

Cakapurā: A Unique Ritual-painting Tradition of India

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Abstract

Caka refers to a square – a lateral space on the ground – while *purā* means filling up. Together they identify a unique form of ritual painting, executed during the festival of *Bāndnā* all across the land of ancient Manbhum – including parts of today's West Bengal and Jharkhand. In this tradition, a specially prepared liquid pigment is dripped with all the five fingers of the hand – creating sacred designs by the village women effortlessly on their ritual-grounds. This linear emotion often gets extended upon the adjoining wall – where the same pigment is sprinkled with the fingers, along with impressions added with the palm and finger-tip. As a whole, this form of visual expression could be distinguished and identified in comparison to any other floor or wall paintings in India. It's undoubtedly one of the finest examples – all in terms of technique, style and aesthetics – representing the rich folk-tribal tradition of this country.

Keywords: *Cakapurā*, *Bāndnā*, Manbhum, *Māhāto*, Purulia, ritual, painting, tradition.

1. Introduction

India is a country of traditional art practices, antiquity of which could be traced back to c. second century BC, if not earlier.ⁱ Since then, various traditions have emerged, evolved and sustained all across the country – whose evidences are prevalent even today in majority of the rural habitations. Each of these traditions, however, are characterized by their specific cultural functions and thus identified as ritual, iconic, narrative etc.ⁱⁱ Among them, the practices of ritual art – of which *Cakapurā* is one of the most significant specimen – have always been connected to auspicious effects, as well as material or spiritual benefits.

Cakapurā as a word belongs to the regional dialect of Manbhum – one of the earliest geographical, anthropological and historical lands in eastern India. The region however is now divided politically in between the districts of Purulia, parts of Bankura and West Medinipur in the state of West Bengal, along with parts of Jharkhand and Orissa.ⁱⁱⁱ But culturally, it remains as an integral part of ancient *Rādhabhūmi*^{iv} – that lies in between the Chhota Nagpur Plateau on the west and the Ganges Delta on the east. According to the Manbhum idiom, *Caka* refers to a courtyard or a square – a lateral space on the ground – while *purā* means filling up. Together they constitute an indigenous expression that identifies a folk-tribal tradition of ritualistic painting, typical to this soil. It is indeed a significant form of *Ālpanā* – a pan Bengali vernacular known all across West Bengal and Bangladesh – which is said to be derived from Sanskrit *Ālimpan*.^v This *Ālimpan* as a whole refers to a wide range of floor-paintings – also done on wall at times – executed all over India during various rituals, occasional festivals and many other regular events (fig 1a).^{vi} It is an integral part of traditional occasions – both in folk-tribal and hieratic genre – and

an ancient way of highlighting, illuminating and honoring a piece of land or floor, where the event concerned is supposed to take place.

However, the name *Ālimpan* is much younger than the tradition itself, whose ancestry could be traced in the antiquity of *Gunḍi* or *Gunḍi-Citra* – also known as *Dhūlā-Citra*, i.e., dust-image – where dry powder of colored rice was used to draw images on ground or floor.^{vii} Similar traditions are prevalent in many parts of the country even today, while the most popular medium in Bengal has been rice-powder mixed with water. This solution usually is picked up with a piece of cotton or cloth and is applied with the middle finger by touching the ground to guide the flow of paint accordingly (fig 1b). But, it does not happen so in case of *Cakapurā*, where the painting is executed by dripping a liquid pigment with all the five fingers from a gross distance above the ground (fig 7c, d & e) and also by sprinkling the same on wall (fig 9a). Suggestion has been made that the dripping of paint has earned the tradition another colloquial name called *Jhārā*,^{viii} though it is rather frequently referred to as *Caka* – a shorter version of *Cakapurā*. Its technique, however, constitutes the most important aspect – since no other tradition of *Ālpanā* or any other form of ritualistic-painting in India has anything similar to this. Rather, in terms of technique and style, its approach is closer to the much celebrated *all over* paintings by Jackson Pollock (fig 2),^{ix} though their date of evolution, place of origin, basic purpose and final outcome were widely different.



Figure 1a. *Ālpanā* of *Pouṣa Saṁkrānti* at Bardhaman, West Bengal | Figure 1b. Popular technique of *Ālpanā* (detail)

The ancestry of *Cakapurā*, as an art form, goes far beyond the reach of Abstract Expressionism or Modernism at large, emerged in the mid-twentieth century of Euro-American culture. Although its origin has not been advocated by any textual evidences, but its relevance could easily be associated with the early folk-tribal society of Manbhum region – majorly dependant on prey, livestock and harvest. It is a predominant form of ritual painting, closely integrated with the festival of *Bāndnā* that is largely observed all across Purulia, southern Bankura, northern West Medinipur and the majority of Jharkhand. However, *Cakapurā* in particular – as a distinct form of *Bāndnā-Ālpanā* – is done mostly by the clans of *Kurmi* and *Kumhāra*, especially those with the surname of *Māhāta* or *Māhāto*.^x It is none other than their womenfolk, who habitually execute this typical form of painting once in a year with effortless skill and mastery. Without any wish to be an artist, without any formal training in art and without any exposure to anything called *avant garde* – they maintained their tradition through generations. Even during today's era of random violence, chemical-harvest, smart-phone and e-network, they perform this yearly ritual with firm belief, strong conviction and absolute submission.

