

A Study on the Tattoo Symbols used to Adorn Body by Korku Tribe of Madhya Pradesh

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Abstract— Tattooing is more than just ink and design: it is essentially a process of knowledge transmission via visual language, in which culture is imprinted and kept in a unique way. A tattoo can be regarded as a work of art, but its maintenance is challenging because even the most indestructible tattoos fade away with the mortal body to which they are linked. Korku is one of the main tribe of Madhya Pradesh. Primary as well as secondary data was collected to study the tattoo symbols used by Korku Tribe. The importance of tattoos, the symbols used, as well as and their meanings in the lives of the Korku tribe has been highlighted in this study.

Index terms: Korku tribe, Madhya Pradesh, Symbols, Tattoo.

I. INTRODUCTION

Tattooing is the process of embedding pigments into the skin to create practically indestructible artwork on the human body. It can be seen of as a "visual language" in which the owner's culture is imprinted on his or her skin. For tribal people, however, it is more than just a design or an art form; it is a whole emotion that includes stories and beliefs that have played crucial and diverse roles in society since the birth of humanity. Tattooing is more than just ink and design: it is essentially a process of knowledge transmission via a visual language, in which culture is imprinted and kept in a unique way. A tattoo can be regarded a work of art, but its maintenance is challenging because even the most indestructible tattoos fade away with the mortal body to which they are linked. However, tattoo knowledge and abilities are passed down from generation to generation (Ghosh, 2020). Since before the beginning of the Christ Era, tattooing has been a part of the culture of various indigenous cultures around the world. The anthropological evidence of distinct tattoo designs in various cultures also demonstrates that tattoo culture arose independently in numerous locations throughout the world. The tribal populations of India, in general, and the tribal people of Madhya Pradesh, in particular, have a tradition of tattooing as a form of body ornamentation (Goswami,2015). The tattoo art of Madhya Pradesh's tribes is well renowned, and the Baiga tribe's tattoo art is well known. Apart from that, the custom of tattooing is very popular among the ladies of the Korku tribe of Madhya Pradesh. The process of tattooing is known between tribal peoples as Godna. The Ojha community people work as tattoo artists for the Korku tribe and inherit this aptitude from their ancestors.

Madhya Pradesh's primary tribe is the Korku. They live in

the heart of Madhya Pradesh, a state in India's peninsula with a high tribal population. Between latitudes 17° 48'2 N and 26° 52'2 S, and longitudes 74° -22' N and 84° 24'2 E, the state is located (Rai,2012). They wear a variety of accessories made of bamboo, seeds, and metals. The word "Korku" means "men's group."The Korku tribe is thought to be a branch of the Munda or Kolorian tribe. The majority of this tribe's members live in Madhya Pradesh's Hoshangabad (Satpura Valley), Betul, Chhindwara, Harda, East Nimar, Khargone, Harsud (Khandwa), Burhanpur, and other districts. Men of this tribe wear dhoti, bandi, towel, or Angocha on their heads, while the women wore lugda and choli. Ladies have a strong affinity for ornaments (Parveen,2013).Women in indigenous communities choose to have their hands, legs, and necks painted with bright colours. The Korku people live in grass and wood homes in small groupings. There is a raised stage-like structure on the front side of every house. Lord Shiva is worshipped by Korkus, DogandDevta, Meghnad, MurdaDev, and Moon are also worshipped by them. (Anomyons) Lord Shiva is the Korku's founder, and they call themselves "Ravana's Descendants" and "Ravanbhansi."Korku tattoos were once considered trendy among women, which were usually done on the arms and forehead (Khedkar,2020)

The Korku tribe has a long history and culture. Although Korku's have certain distinct traditions, most of their cultural practises and traditions are similar to those of other tribals in the region. The Korku's have a religion and belief system that is nearly identical to Hinduism, with a few exceptions. The Korku's worships Hindu[1] Gods and Goddesses as well as the moon, sun, rivers, and forests. Lord Shiva is the most powerful God, followed by Ravana, Meghnath, and KilarMuthwa. Tattooing is a prevalent practise among Korku's, and it is seen as a religious gesture. Among them,

magic-religious rituals are widespread. Korku is the predominant language spoken by the Korku people; however Hindi is also spoken by a large percentage of them (Choudhary & Azeez, 2020)

II. OBJECTIVE

- a. To study the significance of tattoo design of Korku tribe.
- b. To comprehend the meaning of the symbols used in the tattoo by the Korku tribe.

