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earth to earth

Pardhan Gonds: A journey through their life

Author: Padmaja Srivastava | Artist : Mayank Shyam | Photographer: Komal Bedi Sohal



preface

The central idea of the book was conceived over a conversation with the talented artist, Mayank Shyam, who is the son of the legendary Jangarh Singh Shyam, the pioneer of the distinct genre of Gond paintings called “Jangarh Kalam”.

Having known Mayank for the past two decades, we had never before delved into discussions about the rapidly vanishing cultural heritage of his community “The Pardhan Gond Tribe”. Mayank Shyam possesses a profound understanding of the Gond Pardhan tribes and their cultural legacy, as well as insights into bridging this connection with today’s younger generation. As we explored the cultural practices of this unique tribe, there was one thought that seemed to weigh us down the most, which was the gradual disintegration of the cultural link between the present Pardhan tribes and their ancestors. The root concern was the progressive replacement of their tribal practices with contemporary way of life. We felt a pressing need to help preserve these sacred traditions

before they completely vanish with time. With this dilemma in mind, I initiated a conversation with Mayank to discuss how we could revive and instill appreciation for these traditional practices among the younger generation. The Pardhan Gonds traditionally decorate their houses with pigments extracted from natural colors and coloured clay. With a vision to bring his ancestral traditions back to life, Mayank offered to document them through his paintings, utilizing these traditional pigments procured from the region.

Komal Bedi Sohal is an award winning designer, creative director and photographer who I happened to meet at a common friend’s place. Upon hearing about this project she agreed to collaborate as I explained the interesting details.

Our collective mission thus began: to safeguard and preserve the narratives of the Gond Pardhan tribes, ensuring that their rich legacy endures within human history.

- Padmaja Srivastava



introduction

India, a land of myriad cultures and traditions, holds within its bosom a tapestry of indigenous communities known as tribes. These adivasi tribes are the first people of the land, with their rich heritage and unique ways of life, providing a glimpse into their diverse and vibrant cultural fabric.

The Gonds, an ancient tribe from the heartland of India, who thrive amidst verdant forests and rolling hills are a tribal community deeply rooted in ancient customs and beliefs.

The Gond Adivasi community is among the largest indigenous communities in central India. The Pardhan Gonds, as a subsect, bears the responsibility of safeguarding the collective memory of Gond kings' virtues, tales of valor, and folk traditions through the medium of ballads. The balladeer uses a musical instrument known as the "Bana" to accompany their storytelling and singing.

In earlier times, the Pardhan Gonds received patronage from both kings and clergy within their community. However, with the advent of the

British Raj, royal patronage ceased, and the Pardhans were compelled to transition into agrarian pursuits for their livelihood.

In this book, we embark on a journey to celebrate the rituals and daily intricacies of life, spanning from birth to death. We will delve into the profound wisdom and reverence of these moments through the evocative paintings of artist Mayank Shyam (son of Jangarh Singh Shyam) and the compelling photographs captured by Komal Bedi Sohal.

Through meticulous study, personal interviews, and an empathetic lens, this book seeks to bridge the cultural divide and provide an intimate window into the world of the Gond Pardhan tribe of Patangarh.

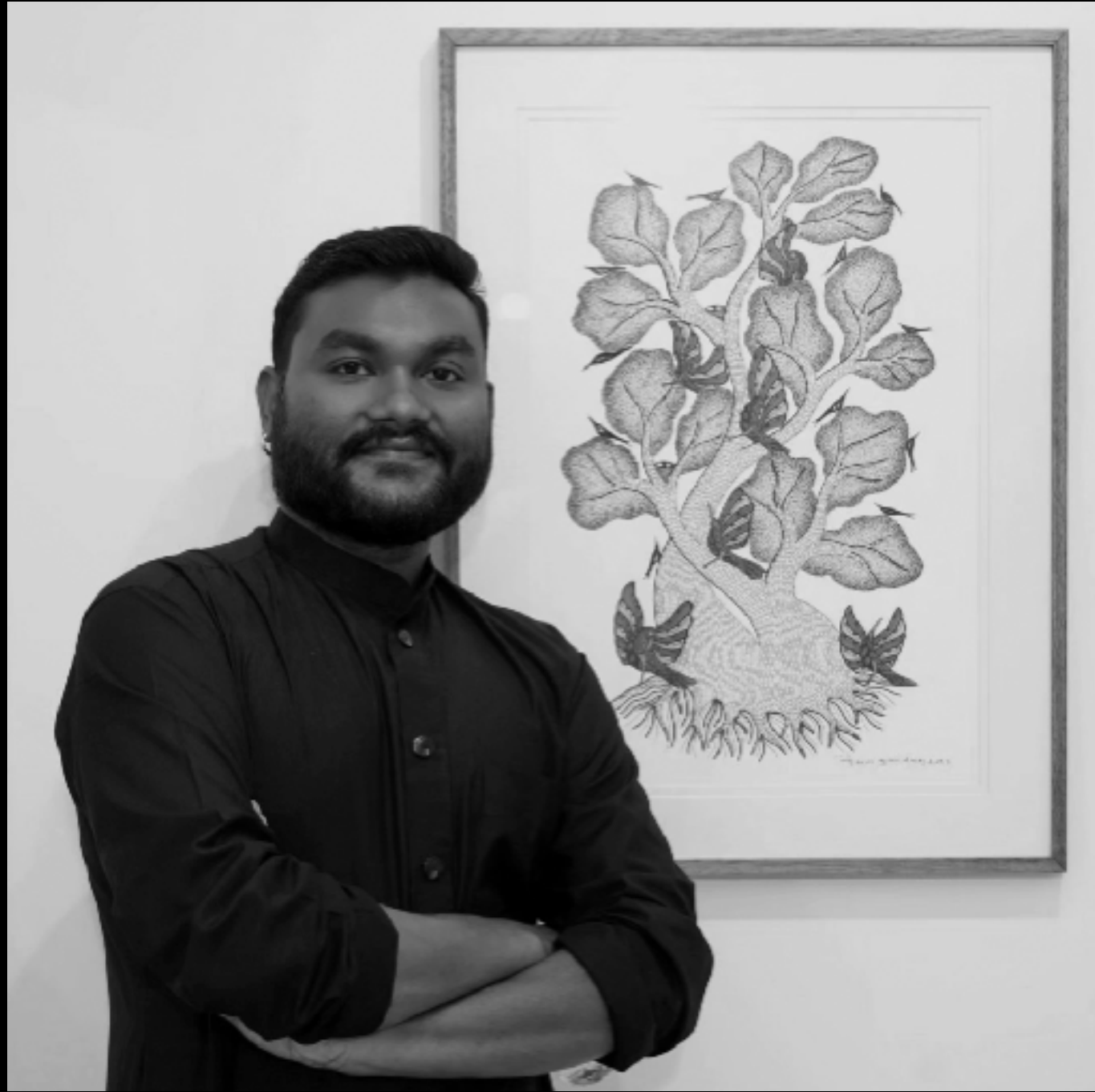
To comprehend the significance of the various milestones from birth to death within the lifespan of a Pardhan Gond. It is essential to delve into the mythology surrounding their deity, Badadev. Exploring the origin of Badadev, the genesis of the earth, and the birth of the Pardhan Gond are fundamental to understanding the cultural and spiritual framework that shapes their beliefs and traditions narrated below.

jangarh singh shyam



Jangarh Singh Shyam, belonged to the Pardhan Gond community of village of Patnagarh. He was a self-taught artist whose creativity stemmed from an innate urge to create. His passion for art was evident from a young age, as he would sketch drawings on the sandy banks of the Narmada river. His artistic talent was discovered by a team from Bharat Bhavan Bhopal headed by Vivek Tembe, who stumbled upon his artwork adorning a hut in Patnagarh. Jangarh was handed paper and brushes and was asked to paint. He made two notable paintings of an Englishman and the Hindu god Hanuman. Recognizing his potential, he was invited to Bhopal to work alongside other artists at Bharat Bhavan. Under the mentorship of Jagdish Swaminathan, the director of Bharat Bhavan, Jangarh developed his own unique style of painting, known as “Jangarh