2. Cakapurā of Bāndnā

The tradition of *Cakapurā* is an integral part of *Bāndnā* or *Bāndhnā* – the most important festival of Manbhum region, celebrating the role of domestic cattle and harvest in their daily life. Belonging to the Austro-Dravidian descent, the word *Bāndnā* means *Cumāna* or *Baraṇa* – i.e., the welcoming of someone special.^{xi} It is a traditional ceremony of greeting the *Garu* (cow) and *Kāḍā* (buffalo) – along with the human *Jāmāi*, i.e., daughter’s husband – and accepting them as a distinguished member of the family.^{xii} The villagers play pranks with the *Garu* and *Kāḍā* – teasing them in various ways – as it is also customary with their *Jāmāi* in the in-laws’ residence. The event, however, was derived from the ancestral culture of several indigenous clans like *Bāuḍi*, *Bhūmija*,^{xiii} *Cero*, *Koḍā*, *Kola*, *Kurmi*, *Kumhāra*, *Lodhā*, *Lohāra*, *Mudikoḍā*, *Munḍā*,^{xiv} *Orāon*, *Sāontāla*^{xv} etc.^{xvi} Even the *Āhirā* or *Ahirā* – songs of *Bāndnā* – were primarily evolved from the ancient harvest-festivals and the worship of season-deities. Later on, perhaps sometime around c. sixth century AD,^{xvii} the tradition came in touch with Brahmanism^{xviii} and was influenced by the sophistication of *Bhagavatī-vandanā*.^{xix} Thus, it came out of its tribal ancestry to take a renewed form that finally resulted into the composition of songs like *Kapilāmaṅgala*^{xx} and *Śiri-Gāi Upākhyāna*.^{xxi}



Figure 2. A *Cakapurā* artist in action

By this time, the *Māhāta* or *Māhāto* emerged as a new enlightened class,^{xxii} taking representations from various clans like *Goyālā*, *Kurmi*, *Koiri*, *Kāhāra*, *Kumhāra*, *Rājwār*, *Dhānuka*, *Munḍā*, *Cika* or *Pāna* and *Pāsi*.^{xxiii} Simultaneously, their festivals like *Bāndnā* also evolved by collating multiple traditions, collective memories, synthesized rituals and renewed contexts. Its vast panorama included the *Sāontāla* and *Munḍā* observing *Saharāya*^{xxiv} on one hand, and the *Rāḍhiya* Brahmin^{xxv} celebrating *Goyāla Pūjā* on the other. The former is the other name of *Bāndnā*, with some minor ritualistic variations; while the latter is the worship of cowshed, an integral part of *Bāndnā*

festivities.

In any case, *Bāndnā* is a yearly event, which takes place during the month of *Kārtika* in Bengali Calendar;^{xxvi} while some of the *Sāontāla* and *Munḍā* groups observe the same in *Pouṣa*.^{xxvii} However, the ritual of *Cakapurā* is connected only with the former that begins on the day of *Kālīpūjā* – i.e., the worship of goddess *Kālī* – and continues for the next four days.^{xxviii} The relation of *Bāndnā* with the day of *Kālīpūjā* or the *Tithi*^{xxix} of *Amāvasyā*^{xxx} might be traced in the ancient Tantric cult of this soil – whose practitioners, even a few centuries ago, used to worship this goddess in secrecy. Especially the *Amāvasyā* of *Kārtika* – that occurs during late-October or early-November – is still considered to be suitable for the veneration of ancestors and ghosts.

In entire Manbhum, two types of *Bāndnā* is celebrated – *Garu Bāndnā* or *Gobāndnā* and *Jāmāi Bāndnā*. The former is the welcoming of cows that happens on the third day, while the latter is the welcoming of son-in-laws that take place on the fourth. However, the festival begins with *Ghāoyā* and then continues with *Goṭhapūjā*, *Ānjhimajhi* or *Injala Pinjala*, *Garayā* or *Goraiyā*,

Buḍhibāndnā, *Goyālapūjā*, *Khunṭi-o-Daḍi* (*Pāghā*) *Pūjā*, *Jhāṅgara-Dhāṅgara*, *Ṭheṅgā* or *Lāṭhi Pūjā*, *Garu Khunṭā* or *Kāḍā Khunṭā*, reading of *Kapilāmaṅgala* and singing of *Āhirā* or *Ahirā* songs.^{xxxī} In between all these, various forms of indigenous *Ālpanā* – including *Cakapurā* – appear for twice on the courtyards and cottage-walls. For some, it appears once after *Goṭhapūjā* and then after *Garayā*; while for the others its after *Garayā* once, and then during *Buḍhibāndnā*. However, majority of the *Cakapurā* renderings follow the latter schedule, with two different approaches for these two days.