III. METHODOLOGY

This paper is based on primary and secondary data sources, Primary data was acquired through a field study in Betul, Madhya Pradesh, through interactions with individuals of the Korku tribe as well as tattoo artists of the Ojha tribe. Secondary data was collected through the literature available online and offline. Designs were collected from various sources and were digitalized using CorelDraw software for better visibility and to preserve the original designs. Designs were discussed with the artists of the Ojha tribe, met women from the Korku tribe, studied and understood the designs with the help of books and other resources.

IV. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Tattoos on the face, hands and legs are common among Korku women, but the practice of tattooing on the feet is almost over in today's women. The tattoo is visible only on the feet of the old women of this tribe. In the tribal society, the tattoo done on the [2] frontal area is a symbol of the tribal society. Each tribe's tattoo designs on frontal area is regarded an ethnic sign of its aborigine group because of its unusual appearance.

Women have a "M"-shaped tattoo on their foreheads, as a symbol of their Korku tribe affiliation.

Frontal tattoos are known as "KaparGodai" and hand tattoos are known as "T Godai".



Figure-1



Figure-2



Figure-3

Picture Capture while Survey at Chicholi, Betul, Madhya Pradesh (Courtesy- Google)

a. Accreditation of tattoo among Korku tribe:

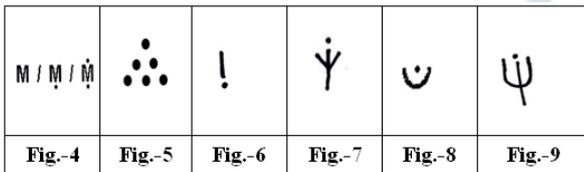
- i. According to the mythology, all clothing and decorations will remain here after death, and no one will be able to remove the tattoo from the body after death; it is the only thing that will stay with you after death, even if you are buried in a pyre or cremated to be charred Tattoos are associated with the soul, and tattoos aid in the ascension into paradise. Even the gods are enthralled by the tattoo.
- ii. It is believed by the Korku tribe that if the Korku women experience some pain while getting their tattoos and they bear that pain, they would be able to withstand evil and hardship in their future lives without a problem. It gives strength to bear the Labour pain, helps to easily access to paradise after seeing the tattoo and they also strongly believed that the gods are enthralled by the tattoo.
- iii. Tattooing on the feet is a symbol of speed, and it is done so that walking on the feet does not cause fatigue.
- iv. They believe that a greater number of tattoos on women's body is the sign of prosperity, happiness, and serenity, with no blood defects or diseases.
- v. Almost all tribes have a custom of tattooing in their bachelorhood, and the Korku's have a habit of tattooing unmarried girls as well. The act of adorning one's body with tattoos is a way of honouring virginity. Korku women start getting tattoos on various regions of their body when they are five years old to improve their attractiveness and appearance. Tattoos are treated with equal respect in both the maternal and in-law households.

b. Significance and meaning of the symbols used tattoo designs:

- i. **Face Tattoo:** Face tattoos are done on the forehead between the brows, near the eyes, and on the chin.
 1. 'M' figure: Korku ladies have this tattoo design e.g., Figure-4 in the centre of their brows on their forehead. This tattoo is a symbol of the joint family system prevalent in their society, which defines this feature of the Korku tribal society. Similarly, this graphic represents the stove's flames.
 2. 'Y' figure: The tree is represented by this tattoo symbol. Also refers to the relationship of social intimacy with the nature of the Korku tribe.
 3. Moon figure: Tattooing the shape of the moon on the Korku tribe is a mark of their calm and collected demeanour. Among these tribals, the expression Chandakriti is well-known. e.g. -Figure-8
 4. Trident symbol: The trident is the Korku tribe's most prominent symbol, which can be seen in abundance in various paintings. Trident tattoo shows the origin of

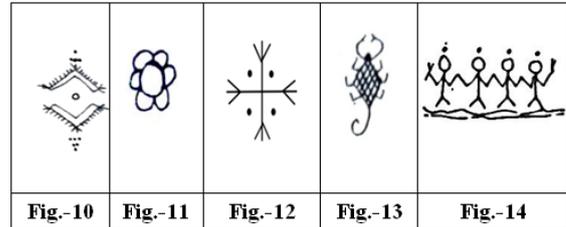
Korku and its association with Mahadeva. This trident represents valour, shakti worship, and profound reverence and faith in Lord Mahadev.

