in this inhuman manner and pieces of meat are doled out in leaf cups for distribution even while it is living. It was not a nice sight and one I shall never forget as long as memory lasts. I wonder what would have happened to a human victim- from what I have seen of religious fervour, the greater the pain inflicted on a religious victim the greater is supposed to be the spiritual reward to the tormentors.

Meriah Human Sacrifice in Orissa

Verrier Elwin who has recorded the relic of the Meriah Post used in human sacrifice in his book *The Tribal Art of Middle India* (Oxford Univ. Press, Revised Edn.1949, pages 179-182) has illustrated this Post, replicas of which are erected by the Kultra Khonds of Northwestern Ganjam district in south Orissa. The post is about five to six feet high and forked and perhaps meant to fasten the victims neck and head. The pillar dedicated to Illn Pinu dedicated to the "house god" partly supports the grain bins near the kitchen. Before it are the mortar and grindstone, and a small earthen altar. On it are hung ropes used for buffalo sacrifice, and Elwin records egg shells from pujas, even a bell used by the *Pujaris*.

The tradition of Illu Pinu and Meriah survives in custom. When a boy is married he is given a Meriah Post. Now-a-days the forked top of the post are shaped to resemble the horns of Oxen, although Oxen are never sacrificed, only buffalos. The buffalo alone is the sacrificial animal. We are reminded of this when goddess Durga slays Mahesh Asura during the Durga Puja festival. India has not changed, only the outward manifestations and observances may have changed outwardly. The Buffalo is the symbol of Shiva, an anti-Brahminical forest god, enemy of the rishis and seers of the Vedas, a cohort of the dreaded Asuras.

The Significance of Tribal ideas of the Sacred *Religion- Its significance?*

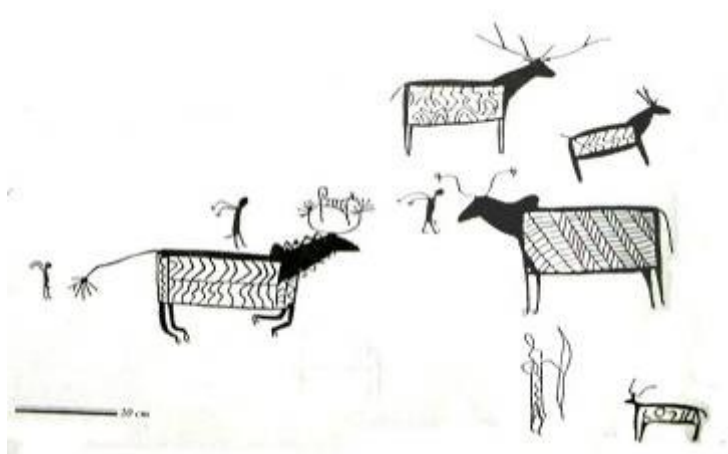
Religion means to each one the peculiar religious belief tradition which he or she inherits and which is inculcated from an early impressionable age. To Sigmund Freud religion was simply a willful expression of human (S.Freud, *Moses and Monotheism*, Random House, NY, 1955). For anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski in describing Melanesian and Polynesian beliefs religion was merely a means of creating a means of immortality for the individual (B.Malinowski, *Magic, Science and Religion*, Doubleding & Co., NY, 1954). For Frazer religion represented tribal man's way of conciliating powers beyond his control (J.J.Frazer, *The Golden Bough: The Magic Art and the Evolution of Kings*, (2 Vols.) NY, 1935). For E.B.Taylor religion for tribes represented nature worship or animism- the spiritual element in the material universe leading to anthropomorphism (E.B.Taylor, *Religion In Primitive Culture*, Harper and Row, NY, 1958). For Evans-Pritchard, religion represented a means through which the society maintains solidarity and continuity (E.E.Evans, Pritchard, *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic among the Azanda*, Oxford 1937). For Marriott animism omitted reference to supernatural powers and made a new distinction which he termed "Animatism" indicating a force which could be invoked to enter inert matter equivalent to the Melanesian and Oceanian idea of Mana- the spirit force which can

enter any thing (R.R.Marriott, *The Threshold of Religion*, Methven, London 1909) similar to the Indian primitive tribal belief in *Bonga*.

In India we have the sudden appearance of the Vedas during the second millennium B.C. From an objective view-point the Tribal consciousness of the sacred is wide and recurent generationally, not a cut-and-dried formulaic entity as presented in Brahminism. For this reason Vedic roots while undoubtedly tribal and reflecting the “genus of India” cannot be held to be the last word. Tribal belief is evolutionary and organic and repetitive traditions appear in new, original forms and contexts.

The Significance of the 12 symbolic animals of the Zodiac

In the opinion of Herodotus these twelve were relics of the Indus and represented the eight original forms of the Proto-Indian Zodiac later entering Buddhism. The Twins; Bull; Ram; Two fishes; Water carrier; Fish animal; Centaur; Scorpion; Merchant; Boat; Lion; Crab. Of course in the Hindu pattern Vishnu is depicted as floating on the primeval Ocean on a lotus protected by a five-headed Cobra. All these complex association of forms appear in the art of the unlettered for villages and totally illiterate women artists and are the fruits of one of the longest continuing religion traditions in the world. How much the so called highly developed Mesopotamian and Egyptian owe to the Proto-Indians is a moot point, one which has surprises whenever we look in searching he roots of North African, Mediterranean, Greek, and Central European cultures and their neighbours because the Proto-Indian was undoubtedly the oldest cultural level of them all! The cult of the Minotaus and the bulls of the ten kings in the temple of Posedion, their hunting with staves and nooses, and the tethering of a bull to the sacrificial post is attested by none other than Plato himself who says the victim bull was “slain over the sacred inscription”. The connections of this description with the Atlantean Kings, Mayorus, the Canary Islanders, the Sohrai Khuta which we have witnessed, and the Khond Porho Jatra are staggering reminders of what is NOT coincidence. Further, it is to be noted that the Bulls depicted on the seals of Sumer, and Mohenjo-Daro and Harappa in their pre-contact level are identical to the Bulls depicted today in the Khovar village murals of North Jharkhand. As the bull was worshipped in Crete and Mycenae even so it is still worshipped by the villages in the forest villages of Hazaribagh. Butt baiting and bull leaping was a favourite Cretan sport, one common to the pre-historic rockart of Central India and the Southern Deccan. The cattle are humped variety in a neo-chalcolithic cultural time frame.