3. The *Māhāto* and their *Cakapurā*

In 1872, the Irish anthropologist Colonel Edward Tuite Dalton has recorded that – “The Bhūmij are, no doubt, the original inhabitants of Dhalbhūm, Barābhūm, Pátkūm, Bāgmūndī, and still form the bulk of the population in those and adjoining estates... chiefly located in the country between the Kasai and Subarnarekhā rivers. They had formerly large settlements to the north of the former river, but they were dislodged by Aryāns, who as Hindus of the Kūrmī caste now occupy their old village sites.”^{xxxii} However, no specific information is available about when exactly this reform took place. Even the origin of *Kurmi* caste and their Hindu siblings also remain obscure, though some scholars have suggested it to be derived from a Dravidian stock.^{xxxiii} In Manbhūm area, they are difficult to be distinguished from a *Bhūmija* or a *Sāontāla*, while all of them worship the plough at the time of *Dasehrā*.^{xxxiv} In any case, presumably, it was after this demographic change of the land that the *Māhāto*s emerged as a new social representative to many^{xxxv} and established themselves in various positions like priest, village-chief, trader etc. Although it remains unclear if they originated from the group of early ‘Hindu Kurmi’ mentioned by Dalton, but their ancestral association to Brahmanism is evident in their motifs and patterns of *Cakapurā*.



Figure 3a. The *Caka* being made dust-free with the sweeping of broom



Figure 3b. Pouring of cow-dung with water and sweeping with broom

In any case, *Māhāto*s are not the only group executing *Cakapurā* during *Bāndnā* – since several other indigenous groups of *Bhūmija*, *Kumhāra*, *Kurmi* and others also do the same. But, even today, the *Māhāto*’s works in particular are highly regarded for their unprecedented skill and mastery in this art.^{xxxvi} Historically, the *Kumhāras* also are considered to have some ancestral connection with the Brahmanic pantheon,^{xxxvii} but the authority of *Cakapurā* seems to be

attributed to the *Māhātos* only. Perhaps they were the ones, who introduced this style of *Ālpānā* – when and how, nobody knows – in parallel to all other existing styles of *Mānbhūmī Citrakalā*,^{xxxviii} the indigenous painting tradition of Manbhūm. However, until today, this tradition could not find much of scholarly attention – except a curious discussion by Amit Kumar Dey in his MFA Dissertation.^{xxxix}

4. Ground Preparation

The preparation for *Bāndnā* begins immediately after *Durgā Pūjā*,^{xl} when the people of Manbhūm begin to repair and clean their households, including the cowsheds that are an integral part of their family-residences. However, the actual groundwork starts usually a day before *Kālīpūjā* – with the observation of a ritual called *Ghāoyā*. It includes the bathing of cowherds, massaging of mustard oil on their horns and hoofs and crowning them with *Meḍā*^{xli} of paddy-ear – all of which, in any case, must be completed before the *Tithi* of *Amāvasyā*. Among all these activities, the most important component for *Cakapurā* is the preparation of ground – including the courtyard, floor of the cowshed and household, along with the exterior wall of the cottages – done by the young girls or the homemakers of the family. However, recent measures of development in the villages, with a desperate rush towards urbanization, hardly allow the traditional methods of ground-preparation to be followed today. Concretization of households, courtyards, lanes and streets has hardly left any room for this, except the sweeping of a broom and then the wiping or cleaning with water. But even after that, wherever possible, the clay huts are made dust-free with repeated sweeping of a broom (fig 3a) that is mostly made of the veins of dry coconut leaves. This is followed by pouring of cow-dung with water and sweeping it across the courtyard with a similar broom or a bundle of hay (fig 3b). Here cow-dung plays a very important role since it encompasses manifold qualities of a natural binder, disinfectant and a holy substance to the pantheon of both folk-tribal and Brahmanic order.



Figure 3c. Water with soft clay from agricultural field being applied on clay-wall



Figure 3d. *Sāontāla* woman painting the walls of her cottage

However, a different technique and material is used for the smoothening of the clay-walls. For this, primarily, a piece of cloth is dipped in a solution of common clay and water to plaster the surface for filling up the cracks. Once dried, another layer of water – mixed with the soft mud from agricultural fields – is wiped in a similar fashion to make the surface even smoother (fig 3c).

The hand-movement for this final coating often animates the half-circular form repeatedly – resembling an impression of the rising sun. In order to create a greater visual impact, the *Sāontālas* often add some colored clay or natural earth-pigments to the mixture and paint the lower portion of the walls – along with the corners around the doors and windows (fig 3d). This inevitably adds a structural background to the later composition that is to be created by the painted images. However, proportion of these ingredients is highly indigenous and perceptual, learned by the women folk through direct apprenticeship under the guidance and supervision of senior family-members or relatives. It is one of the most common traditional knowledge, passed down through generations and not to be revealed to any outsider very easily.