Kalam,” which gained rapid popularity. Jangarh’s artistic journey soared to international acclaim with prestigious exhibitions in Paris and Tokyo, marking his meteoric rise to fame. Tragically, his promising career came to a sudden end with his suicide in 2001. However, his legacy lives on through his family, whom he mentored in this art form. The artists fervently use paintings as medium to channelise their ancient memories and musical energy. Today, nearly every household in Patnagarh boasts at least one painter, a testament to the enduring influence of art within the community. Jangarh’s mentoring sparked a resurgence of a new generation of Shyams, preserving and perpetuating the rich artistic heritage of the Pardhan Gond culture. His life and work exemplify the profound devotion to art and creativity that permeates the village of Patnagarh.



mayank shyam

artist

Is the son of the celebrated artist Jangarh Singh Shyam. Jangarh has been his mentor and guide in instilling in him a profound understanding of the essence of art. He has imbibed from their father the belief that authentic art is the embodiment of one's innermost feelings, thoughts, and imaginings. Mayank finds inspiration solely through gazing upon their father's creations and immersing himself in the rich tapestry of customs and narratives prevalent within the Gond community:

From the outset, black and white hues have held a special allure for Mayank Shyam. While colors possess inherent vibrancy and beauty, infusing the richness of colors into black is a uniquely gratifying experience, one that he particularly cherishes. He continues to portray images from his imagination, a practice he intends to uphold in the days to come.

Entwined within the very essence of tribal culture is a unique and profound connection to nature—the trees, plants, rivers, mountains, animals, birds, gods, and goddesses—that stretches back through the annals of

time. This intrinsic reverence for the natural world and tribal traditions forms the fundamental basis of Mayank's artistic perspective.

Mayank's work is rich with symbolism, where elements of nature take on profound significance.

In his art, the ocean and rivers are often depicted as fish, symbolizing the vitality and fluidity of water.

The earth is represented by trees, signifying strength, grounding, and the interconnectedness of all living things. Similarly, the sky transforms into birds, evoking

freedom, transcendence, and the boundless expanse of the heavens. Towering trees, in their majesty,

embody the divine presence, connecting the earthly realm with the spiritual. Colorful birds, vibrant and

striking, become symbols of adornment and beauty; akin to jewelry. Meanwhile, the leaves of trees take on

the role of garments, symbolizing protection, shelter. Through these symbolic representations, Mayank's

art reflects not only his deep connection to nature but also his reverence for his tribal heritage, infusing each

painting with layers of meaning and significance.



komal bedi sohal

photographer

Komal Bedi Sohal's life journey reflects a rich tapestry of cultures and experiences, rooted in a gypsy upbringing that instilled in her a deep wanderlust. Despite a successful career in advertising spanning Dubai and Singapore, she felt drawn back to the vibrant streets and untold stories of her native India. Returning to Delhi after twenty-five years abroad, Komal's photography captures the essence of life in every moment and scene, from the bustling streets of Old Delhi to the remote corners of Nagaland. With a focus on storytelling and a keen eye for human emotion, her portfolio encompasses a diverse range of genres, inviting viewers to see the world through her unique perspective, where beauty resides in both the ordinary and extraordinary. For Komal Bedi Sohal, photography isn't just a profession; it's a lifelong odyssey, a journey of discovery, and a testament to the boundless wonders of life itself.



padmaja srivastava

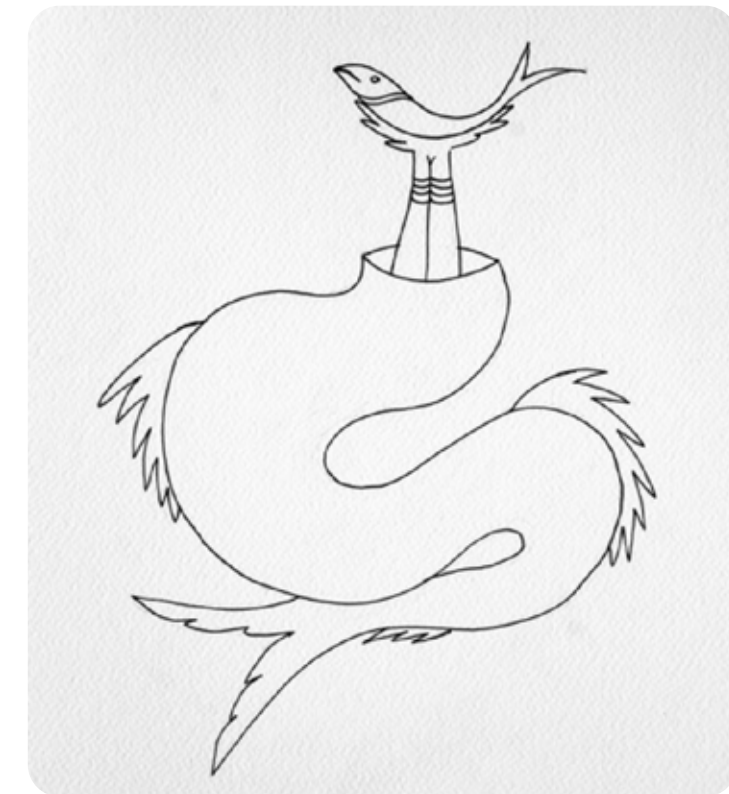
author

Padmaja initiated her journey into art and culture while studying Architecture in Pune. Her encounters with folk artists during her architectural practice ignited a deep passion for advocating for India's tribal communities, especially the Pardhan Gonds of central India. Motivated by this connection, she transitioned to becoming a full-time promoter and activist, dedicating herself to amplifying their voices and preserving their rich cultural heritage.

chapter 1: the beginning: the divine emergence of babadev

The Pardhan Gond community regards water as the essence of life, deeply intertwined with their beliefs and traditions. Even the birth of a fetus occurs within this sacred element. Badadev's birth, a graceful emergence from a single drop of pure water onto a Lotus leaf known as "Kurai Paan," epitomizes the reverence for water within their culture.

This narrative resonates with the belief that Badadev, their cherished deity, is intricately linked with the elements of nature, particularly water, from which all life springs forth. With five heads, four arms, and a turban adorning his head, Badadev wields a spear in his right hand, embodying the divinity intertwined with nature, especially water, the cradle of life.





Mayank Kumar Shyam

EMERGENCE OF BADADEV

Mayank skillfully transforms the fish into the vast expanse of the ocean. Within this narrative, he uses hands to symbolize the lotus leaf (kurai patta), delicately holding a drop of water—another fish. This fish, in its symbolism, embodies a pregnant mother giving birth to a child, which represents the spirit of Badadev. Through this intricate visual storytelling,