*Navsingarh-Khakshila district
Raigarh, Madhya Pradesh
(note dog between Bull's horns)*

There are numbers of wild cattle in South and Southeast Asia as the Indian Water buffalo (*Bubalis bubalis*) both wild and domestic; and bison (*Bos gainus*); in Malaysia the Shadaras and Northeastern Mithun (*Bos frontalis*); Bosmere Banteng (*Bos bantey*), Cambodian Goupry (*Bos sanveli*); Philippine water buffalo or Tamavas (*Bubalis mindorems*); Indonesian buffalo or Anoa (*Bubalis deprencorns quarlers*) etc. These are the wide variety that gave rise in the post glacial (i.e.15,000BP). In the wild cattle of Southeast Asia, Indonesia, and Indochina and Indias short backed cattle which little oxen have tilled the subcontinents small rice fields for milenia and are not related in any way to the European Aurochs (*Bos promogicus*) And yet there is much that is common among bull and cow cults of North Africa, Crete, Greece, Macedonia, Mycenae, and Turkey and those of South Asia. The wild Mithun of Assam become feral and are a eros of the Bison of India and Banteng of Upper Burma (See Bulu Imam, Essential differences between gaur, Gayal, Mithun,, Cheetal, Wildlife Preservation Society of India, Vol33, 1994). Man and cattle like man and dog have a unique evolutionary connection going back to before the dawn of agriculture in the world. Elaborate cults and their attendant mythologies and folklore gnaw and divinity entered the world of the profane such as the Holy Cow of India. This animal and its male counterpart the Bull is the subject of our research of the early forms which they took in the early imagination of our forebears in our pre-historic rockart and the perennial close relationship between bovine and man in village India which is one present subject of investigation and what bearing it may have with other societies which evolved alongside wild cattle. Our concern is primarily with the artistic expression of this relationship between cattle and man in our region. Cattle have appeared everywhere with the dog as mans earliest and constant companion from the regions of Europe, Asia minor, North Africa at Crete, Hersarlik (Turkey) and Mycenae (Greece), Hacilar (Turkey) and Luxor (Egypt) every where the bull appears with men and gods as a divine incas natures.

In Harappa and Mohenjodaro in India the bull was supreme from the 3rd millennium B.C. and is the major motif of the Indus steatite seals so close in form and context with Mesopotamia ideals. The Bull was the sacred animals of the Indus river as the Cow was of the Nile. Oxons was worshipped at Memphis in the great sacred bull the Egyptians called Asar Hapi. The Greeks knew Hapi as Sar Apis. In India the monsoons begin in Asar and the sowing of rice on the eleventh day of the Sakal Paksh during the waning moon I believe is sacred to Asar Osrris. On they which I believe is that while outward names or appearances of deities may change the essential inner significance of worship is eternal and continous. The fish motif is common in Sohrai harvest murals and in Egypt the fish was connected with the goddess Isis portrayed with a fish on her hand. The mudden toys of Diwali portray this figures.

I have often pointed out with great emphasis that the Sohrai harvest paintings made by our village women are not connected with folk stories (like the Ramayan paintings of Madhubani). The 4- petaled lotus is a common motif and in Indian Tantra this lotus is very sacred being the seat of Kundalini (which is the spinal column).

Bovidae

I will now examine very briefly the connection in Sohrai art between the Bovidae of the Indus art and those of Jharkhand (*Bovidae include hoofed, hollow-horned rummains such as cattle, sheep, goats and buffaloes*) in Sohrai village mural painting. This is a most valuable historical resource the importance of which has not been recognized by scholars. For the visual tradition of an ancient race in the expression of history.

Brahui Connections

A.L. Basham has observed (The Wonder that was India, Rupa & Co., New Delhi p.12-14)(in paraphrase) classical writers show that when Alexander of Macedon in 326 BC round the Indus the climate was much as today, perhaps moister. The river valleys were fertile and well wooded although the coastal strip of the Makran and much of Baluchistan was dry and desolate. But in 3000 BC the Indus region was well forested providing fuel for making bricks and fodder for elephant and rhinoceros, and Baluchistan was then rich in rivers. The people of this region belonged to several cultures and were distinguished by different types of painted pottery... They knew the use of metal and copper. The village cultures of the Brahui Hills (Dravidian-Oraon) did not encourage close contact and made predominantly red pottery. The people of the Kulh culture in the Makran burnt their dead, while those of the Nal culture in the Brahui Hills practiced fractional burial as exhumation or re-burial (an Oraon custom) after partial disintegration by burning or exposure. Their religion was Mediterranean in type and Middle East fertility rituals and worship of a mother goddess with figurines in clay of the goddess (in particular the Zhob culture to north of Quetta). In many of these cultures the worship of the Mother Goddesses was associated with the worship of the Bull. The Bull forms a favourite motif for the decoration of pottery (i.e. Kulli, Rana Ghunda, most important of the Zhob sites).

The most famous seal of Mohenjodaro is that of the 3 faced Siva with buffalo horn the supreme god of people of the Indus valley. He bears a Trident as a crown. He is seated yogi-like cross-legged on a low stool under which are two ibexes (*Capra ibea*) both an Iranian as well as Himalayan Indian animal. He is surrounded by four Indian animals- elephant, tiger, buffalo, and rhinoceros. This god was called *AN* symbolic of the first man, and he was supposed to be a sky god in Sumer (Radan, Sumerian Hymns and Prayers to God Ninlil. Pages 13-38; Jean, La Religion Sumerienne, pages 32-41). This deity SIVA is the Forest God or Tree God of all the Tribes of India. He is paramount as Osiris was. His dying is new birth. His death in winter is his birth in Spring. His festival in Sarhul in the tribal Jharkhand when the Sakhua flower blossoms (*Sohrea robusta*). As the hunting way of life gave over to an agricultural economy SIVA moved from the Tree God/Forest God to Phallic God/ Animal God. That is when the seminal religions pan-Indian transformation began from the Mesolithic hunting age to the Chalcolithic farming age. SIVA appeared on the back of the cattle, he was attributed with the forest domestication of cattle, he was the Bull God. As the symbol of agricultural economy he sets on the throne of Mohenjo-Daro. All animals- wild and domestic pay observance to him. He is the supreme Lord. Even the Mother Goddess now takes second place. But in India she remains supreme as the "key to the mysteries" for she alone understand SIVA who is her offspring, *because she is Mother*. And Siva knows this. A great injustice is now perpetrated against Siva for being his Pre-Eminence. He is attacked by the Sumerian mother goddess called Durga after he is insulted by the rishis recorded in the Vedas and his consort Sati consumes herself in the Honea sacred fire, and SIVA crazed with grief carries her flaming body across India, parts of it falling here and there which became devoted Pitha-Sthans in (places of rich from pilgrimage). The temple of Brahminism is recounted this every Durga Puja when Siva is speared by goddess Durga for being himself-portrayed as the form of his tribal lancana Mahesh the Indian water buffalo. It is a truly Indian saga having nothing whatsoever to do with Reason. A fortnight after this straying of SIVA by Durga when he is turned into an *asura* or godless one, called Mahesh-Asura comes the rebirth of Life in the great autumn harvest festival of Sohrai the day after Divali the Festival of Lights, which according to the Ramayana is the day when SIVA's prototype Lord Ram returned from his forest sojourn with great fanfaron to his father capital AYODHYA accompanied by his

monkey army which are the Oraons (who along with other Central Indian tribes like the Marias of Chhatisgarh) have a monkey totem and Birhors of Hazaribagh.