The next day, i.e., the day of *Amāvasyā* or *Kālīpujā*, the intended grounds for *Cakapurā* are smeared again with the same binder to make the surface harder and smoother for the purpose. Nevertheless, it is also the day of cleaning and washing of various agricultural tools like plough, yoke, helm, ladder etc – in the nearby pond or river – and assembling them at the courtyard near the holy *Tulasī-maṅca*^{xlii} for worship. The entire day and night, as a whole, is named as *Jāgaraṇa* – i.e., staying awake; which begins with *Goṭhapūjā* and then followed by *Cumāna* or *Baraṇa* with *Āhirā* or *Ahirā*-songs, *Kāncijiorī*, *Nichāno* or *Nimchāno*, *Ānjhimujhi* or *Injala Pinjala* and finally *Gāi-jāgā*. The last of them is also known as *Gāi-jāgaraṇa* or *Go-jāgaraṇa* or *Jāgaraṇī* or *Dhīmoyāna* or *Dhinguyāna* that continues all through the night. These rituals, as a whole, with varying descriptions and multiple interpretations, have been documented for long by many scholars; but, surprisingly, *Cakapurā* has always been ignored or generalized with the other forms of traditional *Ālpanā*.^{xliii}

5. The Paint

The next dawn after *Kālīpujā* begins with *Dānduḍa* or *Dāndaḍa Phelā* – when the homemakers sweep away old belongings, often symbolized by some old rice-powder in a *Dhāmā*^{xliv} or *Kulā/Kulo*.^{xlv} The *Jāgaraṇī*-singers – traditionally of the *Dhāṅgaḍa*^{xlvi} caste – come back home, while chattering and singing among themselves; and at times smearing the rural women – coming back from the fields with freshly collected vegetables – playfully with rice-powder and vermilion. Later on, at the end of *Amāvasyā*, the *Tithi* of *Pratipada*^{xlvii} begins with the preparation for *Garayā Pūjā*. This ritual is also known as *Goraiyā Pūjā*, or *Goraiyā Gosāin-era Pūjā* or *Goraiyā Gosāin Rāi-era Pūjā*,^{xlviii} where *Garayā* is considered to be a harmful apparition for the cattle. Along with Him, in certain places, a symbol of Tiger-god is also worshipped in order to avoid similar threats.^{xlix} The preparation begins with the fresh powdering of a local variant of *Ātapa Cāla* (i.e., sunned rice) – traditionally beneath a husking pedal – followed by the making of *Piṭhā*, a kind of sweat rice-cake. This *Piṭhā* is offered to the worship of *Garayā* and the Tiger-god, followed by the sacrifice of chickens and, in certain cases, goats.¹



Figure 4a. *Cālagunḍā* strained again to get finer powder



Figure 4b. A bunch of *Narajakhā* stems with leaves



Figure 5a. *Narajakhā* stems being separated from leaves



Figure 5b. *Narajakhā* stems being cut into small pieces

After the completion of these rituals, the villagers start preparing the paint for *Cakapurā*. The basic pigment for this is the freshly powdered *Ātapa Cāla*, already separated from the amount grinded for *Piṭhā*. Before use, this *Cālagunḍā* or *Cālagunḍo* (i.e., powdered rice) is strained through a sieve to remove even the smallest chunks and get the finest particles (fig 4a). Then it is mixed with a vegetable binder that could be extracted from multiple natural resources with a wide range of variety–

Leaves

Gāmāra^{li}

Ḍhenḍāśa or *Bhenḍi*

Bhinḍi^{liiii}

Tila^{liv}

Arjuna^{lvi}

Stems

Narajakhā (fig 4b)^{lii}

Hingle or *Himce* or *Hingcā* or

Heḷṅcā^{liv}

Vegetable

Ḍhenḍāśa, *Bhenḍi*, or *Bhinḍi*

In case of the first group mentioned above, full branches are collected from the trees to extract the green leaves from them. These leaves are cleaned, smashed lightly on a grinding stone and then dipped in a bucket half-filled with water. However, a similar process is followed for the second group – the stems (fig 5a-d) – while the third is chopped into pieces before being put in water. This allows the leaves, stems or vegetable to secrete their juice – which is a kind of sticky substance, effective as a binder as well as a carrier.

In this process, the water in the bucket needs to be stirred continuously to mix the juice well (fig 5d). Usually, this is done by the girls in their teens, under the guidance and supervision of expert and experienced women of the household. After some time, the water turns sticky, the degree of which is tested repeatedly until the expert is happy with the *Lāḍa* – which refers to the solution, as well as its stickiness. Once the *Lāḍa* is ready for use, it is poured into another container by straining through a piece of cotton cloth (fig 6a-b) or a net, while the leaves, stems or vegetables are left in the bucket with more water added for future use. This *Lāḍa* is then mixed, in a desired proportion, with the requisite amount of *Cālagunḍā* that result into the most suitable *Cakapurā* paint (fig 6c). While mixing the solution, it is frequently checked by dipping the fist and then lifting it repeatedly – testing the flow down the stretched fingers (fig 6d). Its natural and authentic hue is White, with a tint of ochre, while additional pigments of blue, pink etc are also being mixed now a days. However, the paint must be applied immediately after the preparation – or else would be dried, and not remain of any use.