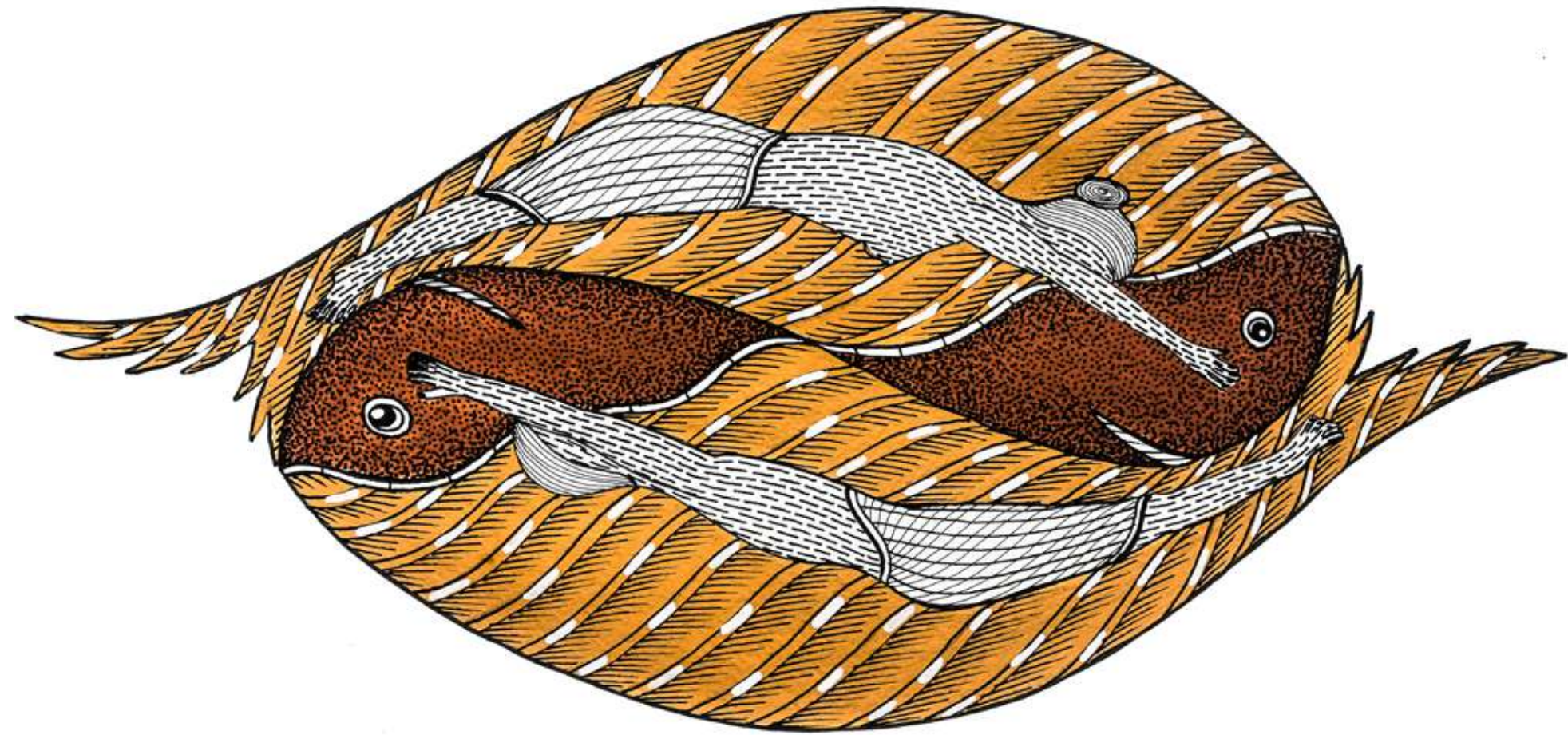


THE ETERNAL WOMB

A fascinating interpretation of the lotus leaves to represent the eternal womb and a shoal of fish to symbolize the amniotic fluid is a creative and symbolic way to depict the concept of birth, fertility, and the nurturing environment of the womb.

ayank kumar shyam





chapter 2: genesis of the earth- a gond myth

According to the legend, the tale of Badadev's creation of the Earth unfolds in a mesmerizing sequence of events. As Badadev bathed, he gathered dirt from his body and sculpted it into a crow, breathing life into his creation. Tasked with the mission of procuring soil to mould the Earth, the crow embarked on a journey spanning 14 centuries. Scouring vast waters in search of soil without success. Exhausted, the crow perched on a twig, which happened to be the leg of Kakramal Chattri, a crab straddling the realms of water and soil.

Intrigued by the crow's presence, Kakramal inquired about its quest. Upon learning of the sacred mission, Kakramal, the crab, took the crow to seek assistance from Kichakmal, the earthworm, and his wife, Kichakmal Rani, the revered guardians of the soil.

Upon hearing the crow's demand, Kichakmal Raja refused and asked the crow to leave. This enraged Kakramal, who seized Kichakmal by the neck and commanded him to release the balls of soil. The grip of the crab was so firm that it left distinct rings on Kichakmal's neck, explaining the earthworm's

characteristic rings.

Upon returning triumphantly with the soil, the crow presented them to Badadev. Who then proceeded to spread the soil evenly on the water's surface, intending to mould the Earth. However, the playful antics of snails disrupted his efforts, annoying Badadev, he twisted the snails and threw them, resulting in their distinctive spiral shells.

Subsequently, Badadev invited Makramal, the spider, to stabilize the Earth that was troubled by unstable waves. As the spider successfully aided in balancing the Earth, Badadev bestowed upon him a human life of a man who he named the Baiga, and assumed the identity of Dharti Putra (son of the earth). The Baiga, a tribal man, was entrusted with the solemn task of anchoring the Earth, thus became the first dweller of the earth. Badadev then meticulously sculpted mountains and valleys, planting Saja trees with his own hair. After creating the humans, Badadev ascended, becoming the boundless spirit of the Universe, his power formless yet omnipresent.



GENESIS OF THE WORLD

Mayank intertwines elements that represent the interconnectedness and union of different realms. The crow symbolizes the air, while the fish embodies the concept of water, and the crab signifies the subterranean world. By merging these diverse elements in his artwork, Mayank ingeniously illustrates their interdependency and the intricate connection between these realms.





chapter 3: origin of the pardhan gond

This narrative unfolds as a divine creation within the Gond belief system. Badadev, the custodian of this nascent world, meticulously populated the realm after fashioning Dharti Putra Baiga and sculpting the Earth itself. The body of Badadev is depicted with five heads and four hands, embodying the vastness of his divine power and presence. Turning attention to the task of creation, he began with the formation of the Gotra, denoting “dynasty” or “lineage,” a term derived from the Sanskrit word “Vansha,” signifying growth and fruition.

Crafting the foundational figures, Badadev initiated the emergence of the Pardhan Gond, the foremost priest, symbolically born from his own mouth. This act bestowed upon the Pardhan the privilege of being the priest and conducting the sacred recitals. Sequentially, he manifested five distinctive Gotras, each springing forth from five different heads and the sacred parts of his divine form, reflecting the sacredness of their origin.

From the majestic dreadlocks atop his head, the Netam Gotra materialized, rooted in the essence of water drawn from the sacred river Ganga.