The figure of God on the back of the bull in the harvest paintings of Sohrai is both SIVA and RAM, but above both is he PASHUPATI the Father of Animals. Sohrai to my mind is more than a mere harvest festival (like Pongam in South India) *it is in fact a liberation of the first domestication of Cattle.*

The Triangle sacred to Yoni or organ of procreation of the Mother Goddess is the pre-eminent motif of Sohrai women's painting. It is the pyramid and stepped ziggural as ancient as Ur upon which the figures of the goddess was worshipped... It is also the motif found in the rock paintings (as in Isco 3500 B.C. Central Panel) as The Queen- when it is wears a crescent moon on its pinnar. It becomes in a similar hieroglyph the symbol of the Buddha.

Another enigmatic symbol of the Sohrai is the lotus, to which I shall come later, but the first mention may be made of the heavenly tree- the real ASWATTHA, which is the PIPAL or PANI of the ancients, a fig (*Ficus religiosa*) whose leaf is found in every household shrine and whose preserve in some form is found in almost every Sohrai painting. This tree and its sacredness dominates early brahminical scripture from Ratha Upanishad (6,1); Taltiriya Aranyaka (1, 11, 5); Martri Upanishad (6, 4); Srmad Bhagwat Gita (15, 9) which is called the fire of the Third Heaven.

It is generally stated that the enlightenment of Lord Buddha took place beneath the Pipal Tree but other versions would hold the tree was not a Pipal but a Barh, Saal, or even date palm (Khejur- *Felix sylvestris*) whatever the truth might be the Pipal leaf is the commonest expression for SIVA in the iconography of the Indus painted pottery. Why should we delay to describe the lotus, the most important motif of the Sohrai harvest murals? It is drawn with great originality using a forked stick for compass and in a series of interconnected lotuses when it is called the Kamal Ban or Forest of Lotuses. A really unique form is this lotus which is one of the oldest floral motifs in the history of art. The lotus is a natural motif whenever it is found. But a particularly Oraon motif is the Crescent moon called Kokkethai by the dwellers of Coorg in South India which people according to S.C.Roy had connections with the Oraons. The motif is found in the rockart of Nutangwa Pahar in Keridari Block of Hazaribagh district in the North Karanpura Valley. According to the eminent linguist Aska Parpola the Oraons were the original dwellers of the Indus and that enigmatic script can only be read using the Kurrukh- a Brahui language the Oraons speak. Originally dwellers of the Brahui Hills above the Indus plain today the last population of Oraon Kurrukh speakers are found in the Chotanagpur plateau and north Jharkhand's Rajmahal Hills where they are known as Mal Paharias. S.C.Roy the father of Indian anthropology also held that the Oraons were the Indus people, a view supported by the researches of Fr.Henry Heras (Studies in Proto-Indo Med. Cultures, 1951) and Mangobinda Banerjee (M.Banerjee, *An Historical Outline of Pre-British Chotanagpur*, 1942, 2nd re-print 1993). The views of both Heras and Banerjee concur on the route to Chotanagpur following the valleys of the Narmada and Sone rivers to Jharkhand (which is the new name of Chotanagpur). Over ninety character of the Indus Script have been identified in the Isco rockart of Hazaribagh alone.If the Oraons were indeed the original inhabitants of Harappa and ohenjodaro it is a matter of great pride for Jharkhand but one nobody seems to have as yet woken up to despite my saying it a thousand times in different forums! The people, and especially the government in Jharkhand, are prone to be deaf!

Comb animals

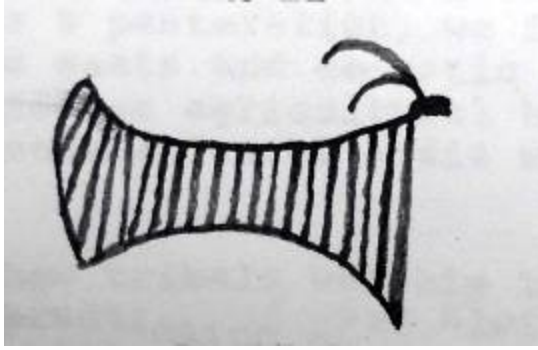
The comb is a sacred instrument for women in India record as far back as the 3rd millennium in the Rig Veda. Verrier Elwin devoted an entire chapter to it in his classic *The Art of Middle India* (O.U.P.1950) and “comb animals” or animals in that form appear in the Harappan culture of Indus Valley. Long haired animals like our northwestern goats are typically comb-shaped, the body hairs resembling teeth of comb. It is common in the painted pottery of Susa and Mohenjodaro. Interestingly it is also a common feature in Saora religious pictographs in the Eastern Ghats of Orissa! The Khonds of Orissa and the Murias and Baigas of Chhatisgarh also make animal formed combs in connection with sexual practices of the bachelor dormitory call Ghotul- why I have made this long introduction to the comb form animal (or conversely, animal-formed comb!) is both the nature of the animal and the comb itself. The comb is associated with groom etual lines including reticulate (opposed) triangles and cross-latching (both found in Hazaribagh Meso-chalcolithic rockart) and also noted by Elwin in *Pre-dynastic Egypt* (Ibid.p.47)

In the Sohrai village murals in Hazaribagh the large animal figures are typically in “Comb” form although this has no visible connection with the comb used for the hair. It will be noted that some of the *earliest animal forms* in Indian rock paintings during that period which is between the Mesochalcolithic hunting stage of society and the agricultural phase are geometrical i.e. rectangular. It is the prototype of the later comb form seen in Iran (i.s. Susa). In this stage of rock paintings I refer to the body is divided into sections by vertical lines, also a feature in later painted pottery of Indus valley and the hallmark of the Jharkhand Sohrai harvest paintings. Spotting of animals to denote their sacredness (mentioned in the Bible also- Genesis) is found in our rock art.

