

Tattoo As A Means Of Communication Among Baiga Tribe

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Abstract

Human life can be summarized as an ongoing search for self-identity. Individual identity is essential for incorporation in peer groups because human beings are social animals and in order to survive, we need to be part of a bigger society. For these reasons, human cultures have created visual markers that belong to these marked bodies since prehistoric times that tell stories of the self and of communities. Maybe this search for visual markers was the reason why people began scarring, piercing and tattooing their bodies first. The tattooing culture extended its function to suit a broad variety of purposes as civilizations became more complicated and varied. Tattooing transcended from being solely semantic to serving spiritual and aesthetic aims. Tattoos have been used over time as markers that denote passage rites, social rank symbols and birth status, spiritual and religious iconography, battle and hunting achievement insignia, fertility display and sexual virility, love and luck protective talismans, and much more. However, everything about tattooing was not related to significance or creativity. Tattooing was also used violently as a form of marking possession to mark criminals, slaves, outcasts, and minorities. This paper will highlight the use, importance, belief about the tattooing among the Baiga tribe. It will focus on how Tattoo plays a role of communication among Baiga's.

Keywords: Tattoos, tribal, beliefs, communication, civilizations

Introduction

Communication meaning and Tattoo as Communication

Communication is not limited to verbal interpersonal and mass media methods. Rather it includes everything that helps in sharing, imparting or conveying any message, emotions, feelings, thoughts or expressions. Communication is inherent part of all living beings and vital component of social interaction and social organization. We communicate through plenty of symbols, and tattoo is one among them. If we go through modern classification tattoo falls in traditional folk media which includes all expressions, traditions, performances and communication practices alive and transferred orally or through traditional practices to generations. Tattoo is part of primitive practice of different social and ethnic groups across the globe. 'Tattoo is part of a series of ritual practices carried out by different social groups which can be found in communities across all five continents (Walzer & Sanjurjo, 2016).' Tattoos have been in practice since the period of dominance of tribal culture and carried forward to traditional societies as reflection and symbol of collective identity, and sacred practices. Even in modern world tattoos are emerged as expression of erotic and aesthetic component, and exiting desires.

Besides used as fashion statement by urban population, tattoos are still used as ritualistic practices among numerous tribal and rural communities of our country. Out of these communities Baiga tribe, a primitive tribal group of central India, have established practice of tattooing which reflects their ritualistic, religious and social significance. Tattoos are integral and ornamental part for Baiga women as 'the women decorate their bodies with tattoo marks. Long strips of similar lines are made on the face, particularly on the fore head (Babu & Panda, 2016).' Baiga female are renowned for their Tattooing (Godna) art. This is part and parcel of their culture. The symbol instils among females a feeling of pride. Without their Godna, the females feel imperfect. Tattoo is one of the importance means of Baiga's communication system.

Objective of the Study

1. To know the importance of tattoo as means of communication among tribes

2. To analyse the practice, importance and adaption of taboo tradition through generations among Baiga
3. To explain the nature and inspiration behind tattooing among Baiga

About Baiga tribe

Baiga's are mainly found in the state of Madhya Pradesh in central India and in lower numbers in Uttar Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and neighbouring states of Jharkhand. This tribe inhabits the thick hilly forests in Shahdol, Bilaspur, Rajnandgaon, Mandla and Balaghat districts in the eastern portion of the Satpuras. As per the Madhya Pradesh government data there are in total 1,31,425 Baiga tribe in Madhya Pradesh living among 1143 villages and 22 blocks of 6 districts (Mandla, Shahdol, Dindori, Umarिया, Anuppur, Balaghat (Baihar)) (source: <http://www.mp.gov.in/en/web/tribal/primitivetribe>).

Baiga have sub-castes from Narotia, Bijhar, Nahar, Rai Bhain, Bharotiya and Kadh Bhaina. Baiga don't plow the ground because they say scratching the breast of their mother would be a sin, and they could never ask their mother to produce food from the same patch of earth again and again: she would be weakened. The Baiga exercise moving culture, known as 'Bewar' or 'Dahiya'. It is thought that the ancestors of the Baiga spoke an Austroasian language, but there is no trace remaining of it now. Some Baiga and the social experts have in the past mentioned 'Baigani' as their mother tongue: Baigani is now recognized as a variety of Gondi-influenced Chhattisgarhi.