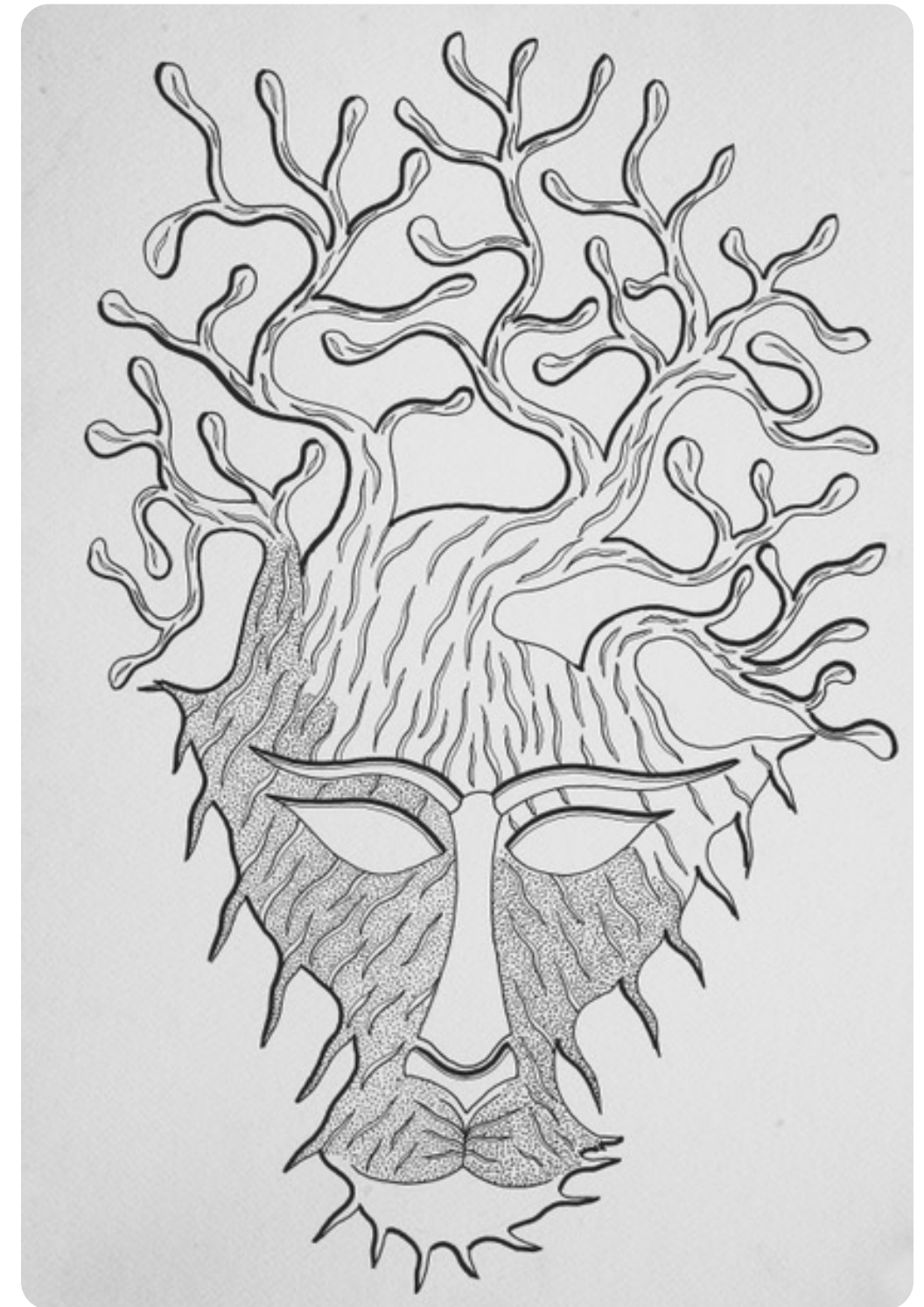
The Dhruve, also called Chandra or Akash Vansh, stemming from his exalted forehead adorned with the moon and sky, emerged in graceful sequence.

Delving deeper into his divine anatomy, Badadev invoked the Maravi Gotra, associated with the Nag Vansh (Snake family), or the Hawa Vansh, symbolizing the element of Air, mirroring the coiled snake encircling his neck.

Continuing this divine creation, he moved down to his waist, forming the Parteti Gotra or Singh Vansh (tiger Vansh), or Agin Vansh (fire Vansh), embodiments of the fierce tiger family and reminiscent of a tiger skin worn as a waistband by the deity.

Descending to his robust thigh, Badadev established the Markam Gotra, the Sandh Vansh (Bull family) or Prithvi Ansh (Fragment of Earth), drawing

parallels between the strength of the bull and the steadfastness of the Earth (Prithvi). To honor these unique creations, distinct settlements called Gads were designated for each Gotra, signifying the sacred and distinct lineage from which they originated. Additionally, to further symbolize the sanctity and individuality of each Gotra, a specific color flag was assigned to represent them. These flags carried significance, serving as visual markers of the Gotra’s identity and heritage within the community.





chapter 4: the melodic saga of the bana



In the tranquil fields, seven brothers of the Gond tribe toiled diligently, preparing for the upcoming sowing season. Suddenly, their gaze fixed upon a figure of extraordinary grandeur, riding a magnificent white horse that traversed their land with regal grace. The allure of his brilliance was irresistible, and the brothers, captivated, gave chase, urging him to halt. Yet, the rider paid them no heed, and continued forward. To their astonishment, he rode directly into the heart of a Saja tree, vanishing from sight.

They knew with certainty that the man was none other than their deity, Badadev. Fearing they had incurred his displeasure, the brothers sought to placate him with offerings—lentils, the sacrifice of a rooster, liquor brewed from the blossoms of the Mahua tree. They implored for forgiveness, requesting

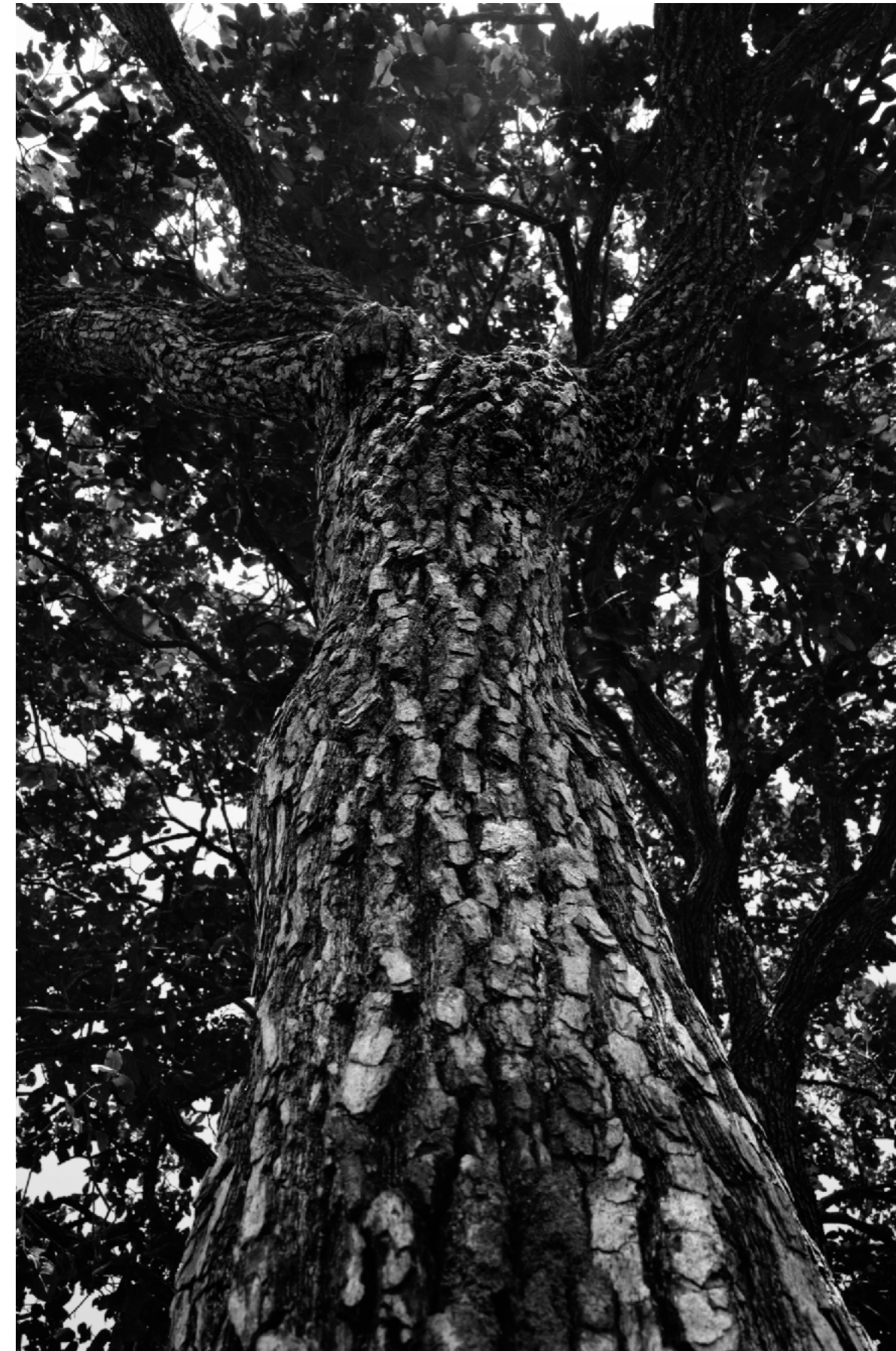
him to emerge from the Saja tree and bestow his blessings. But their entreaties fell on deaf ears.

