

**THE JUXTAPOSITION OF 2D AND 3D ART IN THE PRACTICE OF SONABAI RAJWAR
(A TRIBAL ARTIST OF CHHATTISGARH, INDIA)**

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Abstract:

Sonabai Rajwar was a tribal women artist from the Indian state Chhattisgarh. She comes from Rajwar community and has a very rich tradition of art and craft. She married at the early age of 14 and settled in a joint family in Puhputra village, district Surguja, Chhattisgarh. Due to some family crisis, she again moved to a new home which was surrounded by Jungal and Jhars. She got her first child and a story begins of her artistic creation. This study reflects the various dimensions of her artistic creation and pinpoints the juxtaposition of 2D and 3D art forms in her art practice. With the help of qualitative research tools, this study explores the dynamics of her artistic output and establishes her as a key tribal artist of Chhattisgarh, India.

Keywords: Tribal Art of central India, Artistic practice of Sonabai Rajwar, 2D and 3D art, Art and Nature

1. Introduction

Chhattisgarh is rich in its cultural heritage. The state has a very unique and vibrant culture. More than 35 large and small colorful tribes are spread in this area. The rhythmic folk music, dance, drama, paintings and sculptures are a delightful experience which also provides an insight into the culture of the state. The state's most famous dance-drama is Pandavani, a musical narration from the Hindu epic Mahabharata. Raut Nacha (Folk dance of cowherds), Panthi and Sua are some other famous dance forms of the region. The state of Chhattisgarh came into existence on 1st November 2000 (Venkatesa, 2000). It was separated from the largest tribal dominated state of India, Madhya Pradesh. Chhattisgarh is full of tribal tribes in which Baiga, Birhor, Pahadi Korva, Bhunjia, Kamar, Abujhmara and Rajwar etc. are prominent.

Sonabai was born to the Rajwars community in the late 1920s and grew up in a large family in a small village in Kenapala, in the Surguja district of Chhattisgarh. They were seven brothers and sisters (Mittal, 2014). She spent most of her time playing with other children, caring for animals, and roaming the dusty streets of the village. She never had the opportunity to study at her school, and it's also the story of another girl in the Indian countryside. At the age of 14, Sonabai married a man who was almost twice as old as her who had already lost her first wife. After a while, his first wife moved to her parents' house.

Sonabai has moved to a new home in the village of Papattra, three miles from his hometown. Her new life turned out to be challenging but significant. After her marriage, Holi Ram (husband) never allowed her to visit her parents and relatives. Ten years have passed since her life was completely devoted to household chores. After years of humiliation, he gave birth to his son, Darogaram, in 1953. That same year, her husband decided to move to his own new home, which became a major motivator for her creative and artistic life. There were two factors that immediately prompted her to explore their creativity faculties which were her Child and New Home.

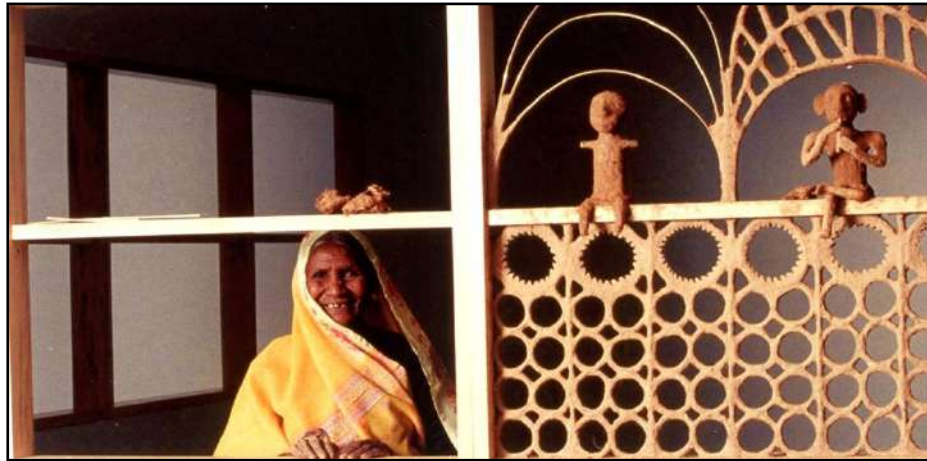


Figure1, Sonabai's Untitled 1999, installed for 'How We Live', Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane

Sonabai decided to find new meaning in her life and began playing with clay (fig. 1). She first started making toys for her son, and she slowly transitioned to human figures, gods, birds and animals. For days and months, she considered different patterns and shapes, tried minerals, vegetables, herbs, and spices, chewed chopsticks to make colors, and made brushes. One of the most spectacular pieces in her repertoire is the wall mural full from opaque and transparent spaces (fig. 2). The use of Jallis (lattices) in royal architecture is obvious, but Sonabai has evolved it in a certain manner. She made her own grid from bamboo sticks and clay and attached colorful sculptures to them. The scenes on the walls range from dancing women to flute-blowing Krishna, birds perching on branches, and hanging monkeys. Three-dimensional sculpture has become her companion. The juxtaposition of transparent and opaque space along with 2D and 3D art forms had made her artistic output significantly.



Fig. 2, Jallies by Sonabai Rajwar. Photograph by Jyoti Bhatt

2. Methodology of the Study

Sonabai is a giant in the art world of Chhattisgarh. The investigator personally visited the village of artist Sonabai and worked with tribal artists. Therefore, the method of introspection, self-observational method was used to understand and interpret the life of the artist Sonabai. Content analysis research tools were used to evaluate and interpret the artwork she performed.

3. Realizations of Socio-Cultural Space

The artist's thought and emotional situations inspire him/her to express vision according to his/her abilities. That is why the works of art created by the artist reflect his personality and ambition (Swaminathan, 1992). Sonabai's art is also part of her individual struggle against the existing patriarchal structure and its struggle to prioritize his goals in the existing universe (Khan, 2019). The Chhattisgarh tribal community has an isolated tradition. When a mother gives birth to a child in a tribal community, there is a ritual in which she is isolated from her family for a month. A woman spent all her time with her child. It's a kind of cognitive process. As women grow older, the widow of traditional Indian society also becomes isolated from society. If a woman does not follow social customs, she also urged her to be isolated from certain activities. Therefore, there are several reasons why women face life isolation for a variety of socio-cultural reasons. Isolation can affect the process of self-realization and self-development, and Sonabai has demonstrated this phenomenon in a creative manner. She began with clay assimilating local material and transformed it into creative expressions.



Fig. 3, Traditional Rajwar home in which murals is made. Surguja, Chhattisgarh.

4. Expansion of 2D and 3D Spaces

A painting that is structurally limited to length and breadth dimensions is called 2D art. This includes drawings, photographs, posters and wall murals etc. But 3D art forms include depth as an important property which one can realize in the architectural or sculptural creation. Sonabai's artwork includes both dimensions for her artistic output (fig. 3). The architecture of Rajwar houses is different from that of other rural areas of North India. This architecture consists of walls and roofs, doors and windows. The roof is covered with terracotta tiles. At that time, the Surguja district was full of jungle and jars, and animals were running around the house, so the house was sealed from all sides to accommodate the door. But when someone enters the house, they realize a huge open space in the middle of the house and can put a porch in front of each room. Each porch is built with wooden pillars.