Most Baiga interact with strangers in Hindi, and some of them do not speak the same language. Still those living in the interior or most backward places somewhere in jungles are still not able to speak Hindi. They find uncomfortable when they visit to the mainstream society because both do not understand each other. Tattooing is constituent part of their lifestyle. Baiga tribe lives in the thick hilly forests in the eastern portion of the Satpuras, in the districts of Balaghat, Mandla, Rajnandgaon, Shahdol and Bilaspur. Baiga tribe is thought to be an offshoot of the Chhota Nagpur's Bhuiya tribe.

A distinctive characteristic of the Baiga tribe is that their females are known on almost all areas of their body for sporting Tattoos of different types. The females who work as Tattoo artists belong to Madhya Pradesh's are known as different names such as Badni, Dewar and

Ojha and commonly called 'Godharins'. They are highly familiar with the multiple kinds of Tattoos that distinct tribes prefer. Traditionally mother pass on this (Tattoo making) knowledge to their children. Like this the tradition of Tattooing passes from one generation to other but now in the digital world and coming up of the tribe to the mainstream of the society these traditions are missing. Now Tattoo has become a symbol of fashion and choice.

Baiga cuisine comprises largely of coarse grains such as Kutki and Kodo millet with very little flour involved. Pej is one of the Baiga's staple foods, it is a drink produced from boiling rice water or ground macca. They get and hunt for food from the forest, including many fruits and vegetables to add their diet. They hunt especially tiny mammals and fish. Since the 1960s it is said that Baiga have been the victims of forced evictions by the Indian authorities. The social thinkers and researchers write that in an attempt to protect the tiger populations and in the name of conservation of forests tribes have been forced to leave the forests.

Significance of the Tattoo / Godna

It is very crucial to understand what is Tattoo before beginning the meaning of Tattoo. Tattoo is a visual picture that is intended on the body of any figure. The Baiga's are renowned for the traditional decoration of their bodies. The Tattoo artist is known as "Badnin", who makes Tattoo design. According to custom, the female who does this Tattoo is provided some turmeric, salt, chili, few other products, and a rupee wrapped in mahlol leaves, all put in a Supa. Representing their identity in the same group is a sign of communication between the groups. Various tribes or groups have distinct Tattoo making styles and signs. In the words of Theo Haiman "Communication implies the process of transferring data and knowledge from one individual to another". These Tattoo marks, they (Baiga) think, are the only things that are certain to go with them till the grave and beyond. The first Tattoo is usually implemented at the age of nine or ten on the girl's forehead, without which a female is not deemed to be part of the Baiga tribe. More gets added as the girl grows up on other areas of the body. The Chhati Godai (Breast Tattoo) is the woman's last Godna on the woman's chest after giving birth to a child.

Tattoo as a means of communication implies exchanging information by means of signs, symbols, letters or any other means. It can be verbal and non-verbal communication. The Baiga community utilizes non-verbal forms of interaction through Tattoo communication. This art will come under the visual communication mode that is found on the

Baiga's body. It reflects their method of communication, both cultural and traditional. Signs and symbols have been the only way of communication between the tribal individuals and the other parts of society since previous days. They still use this mode of communication to represent their community in the age of technology, i.e. in the 21st century. Tattoo is an essential mode of communication in the community to be identified.

The Tattoo communication art on the Baiga's body represents the person's identity in that group. This communication mode will assist them to keep their community's purity. They can readily recognize the other community or group's individuals. This mode of communication in the female of the Baiga tribe is more prevalent. It has been seen that the girls begin to spot Tattoo on their body after the age of eight or nine, which has different identification. It makes a sense of togetherness to a specific group.