In a final act of desperation, one brother fashioned a simple musical instrument from the branch of a Khirsani tree. He began to play and sang folk songs extolling the glory of Badadev.

Moved by the melodies of praise and the sweet strains of music, Badadev could not remain concealed. He emerged from the tree, drawn to bless the singing brother. He revealed that anyone who sang his praises in this manner, accompanied by such an instrument, would summon him forth.

Before departing, he instructed the brothers to name this instrument a 'Bana'.

chapter 5: sacred beginnings: rituals and traditions in gond childbirth



In the realm of the Pardhan tribe, parents devoutly invoke the blessings of “Badadev,” the benevolent deity, to safeguard their yet-to-be-born child. They beseech this divine protector to watch over the child within the womb, endowing it with the fortitude needed for a resilient existence. Badadev’s grace extends to the expectant mother, granting her the strength required for this transformative journey. Equally, the midwife, known as “Suveen Dai,” who oversees the birthing process, seeks divine favor from Bada Dev to ensure a safe and prosperous delivery. In the Pardhan tradition, childbirth unfolds within the sanctity of one’s home, under the vigilant care of Suveen Dai, a revered midwife who also assumes the role of a deity. Following the birth of a child, a sacred ritual ensues where the mother’s umbilical cord and placenta are tenderly laid to rest in the earth.



chati baro

The Pardhan Gond community holds the birthplace of a child in profound reverence, considering it a sacred site where rituals symbolize the deep bond between the newborn and the Earth. Central to these customs is the ritual involving the “Budri”, the umbilical cord signifying the innate connection between the infant and the earth. During this ceremony, a part of the umbilical cord which is attached to the mother is gently buried in the earth floor. A fire called ‘Sairi’ is then kindled atop this sacred spot, and its flames are sustained until the “Budri” naturally detaches from the baby’s navel. This fire’s gentle warmth is occasionally utilized to soothe the infant’s stomach, offering comfort during this transitional period.

Following the detachment of the Budri, the Sairi fire is allowed to smoulder and die out. The area is adorned with a decorative chowk, an auspicious square delineated on the floor using Chuhi mitti(white clay).

On the sixth day which the Chati, a lamp is ignited amidst offerings of agarbatti(incense), coconut, and mahua(local liquor)—an homage to Budri Mata, the deity representing the umbilical cord, and Suveen Dai. There’s a belief that allowing an infant to look directly at fire might lead to crossed eyes. This belief often stems from a protective instinct to shield the child’s delicate eyes from potential harm or adverse effects.

To honor Budri Mata and Suveen Dai, a ceremonial offering of dal rice is made to ?. Suveen Dai is showered with gifts such as sarees, money, rice, and

mahua, signifying gratitude and respect for her role in this significant ritual. On the twelfth day, known as Baro, a significant purification ritual occurs. It’s a celebratory occasion where the entire family joins in festivity: Suveen Dai is honored once more with gifts in this joyous gathering. It was believed that if the feet of a newborn were touched with rabbit dung, the child would acquire the ability to run as fast as a rabbit.

The child is given its name on the same day as Baro. In the past names were not merely labels but shields against malevolent spirits or reflections of specific events or occurrences. For example, the celebrated artist Jangarh Singh Shyam was originally named Jangan Singh Shyam. His name was influenced by the presence of the census(Jangana means count of population) during his birth, reflecting the customary practice of naming a child based on noteworthy events or circumstances surrounding their arrival into the world. For instance, a girl born on a Wednesday might be named Budhwariya, derived from “Budhwar,” signifying Wednesday in Hindi. Similarly, if the father was partaking in cannabis during the birthing process, the child might endearingly be named Ganja, a term that signifies cannabis. Similarly, a baby girl born with scanty hair might be lovingly called Chandia, drawing a poetic comparison to the baldness akin to the moon. These names, colorful and expressive, intricately weave the child’s identity into the fabric of familial narratives and cultural quirks within the Gond community.



suveen dai's blessing: larka chikhai

Cradle Song

Hiroli hiroli wo dai so jay so Jay wo

Kon mare kon gari de wo ladhaitin tola nindi awe wo

Kahe ka Rotas dai kahe ka Rothas wo

Ninduli ka Rotas bachhiya ninduli ka Rotas Wo

Ninduli pathoi de wo Ramhula ninduli pathoi de woo Hi toli, hi toli,



The mother sings to the infant “Sleep O sleep who would beat you, who would scold you?

My darling, let sleep come to you ‘Why are you crying, mother, why are you crying? For his dear little sleep my calf is crying. Let Ramhula bring him his dear little sleep.

**Ramhula is the name of an old Ahir(Cowherds) grandmother, famous for singing babies to sleep. The word ‘mother’ in the song is addressed to the child. This is a common practice, even a grown-up man may be addressed as mother by an old woman.*

At the pivotal juncture of a six-month-old infant’s journey, a significant ceremony called the Larka Chikhai unfolds—a ritual introducing the child to

solid nourishment. The infant experiences the first morsel of food. Central to this occasion is the veneration of Suveen Dai, the esteemed midwife, reaffirming her crucial role in nurturing both child and mother. Seated in a circle, the infant on the mother’s lap, surrounded by family women and Suveen Dai, five pipal leaves cradle sweet kheer (rice porridge), symbolizing the five elements of nature. Suveen Dai is honored with the privilege of feeding the child first, followed by the parents and other women. Tokens of gratitude are bestowed upon the mother, child, and Suveen Dai, accompanied by offerings of mahua. This ritual culminates in harmonious melodies of Karma songs and joyful communal dances.

SUVEEN DAIS BLESSING

At its center, an exquisite portrayal captures Suveen Dai embodying a nurturing essence—a bird tenderly feeding its young.

This imagery evokes a parallel with the cherished tradition of the Gonds, who utilize the delicate pipal leaf as a vessel for a newborn's first taste of solid nourishment.

Beneath the graceful figure of a woman, a depiction of fish symbolizes the essence of water—a life-giving force that sustains existence. This woman, an embodiment of Mother Earth herself, stands as a testament to fertility and abundance. Behind her, an ancient tree stretches its boughs, offering sanctuary to the nurturing bird, signifying the intricate interdependence between life forms and their habitats. The painting intricately weaves together these symbols, inviting contemplation on the interconnectedness of nature, the sanctity of nurturing practices, and the profound ties that bind cultural traditions with the natural world.



Suveen Dai



chapter 6: adolescence

In the past, young boys between twelve and fifteen sought wisdom from revered figures known as “Guniya,” “Panda,” and “Vaid” within the Gond community. In Pardhan shamanism, there isn’t a concept of inherited professions. For example a person doesn’t need to be born into a Gunia family to become a Gunia. These shamans each possessed distinct expertise, offering various methods of problem-solving. There are about 6 types of Gunias each specializing in different methods to divination.

Among them, the Panda stood out as a knowledgeable figure, well-versed with the Gond deities and spirits. It is rumored that he is friendly with the spirits or ghosts that dwell in the area.

The role of these shamans extended beyond advice, involving mediation between people and the divine, suggesting ways to honor and appease specific gods. Pandas were also sought for protection against negative influences, safeguarding individuals, even newborns, with rituals and blessings. The Vaid, on the other hand, specialized in natural remedies and medicinal practices. Their teachings were passed down orally, preserving invaluable knowledge across generations.