Figure 5c. *Narajakhā* being smashed on grinding stone



Figure 5d. Water being stirred to mix the stem juice



Figure 6a. *Lāḍa* being strained through a piece of cloth



Figure 6b. *Lāḍa* being squeezed through the cloth



Figure 6c. *Cālagunḍā* being poured in *Lāḍa*



Figure 6d. Testing the flow of the *Cakapurā* paint

6. Paint Application – The *Cakapurā* Technique

Cakapurā is not only an integral part of *Bāndnā* festival, but also an important ritual itself – like the others of its kind – especially for the *Māhātos* and their cultural siblings. Traditionally, it is executed twice with two different sets of motifs and patterns – and with two different relevance. The first round is done usually on the *Tithi* of *Pratipada* after *Garayā* to welcome the cowherds, while the second is executed on the *Tithi* of *Dvītiyā*^{lvii} – with more elaboration – to welcome the *Jāmāi*. However, the technique of paint-application remains the same – with similar movements of the hand and swings of the body.



Figure 7a. *Cāla-Gunḍi* and *Lāḍa* being mixed



Figure 7b. *Cakapurā* artist taking position



Figure 7c. Paint being picked up from the container



Figure 7d. Dripping of paint with five fingers



Figure 7e. Horizontal movement of the artist's hand



Figure 7f. The artist changing her position swiftly



Figure 7g. *Cakapurā* encroaching inside the cottage



Figure 7h. Putting of vermilion-drops at cross-sections

Process 1: The first step is the final cleaning of the *Caka* with a broom and getting it ready for the purpose. By this time, a certain amount of *Cāla-Gunḍi* or *Cāla-Gunḍā* is mixed in a small container – usually made of brass, bell metal, aluminum or stainless steel (fig 7a) – with the requisite amount of *Lāḍa* to get the paint ready. Then the homemaker, usually clad in a new or newly washed *Sāḍi*,^{lviii} starts giving *Cakapurā* with the help of other women and children. The technique of paint application indeed is traditional that requires physical fitness, reflex, confidence and spiritual faith. The aesthetics, in that case, is mostly predetermined, collective and ritualistic – typical to this soil. The role of artist is only to behave according to the prevailing custom and thus produce an artwork of a folk-tribal genre. In any case, the homemaker – intended to fill-up the *Caka* – holds the container in her left hand and dips her right fist to pick up the paint. While doing so, she takes position with a forward bent of the torso at around forty-five degrees from the waist (fig 7b). Then, with a swift movement of her right hand, she picks up the paint (fig 7c) and drips the same on the ground with her five fingers facing downwards (fig 7d) in the shape of inverse *Padmakōṣa*.^{lix} The paint flows down the fingers from a variable height of six to twelve inches, while the artist moves her hand horizontally in different directions (fig 7e). This creates a flow of five lines falling from five fingers that do not maintain equal distance and often overlap each other.



Figure 8a. Upward swing of right hand to extend the design vertically



Figure 8b. Adjoining the floor-design with the vertical extent of the wall

The process is quite demanding, since the paint does not sustain for long in the artist's hand. As a result, she needs to dip her hand quickly back to the container and pick up paint repeatedly to continue the line, motif, design and pattern. Simultaneously, she also has to change her position incessantly to leave the space already covered and proceed towards the empty one (fig 7f). Thus, being started from the main entrance of her house, the artist covers the entire courtyard, including the holy *Tulasī-maṅca* – along with the assemblage of agricultural instruments – and gradually moves towards the interior. In certain cases, the expansion also encroaches inside the cottage-rooms (fig 7g) and at times end on the cooking oven. In this entire course of action, another co-artist – a woman or a girl of the same family – concurrently follows the main-artist to put vermilion-drops at various cross-sections of the patterns (fig 7h). At times, due to the absence of any such partner, it is the main-artist who herself does the needful. In any case, it is an integral and important part of the ritual, without which *Cakapurā* is never complete.

Process 2: The movement, however, changes near the cottage wall – when the right arm swings upwards (fig 8a) to extend the design vertically. In most of the cases, such expansions

remain as a series of intersecting vertical lines with five flows, overlapping each other – adjoining the floor design and the vertical extent of the wall up to a height of two-three feet (fig 8b). However, in some cases, the expansion reaches higher elongation and occasionally follows the two corners of a door as well.



Figure 9a. Sprinkling of paint with a reverse swing of the forehand



Figure 9b. Co-artist adding vermilion-drops on various key points

Process 3: In certain cases, designs are created on the wall by sprinkling the paint with a reverse swing of the forehand (fig 9a). Its technique and style, both are different from the former, since the image is developed by applying layers of color-droplets continuously and strategically. The container is held on the left hand, as usual, while the five fingers of right hand are in a different use. The paint – instead of being dripped – is thrown on the wall surface to create the image of a sprawling tree. Once again, this is also followed by a co-artist to add vermilion-drops on various key points (fig 9b).



Figure 9c. The motif of *Jhāu Gācha*

For some reason unknown, this motif is called as *Jhāu Gācha* – i.e., Pine Tree (fig 9c) – though there is hardly any visual resemblance between the two. Instead, the image has partial similarity with the leaves of two such variants, like the Coulter Pine^{lx} and the Eastern White Pine.^{lxi} However, none of these specimens has ever been native to this land and hence any connection – either historical or cultural – with the inhabitants of Manbhum is yet to be identified. In any case, the technique involved is certainly difficult and takes a lot of skill, control, understanding and precision. Perhaps for this reason, not many women today are equipped with the required passion and skill, resulting into a scarcity of such specimens. It

has been suggested that at least two other motifs – that of a peacock and of an abstract form – were also popular once,^{lxii} but during our last visit in 2018 we did not encounter anything like that.

