



Establishing an Honorary Identity of Dalit and Tribes People Through Art and Cultural Practice and as Weapon for Liberation

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Abstract:

Dalit, Adivasi and tribal people struggle for their identity and recognition. Dalit and tribal literature creating an awareness of this inequality, always try to provide an honorary identity of their community. Besides, art and cultural practice refigures existing relations of exploitation generating new meanings, identities and connections. Visual art, music, dance forms, artefacts decontextualizes Dalit communities from former relationships of exploitation and caste or gender subordination. And all these artistic representations connect to recognition. As 'art' these performances disrupt the nexus of social ties and ritual structures producing new meanings. The art of the Dalit or Adivasi, as well as tribal art, becomes a realm of significance. This research project will focus on the art and cultural tradition of Dalit and tribal communities of West Bengal specifically Paschim Medinipur and Bankura districts. In addition, it will purpose to create an identical framework for tribal artisans. This study based on field survey on particular two villages Naya (Paschim Medinipur) and Bikna (Bankura).

Key Words: Art, Dalit, Tribal, Identity, Patachitra, Dhokra.

Introduction:

The tribal population in West Bengal stood at 5.29 million during the 2011 census calculating about 5.8% of the total population. The most concentrated tribal population is found in the district of West Medinipur, Bankura and Purulia. For this research paper data is collected through ethnographic research method. From primary and secondary sources data were collected. Close observation, field notes, interviews helped to gather primary data. Secondary data were collected from research journal paper and internet sources. A number of questions are asked about the life of Dalit communities. Etymologically the term 'Dalit' means 'oppressed', 'suppressed', 'crushed' or 'broken to pieces'. In India this term mostly used for ethnic groups that have been kept depressed by subjecting them to untouchability. Harijans and neo-Buddhists are not only Dalits but also Adivasi, landless farm-laborer's, workers, the suffering masses, and nomadic and criminal tribes are involved in this communities. Dalits as untouchables are victims of social, economic and cultural inequality. Exploring the degradation, sorrows, tribulations and poverty of Dalits, the Dalit literature, art and artefacts reject the unequal order, demanding equality, fraternity, liberty and justice.

Patachitra of Naya Village:

Art is the face of abstract ideas. Art has a special place in India for raising up with increasing awareness and becoming the voice of the voiceless, notably the marginalized tribal population. Naya, a village of Paschim Medinipur district (Block Pingla) comprise suffering masses of thirty-six families are known as Patha artist. The villagers of Naya skilled in the production of painted scrolls or Patachitra depicting myths, folk and current events accompanying with narrative songs. They make a living by selling Patua-craft. Their artistic touch creates exquisite umbrellas, kettles, hand fans, and other vital home items. In addition to their agricultural work, which is a seasonal employment, they spend the entire year crafting Patua crafts. Naya's patuas now create rectangular and square-shaped artworks in a variety of sizes. Very few of them continue to produce the customary 20-foot scrolls. Sheets of medium-weight white paper are used to make the scrolls. First, they make an outline of the plot and its characters using a light pencil. The people and ground are then filled up by brushing on color in areas. Fruits, flowers, vegetables, leaves, and mud are used to create natural color. Saffron is used to extract red, Aparajita is used to extract blue, beans are used to extract green, turmeric is used to extract yellow, and Kusum mati for white. After the colour has dried, the black geometric patterns and flowing lines are created by painting with black paint. After most of the single panels have been painted, the segments of paper are usually sewed together. The complete paper scroll is then bonded to a piece of repurposed sari patterned fabric. This makes the scroll fairly sturdy and allows it to survive repeated rolling and unrolling. The Patua artists' stories and paintings continue to be based on themes from sacred Hindu or Muslim scriptures from history, mythology, and epics. Epics like Rama's pursuit for Sita or Lord Shiva's marriage to Goddess Parvati, Manasa Mangala, Behula-Lakhindar are examples. Now, drawings addressing social issues, literacy, health, and the environment, such as tree conservation, female infanticide, child trafficking, and AIDS awareness, may be included on the scrolls. The artists have begun selecting themes from current events ranging from Indian historical epics to global affairs such as the 9/11 attacks, the French Revolution, the Hiroshima bombing, Mother Teresa's life, the World Trade Center tragedy, the Indian Ocean Tsunami, the Pulwama attack on 14 February 2019, the search for Osama Bin Laden, and the 2012 Delhi Rape Scandal. They also reflect political issues such as land reorganization and family planning. Globalization has given rise to a slew of new topics. The power of symbolic reversal, re-mythologizing, and performatively reinterpreting rituals that historically stood for and performed subjugation within village caste structures is the foundation of such performances. The most interesting fact that while we visited this place, we did not identify in what caste they belong to. They only bear an identity of artist by using 'Chitrakar' as their surname which literally means picture makers. Thus, performing art has an important role in Dalit activism. These people are driving local development through 'Art for Livelihood.' The patuas now paint on a variety of surfaces such as fabric, clay, and ceramics. The patuas have also established a painter's cooperative, 'Chitrataru', with the help of the NGO 'banglanatak dot com', which has helped their work find new markets and audiences. Patuas from Naya have found a home in prestigious art exhibitions all around the world as a result of this campaign. The President's Award has been given to a number of patuas from the village. Robin Chitrakar, the village's only graduate and Anwar, who in 2006 received the President's award. They've also taken part in exhibitions, cultural exchange programs, and festivals in the United States, Germany, Australia, France, the United Kingdom, Sweden, China, and India. Naya is now often visited by art collectors and fans from all over the world, as a result of their work's great renown. Jamuna Devi, an illiterate woman from Bihar's Madhubani district who was the first Dalit woman to start commercialized painting, rightly asserts that "It [art, paintings] began with the basic motive of generating income and as aesthetic pleasure, both of which were denied to them. At very small scale, they sought ... to overcome past patterns of discrimination and structural inequalities. This step paved way for contemporary art form, a stepping stone towards ensuring Dalit inclusion in political society". Thus, through visual depictions, art has acted as a new agency for resistance, advocating an attitude of logic and liberation.