In the Pardhan world of Panda-Gunias, the physical prerequisites for the

job are unconventionally amusing. Firstly, they’ve got to be darker than a moonless night, as if they’re fair and charming, they might unintentionally attract the romantic interest of their young patients. Combining medical advice with flirtatious behavior could potentially pose challenges for maintaining a professional and ethical business environment

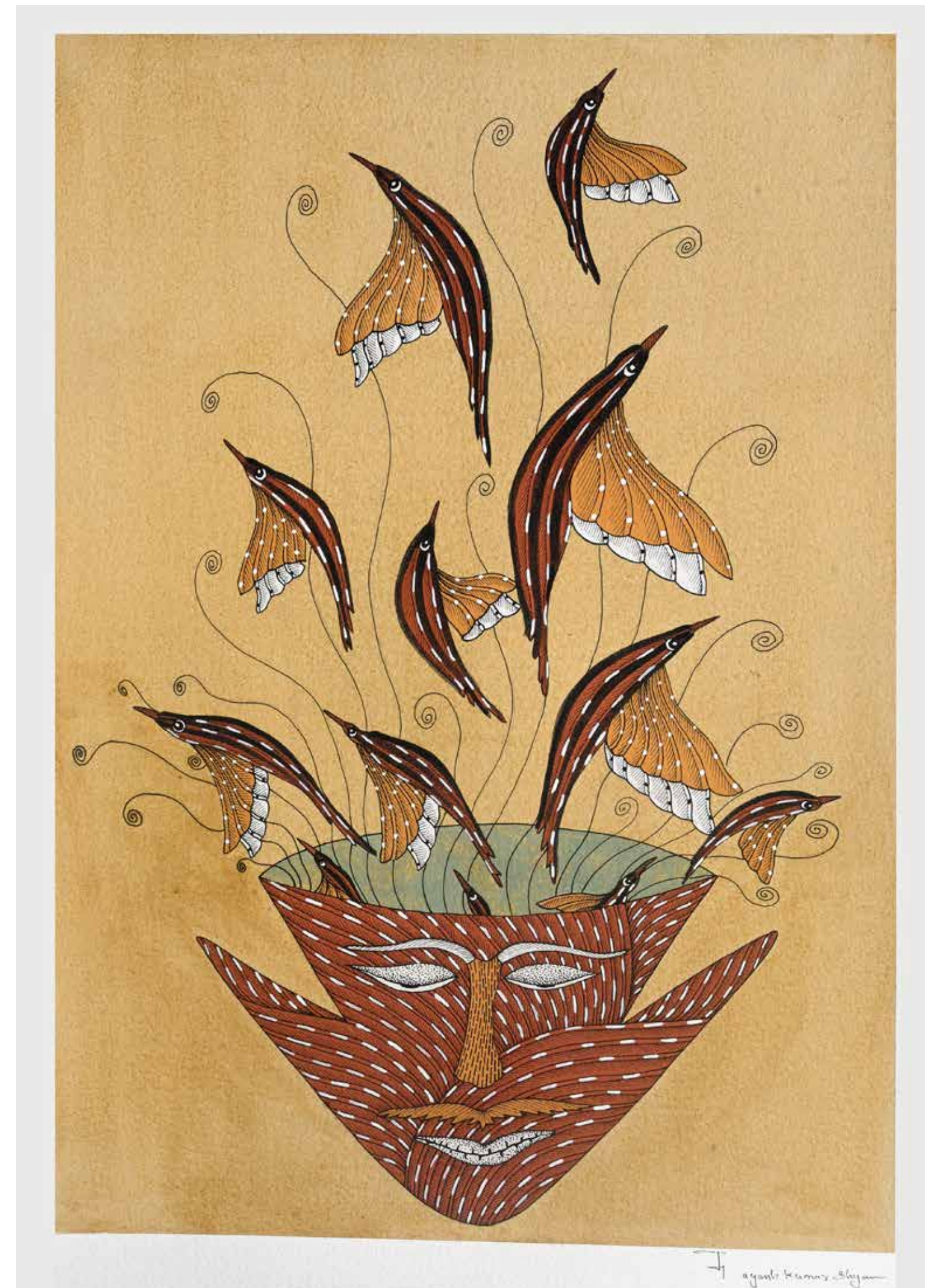
The Panda-Gunias are also expected to look sneaky “thief-like”. Well, they’re supposed to be in the business of swindling the gods, talking the gods into accepting a bargain for a cheaper deal—a bit like trading a fake watch for a treasure chest.

Personality-wise, they’ve gotta be as talkative as a parrot and as sly as a fox to convince the gods and patients. The cross-eyed Panda-Gunias are the real heroes in this mystical world, the cleverer and cross-eyed they are, the more they slay in the shaman game

These shamans guided disciples in invoking deities like Devgan Guru, Nindhhan Guru, and Murha Kavar, seeking blessings to alleviate community hardships. Under Guniya and Panda guidance, disciples learned shamanism’s profound healing methods, forming the community’s spiritual and medicinal foundation, preserving their cultural heritage.

ADOLESCENCE

Mayank intertwines elements that represent the interconnectedness and union of different realms. The crow symbolizes the air, while the fish embodies the concept of water, and the crab signifies the subterranean world. By merging these diverse elements in his artwork, Mayank ingeniously illustrates their interdependency and the intricate connection between these realms.





chapter 7: entwined destinies: the symphony of marriage

Child marriages were prevalent in the past, in present times these are almost rare.

“Dudh Lotana” is a traditional custom amongst the Pardhan Gonds where marriages between cousins, specifically between the maternal uncle’s daughter or the boy’s mother’s brother’s daughter, are common. This practice aimed to strengthen familial ties and maintain relationships between extended family members.

The proposal for marriage is initiated by the boy’s parents and sent to the girl’s parents without necessarily involving the direct consent of the boy and the girl. This is reflective of traditional arranged marriages where the families take the lead in arranging the union.

However, it’s essential to note that these practices were more prevalent in the past and may still persist in some communities with deeply rooted traditions. In modern times, there’s a global shift toward individual autonomy; especially concerning decisions about marriage and relationships. There’s a greater emphasis on consent, personal choice, and individual agency in choosing life partners.