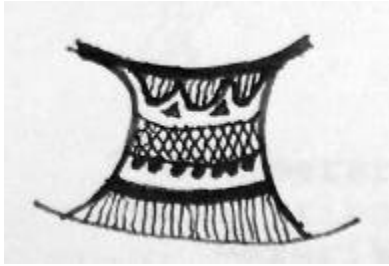


Illustration: Isco rock painting, Central Panel, 3500 B.C.

The earliest domestication of animals in Iran-Indus region was most probably long horned long-haired goats as evident from the record of painted pottery from both regions. The classic comb form in prehistory comes from Sialk II in Central Iran 3000 B.C. in painted pottery and identical



forms are today being painted throughout Hazaribagh villages during the harvest festival of Sohrai.



Sialk II Wild goat, Caprahircus or Ibex Carpa Ibex 2500 B.C.

Mohenjodaro Comb figure,, 2nd Millennium B.C.



Muria comb: Kondagaon, Bastar- Contemporary (Elwin p.51)



Sialk, Iran, 2nd Millennium, B.C.



Sohrai mural Comb figure (Bhelwara, Hazaribagh, Contemporary)

The Sohrai Horse in the first Brahmana

“The Bull and the Upanishadic horse has been closely associated in ancient Hindu scripture and in the First Brahmana it is written Aum, the dawn, is verily the head of the sacrificial horse, the sun its eye, its breath the word, its mouth the fire, the year its body, the sky its back its sides the quarters, the ribs, the seasons are its limbs, the months its joints, days and nights its feet, stars are its bone, clouds its flesh, its stomach food sand, rivers are its blood vessels, liver and lung are the mountains, herbs and trees its hair. The rising sun is it fore, the setting sun the hand, His yawn is lighting, when he shakes it thunders, urmates is the rain.”

How close is this to the traditional Maori aboriginal belief of the serpents in the earth which cause earthquakes... everywhere the early human imagination seems to emanate from a common source as if the Creator was expressing Himself!

The horse is an Aryan import and post Harappan therefore like the iron age itself which came during the same period as the horse itself- *end of the second millennium B.C. or beginning of the first millennium B.C.* In the Vedic Asvamedha or horse sacrifice a gold verne is placed to the east of the horses tail to represent the rising sun (in the Bengal Bay) and a silver one in the west to signify the setting of sun in the Arab Sea. It is the tradition which may have been the prototype of the Greek Apollo so similar to the sun-god Krishna.

Animals in the village Sohrai painting from Harvest Icons p.312

The spotting of animals is mentioned in the Bible with regard to Job’s goat. The act of spotting since earliest times has denoted a mark of sacred. Like ritual scarification spotting is considered sacred. We regularly in our village paintings of animals encounter sacred spotting. All the tribes of Central India consider spotting as sacred. Small pox that scourge of India before vaccine was called Mata to denote the Mother Goddess. When the tiger is drawn with stripes sports are put between the stripes. It would seem that ritual magic developed more prolifically. The whole reason and purpose of these ritual wall paintings is to protect the house and its inhabitants from evil forces which the tribal sees everywhere around him. Then the art is ipherual and at most

lasts a few months when it has to be made again. In the case of Kuris of Eastern Hazaribagh they have developed a highly stylized form of genetic animal art using red, white and black lines, while the Kurmis of hill forest of southern Hazaribagh adopt a completely different technique of painting using sgraffito comb cutting in a light colour earth pigment over a solid black manganese base.

This style of art I have specifically given the name Khovar since I found it being used extensively in connection with the decoration of the brides house prior to the marriage reception. My first book was *Bridal Caves- A Search for the Adivasi Khovar tradition* (INTACH, 1995). However having said this I must confess that Khovar marriage murals are not conferred exclusively to comb-cut-sgraffito wall paintings but that painted Khovar using natural earth colours with brushes made from green stems is perhaps just as common, and especially so among tribes like the Oraons, Ganjus, and Agarias of the Hazaribagh plateau and its environs in north Jharkhand. In fact the Oraon and Ganju painted art has found great favour among international art lovers and murals in both schools have been painted in several principal cities of Australia and Europe including Sydney, Udine (Venice), Zurich, La Rochelle. The art struck an instant acclaim with European audiences in exhibitions of artworks on paper and canvas in several cities in Italy (Rome, Milan), Germany (Berlin, Dresden, Heidelberg, Munich, Bad-Honnef/Bonn, etc) as well as London at the leading venues (Rebecca Hossack Gallery, SOAS Brunei Gallery).

Elements in common between rock art and village painting

As the late Mrs.Pupul Jayakar had perceptively observed about aur art it has the characteristics of

1. no border edge so may exceed the frame
2. no top or bottom so figures may be painted in any direction of orientation as if seen from below as in cave painting
3. no landscape or principles of perspective or balance applied to the subject-matter

I may add apart from these important factors,

4. a composition employing an interactive relationship of play or “exchange” between the animals, birds, fish, plant etc.
5. Regular use of ritual motifs similar to Chalcolithic era rock art.
6. Consistent use of rock art motifs such as honey-comb, reticulated triangles, X-ray of animal bodies and linear markings as well as spotting.

Anyone causally looking at the paintings will find tigers attacking deer, deer eating plants, snakes drinking milk of cows, mongoose attacking snake, dogs bayin to the moon. In fact there is much in common between the art of our Dravidian and Protoaustraloid tribes and that of the Bushmen art of South Africa and the Aboriginal art of South, Central, West and Northern Australia. I have elsewhere attempted a detailed comparative study but it will burden the reader too much over here. Let it only be said the forms are extremely similar as well as the subject-matter. Rabindranath Tagore with his usual deep perception in a lecture at Harvard University (1913) recited,

“What to the bee in nature is merely colour and scent
And the marks or spots which show the way to the honey,

Is to the human heart beauty and joy
untrammelled by necessity-
And bring o the heart a letter of love
written in many-coloured inks.”

*(R.Tagore, Sadhana- The Realization of Life,
Macwillan India, Delhi 1979, 1982)*

The Rectangle and Diamond Patterns

Being two exceedingly important motifs I will briefly dwell upon them in passing. The diamond represents the pitcher in our art in the Billabong or pond between rivers in Northern Australia. The Rectangle in our art (or a square sometimes, all by itself) represents a village Pond. Waters in at all times the source of life. Such motifs appear in the later and highly sophisticated Amish quilting. The honey bag is another important motif. We are also aware of the ritual significance of parallel lines and cross hatching as early signs of human expression from the Welsh Ogham script to the Irish, and the pre-historic markings on bone and antler horns in Europe. We find these in the primitive ritual markings and scarification of Aborigines in Australia. As we follow the DNA markers of human migrations from Africa across South Asia through the Southeast Asian chain to Australia we become aware of human links since the most ancient lines along the continental Pacific-Indian Ocean rim and outwards into Oceania. A great world of visual possibilities opens up before us.