Dhokra Art of Bikna Village:

Another form of art holds a unique space that has served a new agency of development of tribal artisans is Dhokra art. The Dhokra is a beautiful form of tribal art that highlights the artistic talent of tribal craftsmen. The system of metal casting is used in Dhokra art which is considered to be the oldest form of metal casting and technically it is known as 'cire perdue'. Bikna, village of Bankura district of West Bengal is the famous place of Dhokra majestic art. Around 150 years ago a group of craftspeople at that time migrated from Chotonagpur region and settled to Rampur beside Bankura. Over the time Bikna has become a hub of Dhokra artists and their colony is known as Shilpadanga. It was Yudha Babu who named this colony 'Shilpadanga'. The Bengali word Shilpa means 'art' and 'Danga' means 'land'. Thus, art plays an important role to create an honorary identity of this locality. Art expands the notion of we, where individual caste identity is invalid. Nearly 163 craftspeople including women in 58 families are associated with this cultural tradition. Their community known as 'Karmakar' which means metal workers. This community created by arts and culture is potentially a great source of inspiration for tribal and Dalit people. The craftsmen in Bikna are organised under Bankura Bikna Hastajata Dhokra Kutir Shilpa Kalyan Samity build up in 2013. The main focus of the Samity is marketplace linkage for the artisans and it's been efficaciously doing so. The Samity organizes the yearly festival of the artists "Dhokra Mela".

A few years ago, Dhokra art meant ornaments, idols of deities, puja equipment, elephants and horses. Basically, this was the familiar boundaries of the work of Dhokra artists. But now a lot has been added to the Dhokra industry, everything from the usual utensils to the door grill can be made of Dhokra. Clips of curtains hanging from the clothes hanger, from grill to the buttons on the girl's purses, have just entered the Dhokra. Many people are buying earrings, necklaces, hand earrings, key rings, paper weight. Interested buyers are also offering to make Dhokra grills and doors, and to wrap the art of Dhokra around the dressing table of the house and also Dhokra soap cases to enhance the beauty of the bathroom. Many are also giving Dhokra art as a gift to loved ones. In the words of Chandan Karmakar, an artist, "A meeting fair is held in Kolkata. I'm taking home furnishings and ornaments to the customers. We are hopeful of a good response there." He points out that for three years, the Dhokra industry has come out of the familiar past and started building new ones. Gradually its demand in the market increased. Many traders are coming forward and investing in the Dhokra industry. The artist also smiled as their income increased. In 1988, Yuddh Babu received the President's Award by making 'Mansa Ghat' of Dhokra, the story of Chand Sadagar. It is for his hand that Dhokra gets a different identity. After receiving the Award, Dhokar's fame spread at home and abroad.

However, art expresses cultural identity by conveying shared community values and aesthetics. The production of art as a means to forge new relationships to connect to power through works and make communication in national and international fields. In this way art and cultural practice celebrate and honor Dalit identity, or are construed as weapons for liberation. But if art is a means of forging identities, it is also implicated in the complex internal group and gender dynamics of Dalit movements in the ways that have been subject to ethnographic description.

Conclusion:

If an aesthetic consideration of art and cultural practice of Dalit is to be undertaken, it will be necessary to do so in the context of its uniqueness, inspiration, creation, role and features. This awareness will be fruitful to establish themselves, conveying a new meaning of identity. Further commercialization of these art and cultural practices create a new source of non-agricultural income as these have achieved eminence in national and international art market. Government of India and other agencies are also working and supporting the genuine artists directly by arranging various exhibition, skill-oriented trainings, organizing and inviting artists to market events and providing incentives and awards to artists for their work. Ranciere said that "Art is political and politics artistic because both are practice of contesting the historical transcendental factors that delimit the social and ascribe to individuals as a particular mode of subjectivity". As a result, art has the potential to establish equality.

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