Process 4: The final process is all about leaving various impressions on the cottage wall with the help of various parts of the right fist and its fingers. One of them is a series of a three-dot motif, created by tipping the paint with three fingers close together – the pointer, middle finger and the ring finger (fig 10a). Next is another series that is impressed by the side of the fist bent in the form of a semi-circle (fig 10b). The motifs created like this take the shape of a *Kalkā*^{lxiii} or a bird, all of which are added with drops of vermilion by the co-artist. However, two more variants are most popular to these rural artists – one of which is the partial impression, while the other is the full impression of a stretched palm. The former is applied on the assemblage of agricultural instruments (fig 10c), while the latter is impressed upon the cottage walls (fig 10d). Such hand impressions are pretty common all across the world, since the earliest days of civilization, but the uniqueness of this *Cakapurā* motif is in the frequent inclusion of vermilion dots.



Figure 10a. Series of a three-dot motif



Figure 10b. *Kalkā* or a bird-like motif being impressed



Figure 10c. Hand impression on agricultural instruments



Figure 10d. Full hand impression on cottage wall

7. Epilogue

The *Tithi* of *Dvitiyā* observes the final and most elaborate expanse of *Cakapurā* – followed by the rituals of *Gai Cumāna* or the bathing of the cattle in the nearby pond or river. The afternoon is engaged rather with celebrations like *Garu Khunṭā*, where selected cows of the village are brought together to be teased and ridiculed by the youngsters. Similar traits are performed the next day with the observance of *Kāḍā Khunṭā*, which virtually resembles the indigenous tradition of mockery and fun in between the in-laws. Thus, the festival comes to an end for the year – though some of the clans observe the same later in the month of *Pouṣa*. But, even today, *Cakapurā* as a form of ritual art belongs exclusively to the *Bāndnā* celebration of *Kārtika*, as its practice remain limited to the *Māhāto* and their cultural siblings.

As a form of traditional painting, the *Cakapurā*-images must have a socio-cultural relevance, strongly connected with the indigenous belief and perception of life as a whole. However, it hardly matters to its creators – the female-artists – who have mostly remained uneducated and hence always faithful to their society and family. The ritual demands their unquestioned submission and they respond without any clue about its historical, cultural or aesthetic relevance. Yet, even after that, the visuals produced by them represent a convincing sense of graphics through a combination of fluid lines and diagrammatic structures. Each of the motifs, as well as the patterns, showcase tremendous spontaneity complemented by utmost precision – a quality that is essential for any piece of successful art. Even the impressions created on the vertical surfaces constitute a harmonized relation with the horizontal expanse of linear emotion very easily. As a whole, it forms a unique cohabitation of painted images and graphic symbols, which could hardly be seen in any other genre of folk-tribal art.

However, the artistic analysis and evaluation of *Cakapurā* is yet to be done with adequate scholarly attention and intervention – since many relevant aspects need further study and research. We do not know why the people of ancient Manbhum adopted such a unique technique of dripping and how the *Māhātos* have taken such an important role in its execution. We do not have any idea about the historic, economic, political, cultural or philosophical connection among *Bāndnā*, the *Māhātos* and *Cakapurā*. We are yet to study its motifs and patterns and analyze their relevance in comparison to other regional or pan-Indian traditions. We are yet to see how it could restore its collective sustenance through the days dominated by individual aspirations.

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Endnotes

ⁱ Coomarswamy, *Picture Showmen...* , pp. 182-7; Jain, *The Painted Scrolls...* , pp. 3-4

ⁱⁱ Rossi, *From the Ocean...* , p. 19

ⁱⁱⁱ The geography of Manbhum belongs to a common ethno-cultural history. It became a district during the British rule and a part of Bihar state after 1947. Later in mid-1950s, the district of Purulia was carved out and added with West Bengal, while the remaining part was kept with Bihar (today's Jharkhand) as a part of Dhanbad district. [Chisholm (ed.), *Encyclopædia...* , p. 542]

^{iv} Historically, the region has been known by many names and has hosted numerous settlements. One theory identifies it with the *Gaṅgāriḍāi* nation mentioned in ancient Greco-Roman accounts. Another suggests *Gaṅgāriḍāi* to be the plural form of *Gaṅgāriḍ* – i.e., people of the Ganges. (Sircar, *Studies in the...* , pp. 171, 215)

^v *Ālimpan* means smearing something on a surface (as a verb) and the end-product – the image (as a noun).

^{vi} Known as *Jhunṭi* (parts of West Bengal and Orissa), *Mūrya* (Orissa), *Sāthiyā* (Gujarat), *Maṇḍana* (central-India and Rajasthan), *Rangoli* and *Sānjhi* (Maharashtra and Uttar Pradesh), *Lithuniya* (Himachal Pradesh and Haryana), *Mungāla* (Andhra Pradesh) and as *Kolāma* (Tamilnadu and Kerala).