Tattooing has different meanings. It has a decorative significance, and because of its various health advantages, the females also go into such a painful beautification process. Tattooing is believed by the society to overcome females from gas associated issues. They also think they are resistant to modifications in weather. Poisonous substances will have no impact on their body. They think the Tattoo is going to make them realize the god. It will bring rain and prepare them during childbirth for labor pain as well. It's the only way to embellish their body with the natural method and it's a continuous embellishment. They think in daily beautification there is wastage of time. Even after death, this continuous ornamentation will go with them. It cannot be robbed, nor can it be removed from them. Another reason for spotting Tattoos is because they believe that if they fail to do so, they will be found after their death with an enormous ploughing tool. The various kinds of Tattoo's also function as a sign of identification distinguishing one tribe from the other. For example, the Oraon tribe females residing in the districts of Surguja and Raigarh get three Tattooed lines on their foreheads.

The Baiga females place these Tattoos on their bodies to make it an ornament that is their body's continuous embellishment. Because males are not very interested in these, or it can be said that they (Tattoo) are very important to females. They have no other means to make their body beautified. So they prefer on their body to have Tattoo. The natural flowers, fruits and vegetables are the colors used in the Tattoo making. Women are very pleased to

have this beauty mark on their bodies for a lifetime. As the age goes on the mark rises on their body accordingly.

The Baiga community believes they will be helped to heal many illnesses by spotting Tattoos on their skin. Because females are more interested in Tattooing, they support this faith more. It is thought that the Tattoo will heal and also discourage problems such as gas, blood associated issues and arthritis. Maintaining their energy level is a very good indication and thus the community maintains the beneficial energy through these Tattoos. It's a belief that their body won't be affected by the poisons. Because these groups do not reside in the mainstream culture, they do not have contact with the physicians and the fresh medications. It's the only way to stay away from the problems of health.

There is no random or individualistic Tattooing of Baiga. At a particular age, each part of the body is Tattooed with particular designs. It is mainly the females who are spotting Tattoos. It's vital that by the age of eight or nine a girl receives her first Tattoo. The parents discover their sacred obligation at the specific era and moment to get their daughters Tattooed. Parents think that if they purchase any decorations they (daughter) will sell or lose it or break it on the market. But they won't be allowed to sell this continuous mark on the market. After their death, the Tattoo will also remain on their body.

In the centre of forehead, a "V" mark Tattoo is labelled according to their tradition at the age of eight. Tattoo is designed as three dots, horizontal and vertical line. The 16-year-old girl receives her Tattooed on back. Different designs are produced such as rings, dots, circles, parallel, horizontal, slanting and vertical lines. Before marriage, which is mandatory for them, the girl has to get her thigh Tattooed. The whole arm and fingers will also be Tattooed later. After marriage, the girl can also get her breast Tattooed. The Baiga girl receives her whole body Tattooed by the age of 20.

There are birds like Tattoo at both eyes. This gives them a long-lashed appearance. Also discovered this sort of indications in the Bhil tribe. The Baiga tribe women have a 'V'-shaped mark in the centre of their forehead between the brow bones. Tattooing also has a wider importance. Tattooing serves to maintain togetherness among members of a specific group. It brings the community together. There are different meanings for each sign and symbol. The experts in Tattoo making are called 'Godharins'. It has a resemblance with god, nature and other supernatural powers. The Tattoos are having the symbols like dots, fish

bones, steel, peacock, basket, triangular and flies. Like this there are many such names which are used for the different symbols and their meanings are changed according to age, sex and relations. These Tattoos have also their local name which are famous in the community like Kajeri, Macchhli ki haddi, Chakmak, Dauri, Makhi, like this there are many names in their local dialects.

Belief associated with Tattoo making

The Baiga tribe is one of the groups for which Tattoos are an essential component of their lifestyle. Among the younger generation, currently Tattoos are in fashion. There is, for example, an exciting legend linked to the art of Tattooing. According to it, society was basically casteless in the ancient days. Then God chose to appoint castes one day. He gave the pen to the people who came to be called Brahmins, the Gond plough, and the Kaveat water. The Dhol he gave to the Ojha was all he had left. Then the Ojha began to live by singing songs and playing the dhol. This was not very profitable and he went home one day and discovered nothing to eat. He got furious at this and beat his wife up. The wife of the Ojha became highly angry and as a consequence gave up food and water. God was unable to see her suffering after eight days and chose to bring matters into his own hands. So he sent her. God took a black fluid out of the Sarei tree when she arrived, and marked her face with a blackdot. This has been the first Tattoo. He advised her to Tattoo all the tribes living on the mountains from now on. She could gain her living by applying this first cosmetic to the Adivasi females. Since that day, Tattooing has become extremely common among India's multiple tribes as a means of embellishing the body. The Godharins are visiting different towns and village fairs at this moment to practice their art and earn their living. Due to the likelihood of infection, Tattoos are not performed in the rainy season. The females of Baiga pay the Godharins according to their ability and the portion of the body that the Tattoo is performed on.