5. Vertical pie: A frequent tattoo for Korku ladies is a vertical line on their forehead with a dot below it e.g. -Figure-6. This vertical line represents courage, while the dot below it [3] represents the earth. Mother Earth is worshipped prominently in the Korku tribe god family. Mother Earth's symbol is imprinted on the forehead as a sign of respect for her, 'Khadi-Pai' is a term used for this design.
6. Dot figure: Tattooing a single point (Bindu) or three points e.g., - Figure-5 on both sides of the temple, as well as one, three, six, and fifteen points on the chin in a triangular configuration, is common among Korku women. A dot represents jowar grain and the knotting of the dots into a triangle form represents stack of grain.
7. Sun figure: This artwork, known as Suryakriti, is a Korku tribal emblem of trust and belief that is tattooed on the Korku women's forehead or hands. The tribe believes that tattooing 'Suryakarti' protects against diseases and ensures that the ability to fight off negative consequences is maintained at all times.



- ii. **Hand Tattoo:** The biceps to the wrist of the hand are tattooed.
 1. Flower and Leaves figure: According to common belief, flowers and leaves are prevalent in the hand tattoos of these women, which define their natural fauna and social connections with it. These are the symbols of happiness and success. e.g:Figure-11
 2. Scorpion figure: The tickling of a scorpion is tattooed on the hand. The sting [5] of a scorpion is a symbol of libido awakening. It is a sign of fertility in the esoteric sense, regulating the existence of any species in nature.e.g.-Figure-13
 3. Hand ornaments Tattoo: Apart from acacia, deer, peacock pair, scorpion, chowka, sun, mandra, and jhara (grass) tattoos, the Korku tribal women use various lovely jewellery designs such as armpit, nagmoti, and flower khopa from hand to arm. Deer, peacock pairs, acacia trees, birds, parrots, and other animals are also symbols of his love for nature. All these are used to enhance and adorn the body.
 4. Dancing doll figure: Tattoos depicting dancing dolls as seen in figure-14 on the backs of the Korku tribe's hands. These figures appear in murals and other works as well. The Korku tribe's traditional dances are 'Chilluri' and

'Dadal', these dancing effigies are a representation of faith in the Korku tribe's old tradition of anatomy, as well as a mark of good joy.



- iii. **Lower Torso Tattoo:** Leg tattoos are typically applied on the calf and thighs. Korku women also have tattoos on their calves, feet, and thighs. Jhara tattoos, which consist of vertical line drawings, indicating a healthy crop, are common among the tattoos on the foot. Tree figures, such as those[4] of mango, tamarind, and other fruits, are depicted as horizontal or slanted lines to represent progeny proliferation and female fertility in these representations.

Korku civilization has also incorporated Hindu religious norms, which reflect the Korku's historical development. Even after being affected by the surrounding tribes, the ladies of the Korku tribe have accepted new tattoo styles. According to the members of the Ojha tribe in Nasirabad, Betul, who were interviewed during a field study, if someone has been sick for a long time; they can recover from illness by getting tattooed on their body. To avoid this exorcist woman stated that when tattooing, she offered Lord Shiva's Sida beans, salt, and chillies. The tattoo will become festered and painful if it is not cherished with entire dedication.

V. CONCLUSION

Tattoos are cultural artefacts of a tribe or any folk culture. We can determine whose culture the tattoo belongs to by observing an artefact. Tattooing is a Korku tradition defined as a beautiful calligraphy with hidden meanings and implications. In today's highly developed times, the tattooing strategies that the early humans discovered are being utilised in some way. It demonstrates that primitive man had higher intelligence at the time. Tattooing on face, hand, and feet by Korku tribe has been practised for variety of reasons from ancient time, these motifs and designs are significant, emotive, and useful.

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