

REGION

Keeping tribal arts alive:

L From Anil Takalkar living with simple, kind hearted, nature loving tribals has not only influenced her artistic expression but also changed her way of life. When you talk to Ms Sujata Bajaj, the young well-known artist and a U.G.C. scholar doing Ph.D. on 'Tribal Art', you get a feel of her deep involvement in the life of these communities. Her deep rooted affection for them was evident in her lecture organised by 'Yoonmesh', a recently started youth organisation in their weeklong youth festival programme.

In last four years she had visited remotest tribal areas all over the country with the aim to get insight in their art forms. The intensive field work done by her brings to the fore several, hitherto hidden unexplored, facets of these people and their life style. The first striking feature

istic forms) they understood what I was looking for. And when one of them opened the door of an inside room, I was amazed to see the fantastic treasure of wall paintings and other artistic items. They were simple, natural, spontaneous and clearly distinct from our accepted art form."

As the topic of Ms Sujata's thesis is related to 'Indian Tribal art and its influence on the contemporary trends on arts' she compares both with greater authenticity since she has had experienced these two extreme different life styles and their expression reflected in their various artistic creations. An aspect which she finds more disturbing is about the misconceptions and misunderstandings about 'Tribal Art'.

She says, "Unfortunately, tribals have not received proper attention till today. They have always been ignored and looked

(Rajasthan).

Explaining how their artistic creation has rooted in to their age old customs and traditions, she mentions a few examples, such as in Bastar area following the death of an alleged witch, a

jata and indeed, what she feels must be given a serious thoughts to. Because by any reckoning this is going to be a great loss to our cultural heritage. It is hard to believe but it is true that it has been a major source of inspira-

PUNE CULTURAL SCENE

beautiful statue made out of wood carving has to be buried beneath the ground in public place. The statue symbolises the dead soul and as they feel that her soul too should not remain alive, the wood used for it is of inferior quality to facilitate its fast decay. The fact that they do not mind to bury such beautiful art piece again shows their different perception looking at the things in life.

Even artistic pillars are erected in memory of their dear ones.

tion to majority of contemporary artists. In addition to that most of the 'isms', we talk of today, like surrealism, impressionism have been used by these tribals unconsciously in their artistic expressions. Their art derives creative urge from life and nature. Its abstract form comes from its primitive simplicity. One may call them elementary but as scholars like Herbert Read regard elementary as 'most vital' in self expression this too can't be an exception. It's elementary nature, aesthetic beauty and the abstract form fascinate most to artist such as this young painter. But the efforts to 'civilize' tribals by Government is gradually resulting in a loss of their original identity and ultimately their precious art. Though nobody would oppose these efforts to bring them into mainstream, but at the same time a proper care must be taken to preserve their cultural heritage. Those officials who are dealing with tribal welfare must have the deeper understanding of these aspects. "It's a delicate and responsible job", opines Ms Bajaj. As art never remains stagnant, it either perishes or develops. But the tribal art should not perish because of our apathy.



'Chhre' in Rajasthan : Memory of the dear ones

noticed by her is the art being an inseparable and integral part of their day to day living.

In this context she narrated an unusual incident. When she visited a small village "Kujnari" in Orissa and asked the tribals to show some of the paintings, they could not understand what exactly she was asking for. "Most of them do not perceive painting as we do since it is associated with their customs and various rituals. For instance if there is puja (God-worshipping) or marriage or someone is seriously ill, they follow some rituals wherein unconsciously what we describe as an 'art' enters in. But these are their natural expressions of their emotions and instincts to express joyous as well as sad occasions which they came across with."

"That is why when I asked to show 'Itta' (Tribal word roughly conveying the meaning of ritual-

down upon by urban class who call them backward and uncultured but, ironically in the real sense of word, I found them highly cultured. I saw their women being treated with equal status and full honour and this too without any fashionable lib movement. I could able to move around in these areas during night alone without any fear which I would not have dared to in our cities. We have also misunderstood their ideas of 'Ghotul' the tradition which allows real healthy sex life. In the same way their contribution to our culture history and tradition through their arts has not been understood in proper perspective."

Although, she had been to several tribal inhabitations her research study is mainly based on major four tribes — Warli (Maharashtra), Saora (Orissa), Madia Muria (Bastar - M.P.), Bhills

Their favourite things like his pet animal, weapon, drink etc are carved on it. Some carry figures or symbolic portrait of dead persons. They are known by different names such as 'Chhre' in Rajasthan or 'Khatri' in Gujarat. Some eight to ten feet wooden marriage pillars found in Bastar symbolising ancestors are also attractive. As the custom goes newly-wed couples come to these 'ancestors' for darshan and seek blessings.

Surroundings nature and its scenic beauty offer and contribute lot in these creations. That is why tribals living in Rajasthan uses figure of peacock most of the time, while those residing in Arunachal, paints tall tree and colourful birds. Even the paints that are used are prepared from natural things like rice. "But these artistic traditions are vanishing rapidly", laments Ms Su-



Sujata Bajaj : In love with tribal art