^{vii} Here *Gunḍi* or *Dhūlā* means dust and *Citra* means image.

^{viii} Dey, *Bāndhnāra Caka-purā...* , pp. 24, 31

^{ix} American painter (1912-56), considered as the innovator of drip-technique on laid down canvases. (Hodge, *50 Art Ideas...* , p. 161)

^x “Mahat, a sub-caste of Goálás in Chota Nagpur; a title of up-country Brahmans and of some trading castes... Maháthá, a section of Maghaiyá Kumhárs in Behar... Mahato, a title of Goálás, Kurmis, Koiris, Kahárs, Kumhárs, Rajwárs, Dhanuks, Mundas, Chiks or Páns and Pásis; a sept of Oraons in Chota Nagpur.” (Risley, *The Tribes...* , p. 39)

^{xi} Chattopadhyay, *Mānabhūmera...* , p. 47

^{xii} It is not about the marriage of cows – as mistaken by Maniklal Singha. (Singha, *Rāḍhera Jāti...* , pp. 138-9)

^{xiii} “Near the boundary of Chútiá Nágpúr, the term Bhúmij as applied to this class is seldom used. The Kols who form the bulk of the population call themselves Múndas or, as the name is usually pronounced in Mánbhúm, Múras. The title Bhúmij, ‘the children of the soil,’ is given to the members of the tribe settled further east...” (Dalton, *Descriptive Ethnology...* , p. 173)

^{xiv} “Munda, Mura, Horo-hon, a large Dravidian tribe of Chota Nagpur classed on linguistic grounds as Kolarian, and closely akin to the Hos and Santáls, and probably also to the Kandhs. The name munda ... means headman of a village, and is a titular or functional designation used by the members of the tribe, as well as outsiders, as a distinctive name The general name Kol, which is applied to both Mundas and Oraons, ... is a variant of *horo*, the Mundári for man.” (Risley, *The Tribes...* , Vol. II, pp. 101-8)

^{xv} “Santál, Santhál, Saontár, a large Dravidian tribe, classed on linguistic grounds as Kolarian, which is found in Western Bengal, Northern Orissa, Bhágalpur and Santál Parganáas. ... the name Santál is a corruption of Sáotár, and was adopted by the tribe after their sojourn for several generations in the country about Sáont in Midnapur.” (Risley, *The Tribes...* , Vol. II, pp. 224-35)

^{xvi} “Whatever the degree of accuracy in these derivations, there can be little doubt that Mundari or Kolarian races occupied the wild area south of Bihar in Pliny’s time. Bihar itself the ancient kingdom of Magadha, was at one time under the dominion of the Cheros, another branch of the great Mundari race, and Buchanar suggests that the modern Kols, using the word as covering all the Mundari races, are descended from the portion of the original population of Magadha...” (Coupland, *Mānbum...* , p. 48)

- ^{xvii} “... in Manu’s time, fixed by Burnell at 500 A.D., some of the non-Aryan races had already begun to intrude upon the Brahmanical caste system, while others were still in the tribal stage.” (Risley, *The Tribes...*, Vol. I. p. xviii)
- ^{xviii} The religious ideas and practices among Indo-Aryan linguistic group in ancient India – admiring the socio-cultural supremacy of the priests, i.e., Brahmin. These were found in the Vedic texts and were one of the major influences in shaping the contemporary idea of Hinduism.
- ^{xix} The veneration of cow as mother.
- ^{xx} It was composed under the influence of *Maṅgalakāvya* tradition, whose principal poet was Shankar Kabichandra Chakraborty. (Chattopadhyay, *Mānabhūmera ...*, p. 56)
- ^{xxi} It is a part of the *Kapilāmaṅgala* tradition of *Bāndnā* songs.
- ^{xxii} Sengupta, *The Caste...*, p. 80
- ^{xxiii} Risley, *The Tribes...*, Vol. II, p. 39
- ^{xxiv} Bhattacharya, *Paścimabaṅga Darśana – 3*, p. 262
- ^{xxv} The priest-caste of *Rādhā* region.
- ^{xxvi} It (*Baṅgābda*) is a luni-solar calendar, whose revised version is used in Bangladesh and an earlier version is followed in West Bengal, Tripura and Assam. It starts from mid-April of the Gregorian Calendar, while the month *Kārtika* falls in October-November. (Das, *IASLIC Bulletin...*, p. 76; Sengupta, *Land of Two Rivers...*, pp. 96–8)
- ^{xxvii} It falls during the Gregorian months of December-January.
- ^{xxviii} The *Sāontāla* and other tribal-clans celebrate *Bāndnā* for five days.
- ^{xxix} It is a lunar day – in ancient Indian astronomy – or the time it takes for the longitudinal angle between Moon and Sun to increase by 12 degree. It is the time-duration between consecutive epochs that correspond to when the longitudinal-angle between Sun and Moon is an integer multiple of 12 degree. Like ancient Babylon and Greece, Indian calendars also use 30 *Tithi* that begin at varying times of solar day and vary in duration from 19 to 26 hours. (Defouw, *Light on Life...*, p. 186)
- ^{xxx} A Sanskrit word, common to most Indian languages, which means the lunar phase of New moon. It appears when the Moon is within the 12 degree of angular distance between the Sun and Moon before conjunction.
- ^{xxxi} Chattopadhyay, *Mānabhūmera ...*, p. 49
- ^{xxxii} Dalton, *Descriptive ...*, p. 173
- ^{xxxiii} Risley, *The Tribes ...*, Vol. I, pp. 528-37
- ^{xxxiv} Also known as *Daśaharā*, *Daśerā*, *Dasarā*, *Dasehrā*, *Daśaini* or *Vijayādaśamī*; a major Hindu festival celebrated at the end of *Navarātri* every year – on the tenth day in the month of *Āśvina* (the seventh Hindu luni-solar month) that falls in the Gregorian months of September and October.
- ^{xxxv} Kar, *Māṭira Ghare...*, p. 100
- ^{xxxvi} *Māhāto*-villages like Mankiyari, Jari and Jivandi (PS Arsha, Purulia) are famous for *Bāndnā* celebrations.
- ^{xxxvii} Risley, *The Tribes ...*, Vol. I, pp. 517-8
- ^{xxxviii} Kar, *Māṭira Ghare...*, p. 101
- ^{xxxix} Dey, *Bāndhnāra ...*