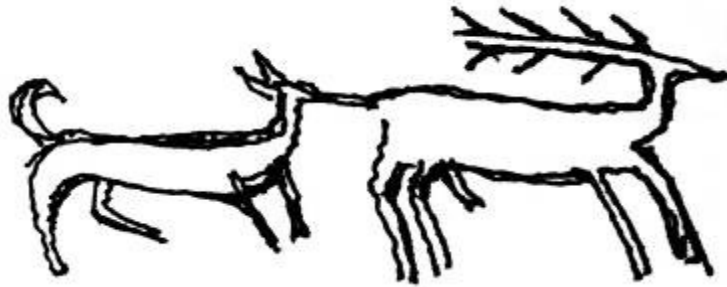
We have before our eyes in an ephemeral self-replenishing stage still the greatest achievements of a pan global palaeolithic culture. Unlike Europe we still have institutions such as ritual animal hunts and the close observation of animal life, the aquatic life in the natural forested water-bodies, the interaction of wild animals and water-birds- the egret and moorhen and lotuses and water-insects. To put it quite prosaically the mural paintings are the Tribal expression of a desire similar to the modern man's to have colourful pictures and beautiful books in his house for only in these could the wealth of his life experience be found. Without these his life would be a colourless and drab in many ways!

The Ephemeral and Eternal Nature of Village Painting

The Ephemeral Nature of the village art is maintained only because of eternal continuing traditions. If there was not such a continue unbroken traditions then the ephemeral nature of the art will vanish overnight because there will be no body left to continue the painting tradition.

The small yellow Dingo dogs found in Australia have been traced to Southeast and South Asia where they were identified now with the Santal Hound, a type of Asian pariah breed which has had its origins traced to the Chinese Wolf by Carbon dating. This wolf was found south of Yangtze river in South China and the name given is ASY or Asia South of Yangtse. This was the fulfillment of a 30year research carried out by me including hair follicles for DNA sampling in India, New Zealand, Australia, and the University of Georgia then at Beijing. Studies for gathering samples were carried out by the Units of California at Davis and Princeton University among others. The National Geographic made a film on this titled 'In Search of the First Dog' in 2004 which won the coveted Explorer Club Award in 2005. The film covered the dog from

North Africa, the Middle East to India, Southeast Asia to Australia and New Guinea (New Guinea Singing Dog) and across Polynesia and South America to the southern State of Georgia in the United States where it is found as the Carolina Dog. This dog has been a figure in the Aboriginal life and art in Australia as well as Southeast Asia, India and Pakistan. It is found with small tribal groups across the Indian Sub-continent and features extremely in Central Indian rockart.



Dogs attacking deer from he behind are common in Alpine rockart (Naquane, Valcamonica, Italy). This motif has been found in the Indus Valley painted pottery and is common to Central Indian rock paintinsg

The dog is associated with Bhairav Shiva and mentioned in the Artharva Veda associated with Yama (Book 18, Funeral verses, Atharva Veda). It is significant that the dog is shown in a sacred context in the Sohrai painting in Hazaribagh.



Illustration of dog with Tree of Life, Ghatwal Sohrai, Potmo

The small Indian-type dog has been found in the ritual burials in China and in Funerary pre-Colombian pottery in Mexico. The same type of dog has been depicted in ancient Egyptian

Stelae used for hunting, and worshipped as Anubis. The dingo has also been depicted as an object of ritual worship and used in Aboriginal hunting. It appear among the Santal and Ghatwal and other tribes in the forest villages of Hazaribagh in a similar context.

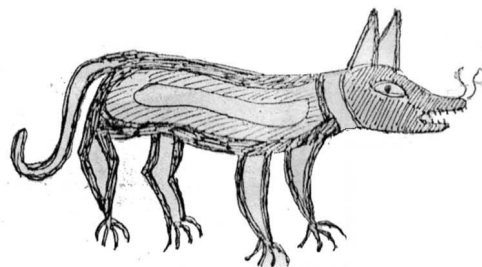


The Egyptian Anubis with gold collar- in Necrophylil Jackal dog believed to preicide over the dead. Mid.2nd Millennium B.C. 28th Dynasty period i.e. Tutankhaman. This dog is painted in exactly the same form with gold collar in the Sohrai Ganju murals in Hazaribagh

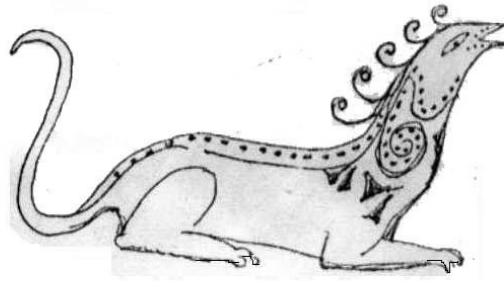
The Birhor nomads of Hazaribagh who live by hunting and food gathering are great expert in ethnobotany and magic- they believe on the horned dog as representing the mother goddess represnted by the crescent moon, and it is notable that identical motifs have been found in Shamanistic paintings in a shrine in Palestine-Jordan dated to 5,500 B.P. by the Drew University- Mc Cormac excavations led by the eminent authority G.Ernest Wright. Such dogs in burials with humans in Harappa and China of around the same period 2800 BC have neen found. In ritual Egyptian representation of Anubis the Egyptian dog associated with death a collar is focused, and a similar representations appear in ritual Aboriginal representation of this dog in Australia.



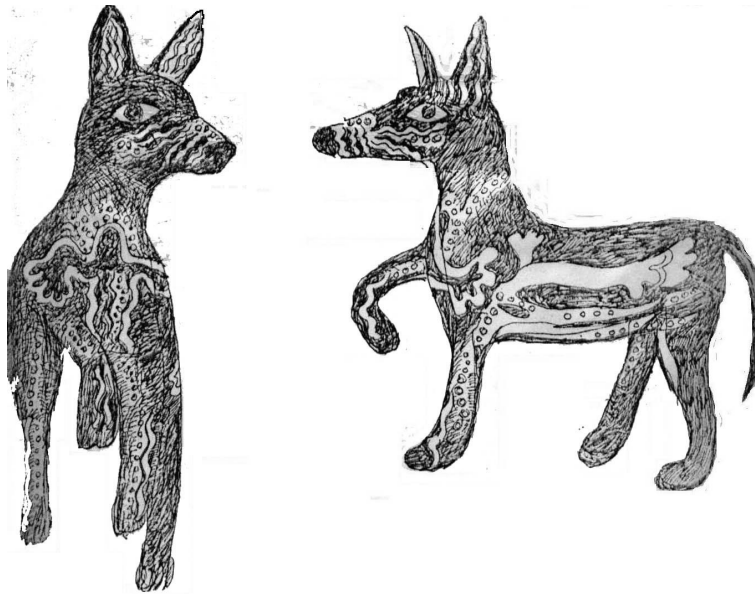
Anubis the Jackal God who presided over the Mummification of Egyptian God-King Paraoh Tutankhamen, (1350-1340 B.C) XVIII Dynasty