Process of Tattoo making

The Tattoo ink is being prepared in a rather complex way. In a ship, black til is cooked first of all. This is pressed by hand and made into horizontal rolls. Then these rolls are burned to get the ink. To give it a wealthy color, Beja wood color or tehra color is sometimes added to the ink. Fluid from the Malwan tree is used as ink in some areas. The portion of the body to

be Tattooed is washed and it draws on the predetermined model. Then the ink is drawn and dipped into three or four needles, and the skin is pierced with it. This piercing takes place throughout the design. This is quite painful and attracts blood also on that portion of the skin from which blood originates is applied Ramtila oil.

Girls often cry out with pain to get Tattooed and roundly curse the Godharins. The area is wiped with cowdung water or soap-nut water after the whole layout is covered with the needle pricks. The water from soap-nut offers a cooling impact and reduces pain. Then these same soap-nuts are strung on a string and placed around tiny children's necks. This is thought to help them cut their teeth easily and protect them from bad spirits as well. The needle marks vanish after a few weeks, but the Tattoo stays for the whole life.

Usually males are prohibited to watch any female get Tattooed. Nowadays, however, Tattooing is performed at exhibitions and weekly bazaars with the assistance of dry cell-operated machines. So in such cases, this restriction is not relevant. But in exhibitions, or by a machine, the Baiga females prevent getting Tattooed. They believe that if a man watches any woman while she gets Tattooed, he can't hunt for the sambhar deer. That's because he won't be able to find the tell-tale marks in the jungle like sambhar blood. The Baiga determine the place of sambhar to be prepared to chase it by seeing these marks.

Conclusion

Communication is universal and essential to our life for all human beings. In reality, all human activities are regulated and shaped. Dreaming, talking to someone, arguing in a debate, speaking to a public, taking part in a traditional cultural function, etc., are distinct types of communication that we engage in every day. It implies that we usually exchange our thoughts, ideas, and movements with someone else, either to fulfill our physical, emotional, or other requirements, or to do the job. The Baiga tribe is discovered in Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, and Jharkhand jungles. They are the offshoot of the Chhota Nagpur's Bhuiya tribe. The community speaks Baigani languages other than Hindi and Marathi. Tattooing is currently in fashion among the city's younger generation.

The cultural and historical importance of Tattooing is not much proof. But this can be seen among some societies as cultural and traditional values. The Baiga tribe's Godna (Tattoo) are the oldest and their shape remains unchanged to date. These Tattoos are

inscribed on the Baiga's body with needles. While getting the Tattoos place on their body areas, girls often shouted with pain. Tattoos are symbols of the unity of the community that identify them with their community. It has some ritual values, on the other side. These Tattoos are also a sign of the community's excellent health and future care. It's a sign of belief and faith. Girls at the age of eight are tattooed to traditional values for their body components.

This tradition is more common among the female of Baiga. Experts fear that the Tattooing art among the Baiga tribe will decline with the time. There are very few Godna artists remaining, it is said, and therefore the tradition loses its identity. Every Baiga woman was previously decorated with Godna, but it is much less common among the younger generation today. Mixing the community with other culture makes the tradition of Tattoos a symbol of past. The arrival of the new art of creating Tattoos also decreases its importance of natural color use. The younger generations are no longer interested in creating Tattoos and are therefore conscious of this art as their traditional values. This ignorance causes the community to lose its cultural values. It creates a feeling of belonging among a specific tribe's members. This provides them with safety and happiness. For these tribes, Tattoos are one of the means of communication, and it is also their cultural and traditional element of life.

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