It was 1960s when the Sonabai and Holiram Rajwar were building their own new house for themselves. It was a new place far from the old existing home and surrounded from Jungal and Jhar (natural habitat). Sonabai was excited and has a thrill to decorate the home in a beautiful manner. Apart from this she has a new responsibility of her child Darogaram. So when his husband left the home for agricultural work, she becomes engaged to decorate the interior of the home. She has created animals, tress, God and Goddess, flora and fauna, simplified decorative patterns on the wall (fig. 3, 4). During this, she has also made some toys of animals from clay for her boy to engage him. At that time, she was preparing two dimensional mural painting on the wall and toy sculptures. One day his husband hanged some agricultural instrument on the mural wall and she awakened with an idea of relief mural on the wall juxtaposing 2D and 3D art-forms. She tried to

assembled sculpture of monkey in a mural, monkey was playing in the tree and a new form of mural art came in existence. Her mural art is the mixture of 2d and 3d images juxtaposed with simplified geometrical patterns (fig.2, 3). She has manifested her imagination on the wall; created a real world which was surrounded nearby her. It was the strength of that geographical location and cultural ethos of the tribal communities.

The architectural structure/space has provides a space to Sonabai; began to build a grid from pillar to pillar in an attempt to create a beautiful space. When the sunlight and the light of the lamps are counteracted by Jallis (lattices), a wonderful shadow is created on the walls and floor. This act resulted in her building a simple geometric pattern (Fig. 2). It is her important contribution to the architecture of the Surguja family. The descriptive and sophisticated Jallis created by Sonabai is unimaginable.



Figure 4. Making Process of Jalis and Sculptures, Retrieved from Stephen P. Huyler (1999).

Sonabai has created many life-size Jalis, about seven feet high and eight feet wide. She had also made many such panels in his house; a long and laborious process. The structure is first prepared by tying bamboo poles and thin, flexible twigs of a tree with a thin rope. To make a circular lattice, each match stick has to be tied in a circle. For this it is necessary to pre-conceive the entire lattice. This is not an ordinary task, it requires extraordinary talent (Jain, 2017). There is a lot of difference between the Jallis that Sonabai made in her house and those she made in other places. The jaalis made at other places are mostly dull and forged, they show the superiority of work efficiency and skill, but they do not have the vibrancy of life. But the jaalis that he has made in his house are like music of life. Every wall has its fascination for different types of bird figures. The lifelike sculpture of various sparrows that he created is unique. Perhaps the desire to fly in the open sky like a free bird was hidden somewhere deep in his mind.

The art of Sona Bai Rajwar is a wonderful fusion of architecture, painting and sculpture (Jain, 2000). In her view, the architecture of the house and the sculpture/painting made for its decoration are complementary to each other. She looked the architectural space with aesthetical perspective and created wonderful artworks. She was not made any of artworks randomly in the house. She has imagined it about the particular place before creating art (Jagatramka, Prasad, 2022). That is, a thoughtfully designed designs to suit a thoughtful place. For her, the entire house was her artwork; she looked at it in its entirety. That is, the shapes made for the house and its decoration are no different, they are complementary parts of each other. Their beauty and existence are interdependent. The interrelations of various arts like architecture, sculpture and painting can be understood by looking at Sonabai's work. Sonabai's understanding of the rhythm and beauty inherent in the designs was so deep expressive.

5. Conclusion

Sonabai was not discovered by the rest of the world until 1983, and her entire existence was irreversibly transformed in that stretch. Sonabai's region was being toured by five scouts from the Bharat Bhavan, a newly built museum in Bhopal that displayed folk art and contemporary art side by side. They photographed her artworks and, despite her protests, took some of her sculptures to their museum during their two-hour stay at her home. She was offered a solo show six months later. The world of Sonabai's art seems smooth and easy to see from the outside, but it is puzzling of socio-cultural echoes and it is an example of the creative human mind and soul. These paintings are voluntary and spontaneous act, like Sant Kabir. She creates artwork in parallel with nature, where the impression of Sonabai is clearly visible in the murals. She has designed and executed wonderful lattices (Jallis) are an amazing combination of design skills, where on the one hand geometric patterns are synced in a musical pattern, while there is a wonderful combination of two and three-dimensional art forms. The art made by her are not only a convention of tradition, but a wonderful co-ordination of individual skills and experiences also. Although tribal artwork is seen as a group work, there are some names that have given specific meaning to his/her community. Sonaibai Rajwar is one of them.

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