Gold collared, gold-eared, sacred Jackal. (Tuio) figure (life size) painted by Putli Ganju of Hazaribagh (contemporary)



*Griffin figure from the throne room of the Palace of Knossos in Crete.
The sacred animal of King Minos resembling in some part a dog.*



Ritually decorated life sized "Majestic Dingo" by Johonno Johnson, Aboriginal, Australia (Contemporary) Right Fore-paw raised in classic "stalk" posture. Note the outward "swell" appears identical to Anubis (above) and gold lining within the ears.



Horned dog Jordan, Palestine 5,500 BP p.343, Harvest Icon

The leader of the Jackal pack is called Pharo. And the pack howling of these dogs is considered an ill omen among our tribes. The significance of the village dog as a motif is understood in relation to its wild cousins the wild dog and jackal which are considered having some kind of super normal significance.

Snake

The double headed snake is considered as esoteric motif in the Sohrai painting. The flying snake is also painted and an esoteric figure similar to the Mayan also a sacred creature. The rainbow snake which the Aboriginals of Australia worship as the bringer of rain (Lorbung) is found in Munda painting (Borbung)

Deer

The Deer or rather antlered Stag is considered a magical figure since there is the belief of a shaman entering into the body of a deer (as in Ravan assuming the form of Manscha in the Ramayana) and we find similar palaeolithic representations such as the shaman with antlers in the Trois Freres Cave (Central Masnf France) during Aurignacian period(30,000 BC). In a celtic artifact the Gundestrup Cauldron we find the combination in a bronze vessel of the stag, an antlered Shaman holding a double-headed snake in one hand a snake with a fenelled neck on the other and a pair of dogs at play.

Crocodile

The crocodile is a sacred animal for tribal women worldwide. In Madagascar there is a sacred lake full of crocodiles worshipped by local women to which meat is offered. The people believe that they are descendants of these vicious reptiles, and men is on the family tree as a descendant of the oldest animal of the world going back some 300 million years. The possible blood link between crocodiles and man cannot be ruled out. The lizard bird Archaeopteryx was descended from the crocodile. In the river valleys of India such as the Damodar the crocodile is considered a sacred ancestor animal.



The 3feet 8” inches ivory handle of the knife of Jebel-el-Arak in which under the standard of a hound Set defeated Osiris (Louvre Museum, Paris)

The invasion of northern Egypt believed to be Osiris under the flag of an Asian hound and Sets defeat of the Anu or Hametic peoples is marked by the belief in the significance of the moon eclipse marked also in India as Amasya after Deepavali. The Egyptians sacrificed a pig on this night and out villages in Hazaribagh do the same. The moon is believed to have been devoured by the black boar. Set the handle of the knife of Jebel-el-Arak (now in the Museum Louvre, Paris) been in high relief motifs strikingly similar to our Sohrai painting. The dogs depicted in high relief are the Santal Hound of Jharkhand and Gordon Childe observed in his work *New Light on the Most Ancient East*, page 122.

Wild Buffalo-Its Significance in Sumer and India

The water buffalo is native to India, and was never endemic to Mesopotamia where its presence is first noted during the latter third of the reign of Sargon the Great of Akkad (2334-2279 B.C.). Sargon himself says that the boats of the Meluhha (Malha) or fishing people from India came to Akkad bringing with them gifts which included the Indian Water Buffalo (*Babulus bubalis*) which was a new, and therefore highly prized animal for the Sumerian. According to cuneiform texts in Sumeria water buffalo were kept by the Sumerians in special parks and enclosures, worshipped and used as highly prized sacrificial animals in Sargon's time. The animal is commonly featured in Sumerian relief carvings in so called "contest" motifs which represent pairs of buffalos attacking each other. Only after Sargon's time (2279 BC) is the Buffalo in Sumeria replaced by the Bull and the appearance of a Goddess prototype of goddess Durga as destroyer of the Buffalo or as her name implies Mahesh-Asura-Mardini (slayer of Mahesh (Bull) Asura (enemy)). The Assyrian or Aryan brought bull worship to India only in the later phase of Indian civilization (i.e. after 2279 B.C.). Earlier in the Indus the animal worshipped was the water Buffalo as seen from the famous seals, but we also for this reason have a perfect evidence of dating when the earlier Buffalo cult of Mohenjodaro would be replaced by the Bull Cult. One of the early manifestations of the Bull cult appears in India in the vehicle (symbol or *Vimana*) of the first Jain Tirthankara Lord Rishabhdeva who was born at Ayodhya near Benares. From here the Bull entered the Brahminical pantheon. The Rig Veda is also an evidence to the earlier buffalo cult, by not specifically mentioning Bulls and referring to cows for milk only, and horses (long-maned steeds Hym XVI) whose sacrifice was personified in the great *Aswamedha*. The Vedic seals personify the Bull after it became established in the sacrificial hierarchy but we will recall the 3 faced An wearing buffalo horns who is depicted in the famous seal from Mohenjodaro who was the supreme god of Indus Valley. In the four *lancanas* (vehicle) of the Proto-Indian tribes surrounding this seated Yogic figure are an elephant, a tiger, a buffalo, and a rhinoceros. An was the god of sky (Radau, Sumerian Hymns and prayers to god Nin-Ib, p.14-38; Jean La Religion Sumerian, pp.32-41). His hieroglyph figure was the stick figure of a man (sometimes with a head tassel). His "Flowering Trident" in the seal is comprised of Buffalo horns and crown.

Thus we find the first animal deity of the Indus Valley was the Buffalo, not the Bull. Even today the Buffalo in India represents Shhiva the forest god and Tribal deity. The Buffalo is therefore to be re-assessed in the religio-cultural pantheon of India in the Light of Brahminism and the whole concept of Mahesh the Buffalo being an *Asura*. Which is killed by Durga who is a Brahminical deity.