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- ^{xl} A four-day annual festival to worship goddess *Durgā* – popular in West Bengal, Assam, Tripura, Bihar, Jharkhand, Orissa and Bangladesh. (Banerjee, *Durga Puja...* .)
- ^{xli} A garland-like ornament.
- ^{xlii} A small podium-like construction of baked clay, stone or concrete in the courtyards of Bengal and Orissa containing *Tulasī* or Holy Basil – an aromatic plant in the family Lamiaceae.
- ^{xliii} Dey, *Bāndhnāra* ... is the only exception.
- ^{xliv} Traditional round-shaped cane-basket with a bigger size.
- ^{xlv} Winnowing-fan.
- ^{xlvi} A non-Aryan agricultural labourer caste of Chota Nagpur Proper. (Risley, *The Tribes ...* , Vol. I, p. 219)
- ^{xlvii} It is the day of New Moon – also called *Prathamā*.
- ^{xlviii} “In Behar they also worship Goraiyā... .” (Risley, *The Tribes ...* , Vol. II, p. 193)
- ^{lix} According to Raghunandan Mahato of Tunta, PS Jaipur, Purulia (6 November 2018).
- ^l We have been told that goats are sacrificed only by those families, who have *Kāḍā*, i.e., buffalo.
- ^{li} Chandahar Tree, Cashmere Tree, Comb Teak, White Teak etc (Latin name *Gmelina arborea*).
- ^{lii} A local variant of grasses – as named by the villagers, but the species remained unknown to the researcher.
- ^{liii} Okra or Lady’s Finger (Latin name *Abelmoschus esculentus* or *Hibiscus esculentus* L).
- ^{liv} Water Cress, Marsh Herb etc (Latin name *Enydra fluctuans* Lour).
- ^{lv} Sesame. (Latin name *Sesamum indicum*).
- ^{lvi} Latin name *Terminalia arjuna*
- ^{lvii} Also referred to as *Bīja* or *Dūja*. It is a Sanskrit word, referring to the second day in each of the two *Pakṣa* (lunar fortnight) – *Śukla* the bright and *Kṛṣṇa* the dark. The *Dvitiyā* of *Śukla Pakṣa* in the month of *Kārtika* is celebrated as *Bhāi Dūja* in northern India, *Bhārdutiya* in Bihar, *Bhāi Phontā* in West Bengal and Bangladesh, *Bhāi Bīja*, *Bhāu Bīja* or *Bhāv Bīja* in Gujarat, Maharashtra, Goa and Karnataka, *Yamadvitiyā*, *Bhātru Dvitiyā* or *Bhātr Ditya* or *Bhagini Hasta Bhojanāmu* in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana.
- ^{lviii} A strip of unstitched cloth, ranging from four to nine meters in length that is draped over the body in various styles. It is a popular dress for the ladies in India, Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Bhutan, Burma and Malaysia.
- ^{lix} *Padmakōṣa* is a traditional Indian hand-gesture – with all the fingers raised vertically from the palm-top, with almost equal gaps from each other. Apart from other meanings, it also signifies lotus-bud, Lily-bud, lotus-calyx, umbrella, religious water-pot, worship etc.
- ^{lx} Latin name *Pinus coulteri*. It is native to the coastal mountains of Southern California and northern Baja California (Mexico). Isolated groves are found in the San Francisco Bay Area in Mt. Diablo State Park and Black Diamond Mines Regional Preserve.
- ^{lxi} Latin name *Pinus strobes*. Found in the temperate broadleaf and mixed forests of eastern North America.
- ^{lxii} Dey, 2003-2004: *Bāndhnāra* ... , p. 35
- ^{lxiii} An ornamental motif, typical to Bengal as well as India, widely used in embroidery and other decorations.

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Konar, Ajoy (figure 2a)

Rana, Samir (figure 4d, 6c, 8e, 8f, 9a, 9b, 11c, 11d).