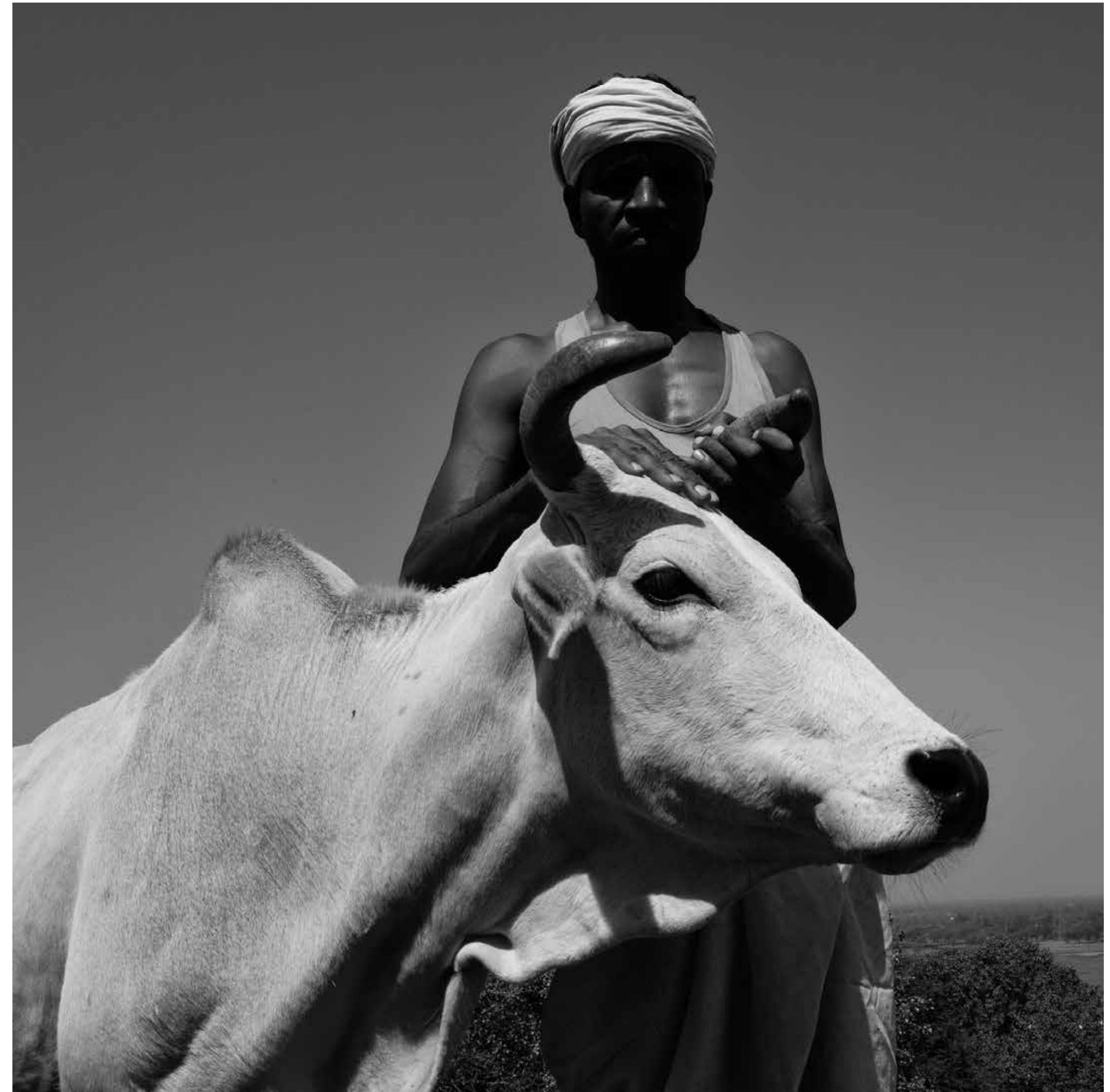


THE SYMPHONY
OF MARRIAGE

lamasanai

It's common for certain customs and traditions, like Lamasanai, to arise in circumstances where economic factors play a significant role. In situations where the boy's family is facing financial challenges or poverty, these traditions serve as a way to ensure that the prospective groom is capable of providing for the bride and her family after marriage..

This custom involves a period before marriage where the boy demonstrates his readiness and ability to support a family. During Lamasanai, the boy lives with the girl's family and takes on various responsibilities, such as fieldwork, woodcutting, cattle herding, and other daily chores. This period could span around three years and is a time for the boy to showcase his qualities—intelligence, hard work, perseverance, and ability to shoulder familial responsibilities. The expectation is for the boy to prove his “manhood” by starting a family through procreation, which is seen as a demonstration of his readiness and capability to support and contribute to the girl's family. Before marriage, the boy seeks blessings from Marra Dev, asking for virility and strength.





chapter 7: quest for domestic prosperity

After marriage, a Pardhan Gond boy takes on the responsibility of providing for his spouse and potential children. In their agrarian lifestyle, the community reveres numerous deities associated with agriculture, weather, and water, attributing to their roles in ensuring bountiful harvests and overall prosperity. These gods and goddesses hold significant importance in the livelihoods of the community, particularly those heavily dependent on agriculture. The following deities are worshipped for agrarian prosperity

Dharti Mata Mother earth

Venerated for their connection to the earth and soil. These deities are believed to influence soil fertility and its ability to support healthy plant life.

Megh Raja and Megh Rani

Worshiped to bring timely and sufficient rainfall for crops to grow. Their blessings are crucial for healthy vegetation and a successful harvest.

Jal Raja Jal Rani water

Worshiped to ensure a constant and reliable water supply for irrigation and sustenance. They are guardians of rivers, lakes, and other water sources critical for agriculture.

Pavan Dasher Wind god

He is acknowledged for his role in pollination and dispersing seeds. A favorable breeze aids in the natural processes that contribute to a successful crop yield.

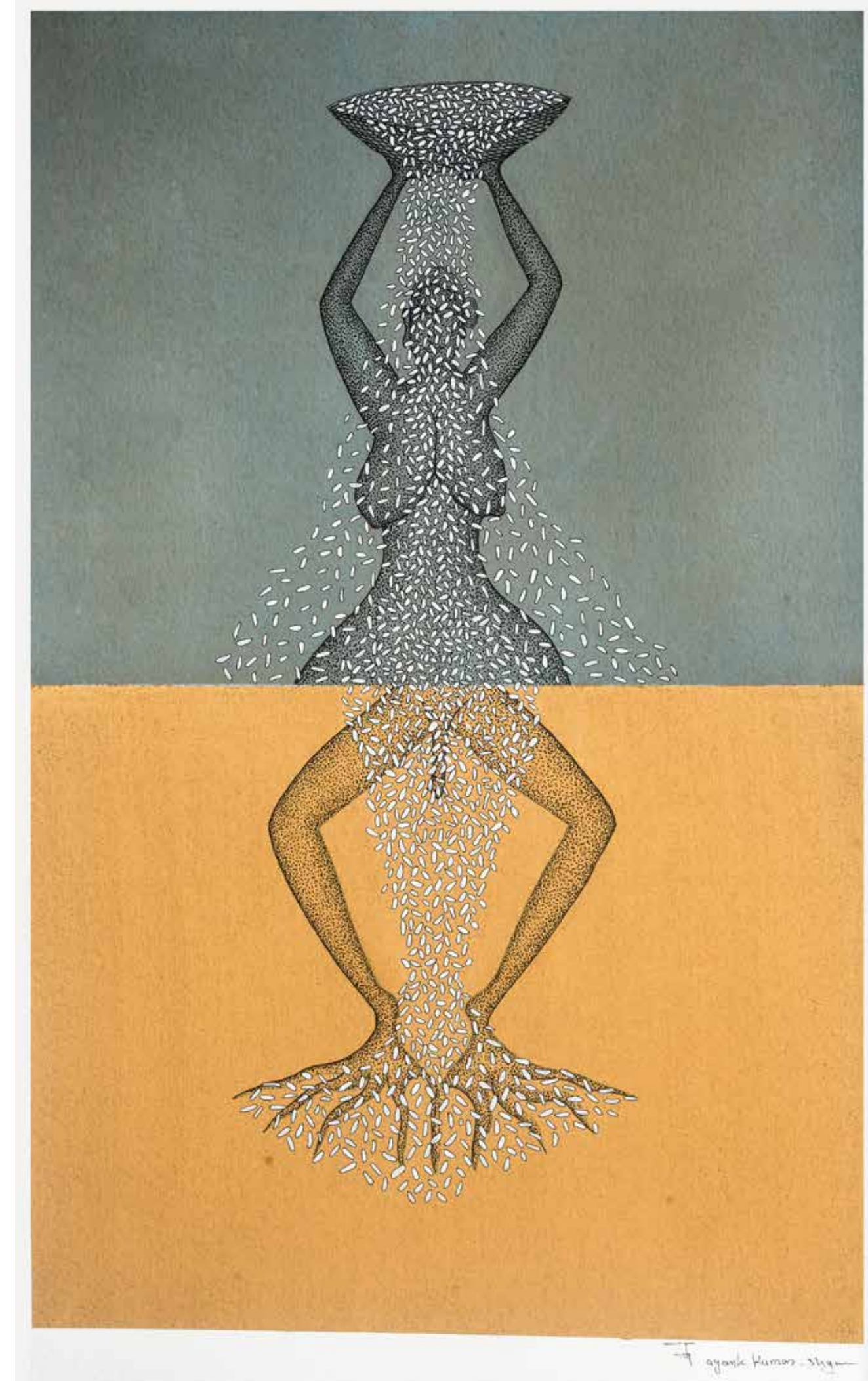
Naga Baiga and Baigin

These “first beings of the earth” hold immense significance as they are believed to be the pioneers of agriculture. Their act of sowing the first crops symbolizes the beginning of organized cultivation and the transition from a nomadic lifestyle to settled farming communities. These beings are revered and worshiped for their pivotal role in providing sustenance and shaping the course of human civilization.