Chakras in the Kurmi Sohrai

In the Sohrai painting of the Kurmis in Bhelwara and Bishungarh block area generally, the Lotus Chakra will be found to be common. Now Chakra means which in Sanskrit and Hindi, the term describing a nerve plexus in the body in Yoga. The main Chakra is the 4 petaled Muladhara charka which is meaning mula= root, dhara= line, And in the Persian text it has been inistallently plaud below the heart, whereas in the Indian texts it is situated at the seat of the spine between genitals and Anus and having four petals and not six as stated in the Persian Text (Shams-al-asvat of Ras Baras). The Chakra celebrating Shiva is having 12 petals and is located in the heart.



Muldhara Chakra

From the above we can see the lotus in Sohrai is not simply a floral decoration but a deeply significant Tantric symbol. Above the meeting of the eyebrows is the Manas Chakra with six petals which is the common one in the Kurmi Sohrai and under it just between the eyebrows is the Ajana Chakra or charka of command. Above the Manas Chakra is the Soma or Mind Chakra. All the symbolic lotuses in the tantric sequence of Chakras are found in the Kurmi Sohrai of Bhelwara. It is inconceivable that so simple a people as the village Kurmi should know anything about these esoteric chakras which only goes to show that these are inherited traditions of antiquity unknown to them for their deeper meanings.

Links with Egypt and Sumeria

There are other mysterious connections. The ancient Hamitic significance of Osyris and the moonless night which belief was the moon was devoured by the black boar Set is somehow found here and a boar is sacrificed to Osiris. The Syrean invasion of Egypt carved in deep relief with hunting dogs which appears in the Ganju Sohrai art in almost exact replica.

We note striking parallels between the art of the Sumerians in the Symbal of the Eagle and snake found in the Northern Territory of Australia which linguists have given the Phonetic value *Baaz*. The common significance of snakes in Indian art and the hawk Garuda is common in Indian and entwined snakes are very common religious symbol in Sumer as well as South India and also found in the Sohrai art of Hazaribagh where the Munda tradition of the Lorbung or Dhaman the rainbow snake parallel the Australian tradition of Dhandian and Borlung which are rainbow snakes. These common traditions are important when understanding the long tradition of protoaustraloid migrations. In India the dancing snakes are a common motif representing the mating dance of the Dhaman in the summer month. The significance of the snake may have traveled to Egypt where it is found in the Uraem of Pharaoh. There is a similar connection with the dung beetle.

Buddhist Traditions

The symbols used in Sohrai painting employ all the sacred symbols used in Buddhist worship which is not surprising since this was the area of Lord Buddha's ministry. We know the tribals of ancient India were the Buddha's disciples as clearly seen from the people in the frescos of Bagh and Ajanta, dark-skinned men and women going back to 200 BC. The eight auspicious signs (golden wheels, victory banner or Jhanki, jeweled umbrella (chatra), Shrivasta, Lotus, Vase, golden fish and Right whorled couch) are all here. The seven royal signs of Buddhism- Wheel, Jewel, Queen, Minister, Labyrinth, Elephant, General and horse, are also found in recognizable form even after passing of non-Buddhist millennia! The eight sacred substances- auspicious in consecration ceremonies- mirror, ghorocana, bowl of curd, durva or dhoob grass, wood apple, (S. anacardium – Soso to Birhor) the Saffron or vermilion spots or Tikka essential for socialization of the art in 3-4 spots; righted-whorled couch. All are essential manifestations in the Sohrai art.

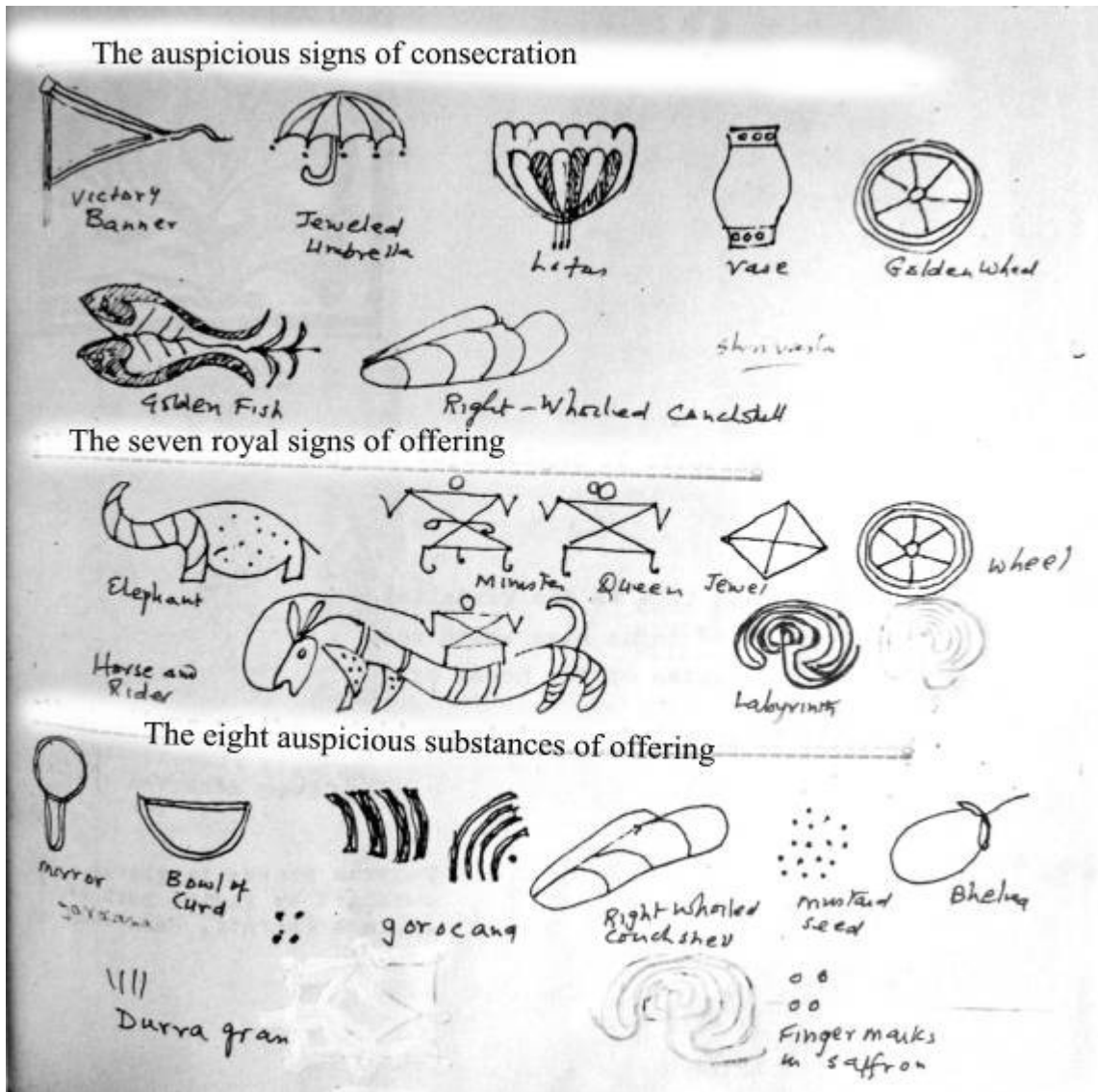
Further, and perhaps the greatest discovery of all- the anthropomorphic tree and plant forms represent Lord Buddha himself as Mahadeva as he has been to the tribals of the Jharkhand region, a little known fact. The lotuses of Chakra significance discussed earlier are now seen as bodily marks or attributes of Mahadeva.