The rituals of “Bidri” and “Navakhana” hold great significance in the agrarian life of the Pardhan Gond community. “Bidri” is a sacred ceremony conducted to invoke the blessings of the gods of seeds, ensuring a prosperous and abundant crop yield. This ritual is typically performed shortly before the onset of the monsoon season.

NANGA BAIGA AND BAIGIN

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bidri

In the village of Patangarh, men gather at the revered altar of Thakur Dev to perform this ritual. Each individual brings a basket filled with grains, which will be offered to Thakur Dev. Every person puts a handful of grain from their baskets into a large common basket. The ceremonial process involves creating a square using white lime, within which all the grains from basket are emptied out in a heap. An oil lamp and agarbatti (incense) are lit to create a spiritually charged atmosphere. Additionally, offerings of Mahua and coconut are presented

A significant aspect of the “Bidri” ritual involves the offering of three chicks. The chicks are held atop the mound and allowed to feed on the grain. As soon as they consume the grain, it is interpreted as a sign of Divine appeasement. Among these, two are female hens and one is a rooster. The hens are then sacrificed, and their blood is sprinkled over the gathered grains, symbolizing vitality and growth. The head of the rooster is buried deep in the mound of grain until it gently passes away, signifying a form of transcendence.

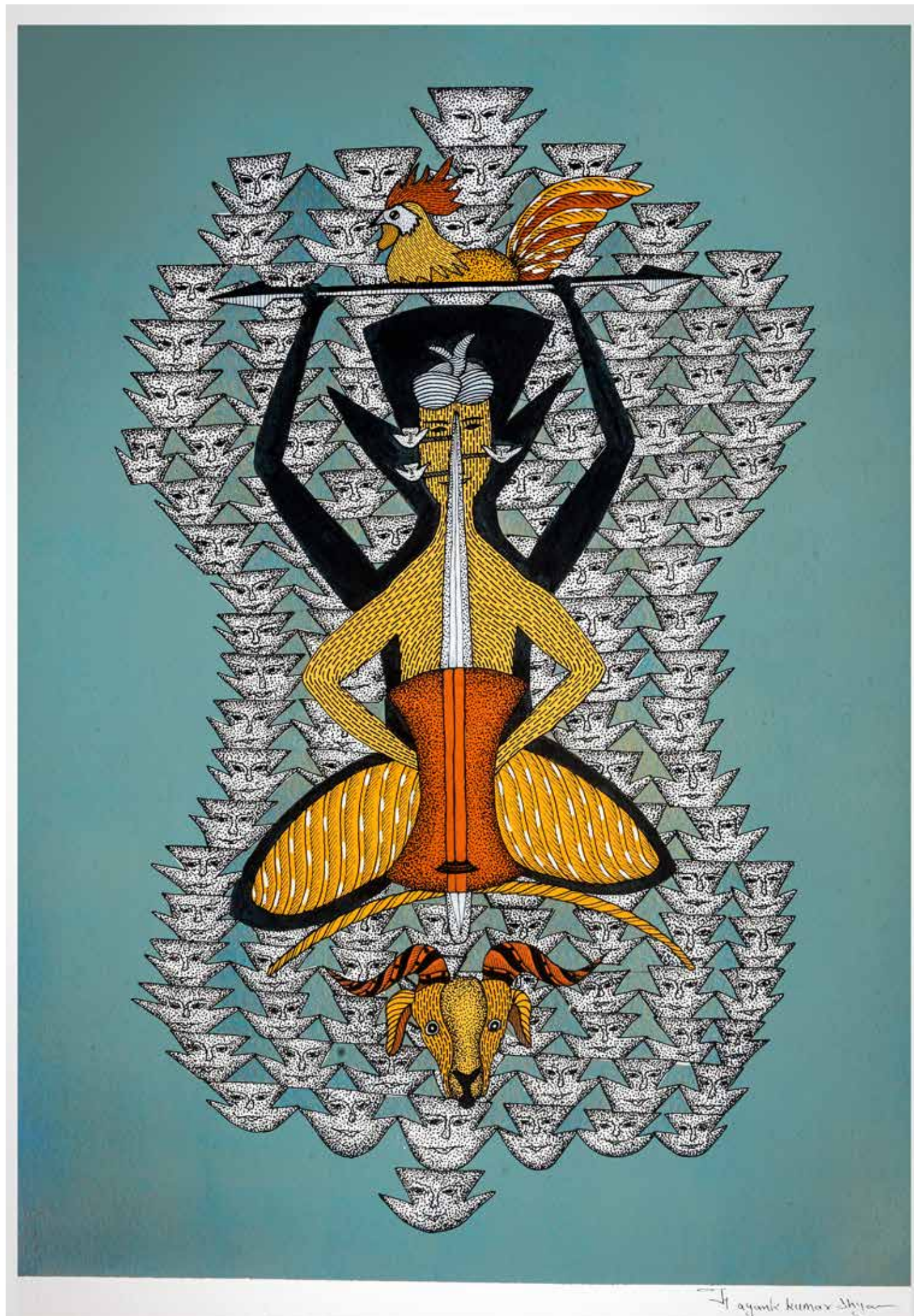
Following the Bidri ceremony, the next step is to plow the land near the shrine of Thakur Dev. A branch from a tree known as Dhanbahar is planted in the earth, symbolizing the deity’s presence. Men in the community come together to plow the land, invoking the Naga Baga and Naga Bagin before turning the soil and scattering seeds for the upcoming crops.

Two of the villagers take on the role of the bullocks, with the plough resting on their backs. The others follow them, and some scatter the seeds for the crops that will grow. This collective effort signifies the beginning of the agricultural cycle, a vital phase in the life of the Pardhan Gond community.

As the ritual concludes, each person takes a portion of the grains from the mound. These grains will be later combined with their own seeds and sowed during the monsoon season.

These rituals are deeply rooted in the Pardhan Gond community’s agricultural traditions, symbolizing their reverence for the natural forces that govern the growth of crops.





navakhana

The 'Navakhana' ritual holds immense sanctity within the Gond community. Once a year, during this sacred ceremony, the freshly harvested rice grains take center stage as they are ceremoniously offered to the numerous gods and goddesses. This ritual also serves as a profound homage to the revered ancestors and divine entities. Through Navakhana, the Gond community honors their lineage, their guardians, and the divine entities, expressing profound appreciation for the blessings bestowed upon them.

During this ceremony the newly harvested cooked rice and urad dal, are meticulously prepared, and spread out on Shaja tree leaves. These offerings are presented to a pantheon of deities as a gesture of profound reverence and gratitude. Other than the primary offering of rice and lentils, additional items such as rice chaff, coconut, mahua, a specialized mixture, turmeric oil, incense, and tender stems of young rice plants are offered.

During this sacred rite, various deities are invoked, each with their unique significance:

Baharvasi Dev: The protector of children

Durgamata: Guardian of crops and fields

Charvaha and Charvahin: Guardian of the cattle

Dehri Dukka: Safeguards against evil spirits entering the door

Ghashrimata: Guardian of the house

Shri Badavan Dev and Maruka Devi: Bestowers of prosperity and financial well-being

Badadev: The creator of all other deities

The meticulous observance of these ceremonies reflects the community's belief in the sacredness of the land and their unwavering gratitude towards the gods of seeds for their sustenance and prosperity.

first pooja pic



PARDHAN GOND'S JOURNEY FROM BIRTH TO DEATH

Author: Padmaja Srivastava | Artist : Mayank Shyam | Photographer: Komal Bedi Sohal