Lord Buddha in Meditation as in a Khovar painting by Jasodha Devi

The ancient tradition still existing in the villages of the Hazaribagh plateau and its environs that the Buddha passed through this land lends credence to what I have written. The place name Itkhor is by tradition as the place where his mother's sister lost touch with him exclaiming "Iti Khoi"! meaning "here have I lost him". From Itkhor the Lord walked down the Mohani river to Bodhgaya which was in those days the village of Senani. The lotus in the Sohrai art are Tantric Chakras which could not be understood sufficiently until now for their real significance. The pipal tree is the symbol of Lord, its leaf which is synonymous with his name is symbol of the

mother goddess in the mudden household shrines in every village home and the shiper itself in a physical manifestation of the leaf's form. In a thousand ways the Buddha has been depicted through this tree and its leaf going back to before his birth in earlier incarnations in Harappa and Mehenjo Daro where the sacred connections appear and Mahadeva appears as the spirit of the Tree as where the spirit of the Pipal tree is depicted in a seal of the human form from Indus Valley.



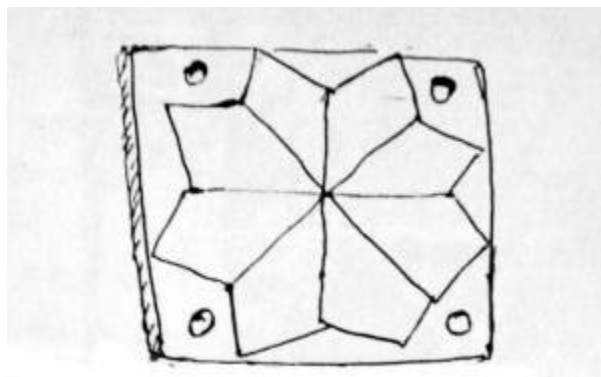
Buddhist sacred motifs

The Lord came as a Jogi or begging monk into the world of the tribals and he made the forest his temple and adopted the lifestyle of the tribals and ate their simple food and here preached his religion of compassion. The word Chaitya or worship hall means Sacred Grove. The Bhikkhu with the begging bowl and dust of the village road coloured saffron robe so came the Sakyamuni to Jharkhand, one who respected the sacred groves of the tribals and consecrated the earth with Bhumi Puja which is immortalized in the eternal Bhumi Sparsha Mudra (Earth touching mudra) which he immortalized. Throughout the Hazaribagh district the remains of Buddhist stupas,

viharas, ponds, caves for meditation, and innumerable stone images of the Buddha have been found and the remains of Buddhist architecture cover the district. It was thus with great happiness I gave to the local Vinoba Bhave University the stone relief sandstone of Marwateri Sitagarha for the University's monogram and a lasting tribute to Buddhism in the heart of academic learning in Hazaribagh. The lotus and the elephant, so deeply ingrained in the epigraphy of Buddhism are the premier symbols of the Sohrai painting of Hazaribagh.

Sitagarha Buddhist Site

Sitagarha in Hazaribagh is an ancient Buddhist site I discovered in 1992 in which the remains of stupas, viharas and ponds have been found along with the votive stupas with images of the Buddha and a large seated figure found near the built up mound and remains of buildings like engraved and carved lintels from the Gupta period many in wells, and a field of over an acre on which the village stood filled with the tile and brick remains. To one side is a pond and remains of a Stupa nearby to another the remains of Asur furnaces near which painted grey ware pottery and other ancient pottery of Buddhist period such as polished and black and red ware has been found. This is an ancient altar of stone in the sacred grove of Saal trees in which some kind of ceremonies was constructed. The old road from Tamlate passes directly below the hill beside the stone face of Mahadeva I have earlier described where on Buddha Purnima the curds are offered by the villages. The floral motifs found in the stone objects such as blocks, pillars, lintels, capitals, are similar to those painted in Sohrai village paintings. In the hills above this basin of Marwateri in the east are the caves of the monks. A stream from the hill runs down to the pond known as Raja-Bandh. The Sitagarha complex ten kilometers from Hazaribagh is a picturesque spot situated in the very heart of the upper watershed of the river Konar. The source of this river in Kusumbha south of the town of Hazaribagh is about ten kilometers away. The lotus grows in the tanks of the villages here and the migrating herds of elephants trumpet in the forest, a place so closely associated with the life and work of Lord Buddha here left to us by posterity.



Astadala or Eight petaled Lotus from a stone block excavated in the Sitagarha Buddhist site in Hazaribagh on left and on right in a Kurmi Sohrai contemporary wall painting from Bhelwara village to show the continuity of sacred tradition

Recently I had found a statue of Tara in black stone in Dato, the head piece having an inscription in Pali, holding a lotus in her left hand. Another Buddhist symbol of importance is the date palm tree under which some believe the Lord attained Nirvana setting on a seat of Kusa grass and facing the east. This is remembered when fronds of grass are placed in a clay-dung cone at the

head of the welcome aripans leading to the cattle sheds of the village houses on the Sohrai day after Deepavali. The propitiation of cattle on this day is all across India and in Kashma Saffron (Zafran) (*Crocus sativin*) was used to garland the cattle. In China its name is Yu-Chin and the ceremony was noted by Huen Tsang in his Travels in India (New Delhi, 1996, Motilal Banarseddas Publications, page 263). The Buddha was traditionally represented by the lotus within the sub-continent and it was only much after his time his form appeared in Hellenic influenced sculptures in Bactria which obviously influenced Emperor Ashoka.

Sacred marks of the Buddha

The Shilpa Shastra was prominent during the Gupta period 320-350 AD and thirty-two principal marks or Laxmanas have been drawn from earlier tribal sources found in the rock paintings and bonowing from this tradition Buddha kept alive the meaning of their spiritual leader from India to China

*Bulu Imam
3rd November, 2014
Jason's 39th Birthday*