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VERBOS INCENDIUM

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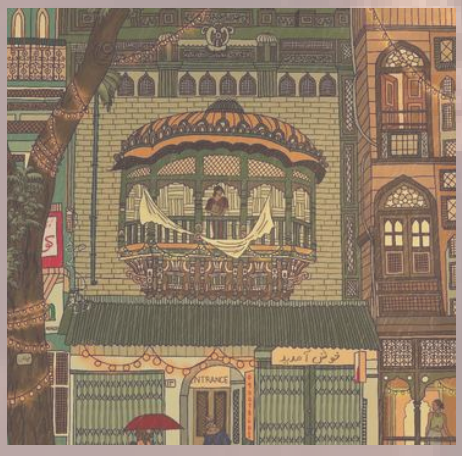

ISSUE 13 | 2024-25

NATIVE NARRATIVES

TIMELESS INDIGENOUS TALES

POETRY| PROSE| ARTWORK

And so much more

NOTE FROM

PRINCIPAL'S DESK

To say that publishing a magazine requires a massive amount of work would be an understatement. The laborious process of creation entails choosing like-minded people, deliberating with them to make complex decisions, repeatedly drafting, revising, amending and altering. This hardly scratches the surface of the effort put in by the Verbos Incendium editing staff.

PROF. (DR)
HARPREET KAUR

The thirteenth issue of Verbos Incendium, is a testament to this dedication and passion. With the theme of Indigenous Culture and Folklore, this issue seeks to illuminate the rich oral traditions, myths, and histories that have shaped communities for generations. The editorial team has meticulously curated poetry, prose, essays, and artwork that celebrate Indigenous voices, offering readers a glimpse into narratives that are often overlooked or misrepresented.

Countless hours have been spent ensuring that each piece respects and honors the cultures it represents, balancing authenticity with creative expression. From the initial brainstorming sessions to the final layout adjustments, the process has been one of learning, collaboration, and a deep commitment to storytelling.

NOTE FROM
TEACHER-IN-CHARGE

I extend my heartiest congratulations to the editorial team of ***Verbos Incendium*** for their unwavering commitment to academic and literary excellence. Each issue of this magazine stands as a testament to rigorous inquiry, intellectual curiosity, and the power of the written word. It is a pleasure to see ***Verbos*** evolve into a space that not only showcases scholarship but also fosters critical conversations. This edition's focus on Indigenous literatures is both timely and necessary. In an era of rapid globalization, where dominant narratives often overshadow marginalized voices, indigenous literatures serve as a crucial counterpoint.

They remind us that storytelling is not merely an artistic pursuit but a means of cultural survival, resistance, and self-definition. Indigenous narratives, whether oral or written, carry the histories, cosmologies, and epistemologies of their people, offering perspectives that challenge conventional literary frameworks.

Furthermore, indigenous storytelling defies rigid literary classifications. Oral traditions, song cycles, petroglyphs, performance, all merge to form a dynamic, evolving body of work. This adaptability underscores the resilience of indigenous cultures, which have endured centuries of colonial oppression yet continue to thrive through their storytelling traditions. The resurgence of indigenous authors in global literary spaces is a testament to this resilience, as they reclaim their narratives and assert their identities in languages that were once weaponized against them.

The study of Indigenous Literatures also compels us to rethink the ethics of representation. Who gets to tell these stories? How do we engage with them without appropriating or distorting their essence? As scholars and readers, our role is not just to consume these texts but to approach them with sensitivity, respect, and an awareness of historical contexts. It is imperative that we listen to indigenous voices on their own terms, acknowledging their authority over their own narratives.

In academic spaces, Indigenous Literatures challenge the Eurocentric canon and demand a more inclusive curriculum. Recognizing these literatures is not an act of tokenism but an essential step toward decolonizing knowledge systems. By engaging with indigenous texts, we move beyond mere acknowledgment of diversity to an actual appreciation of different ways of knowing and being.

Verbos Incendium has taken a commendable step in foregrounding this discourse, offering a platform for voices that have long been relegated to the margins. As readers, let us approach this edition with an open mind and a willingness to learn—not just about Indigenous Literatures, but from them. Their stories are not relics of the past; they are vibrant, living testimonies to cultural endurance, creative brilliance, and the unyielding spirit of resistance.

Once again, congratulations to the editorial team for this remarkable endeavor. May this issue inspire thoughtful engagement, critical inquiry, and, most importantly, a renewed respect for the power of indigenous storytelling.

DR. MANISHA MATHUR

NOTE FROM FACULTY EDITOR

MS. AMANPREET KAUR

The current issue of ***Verbos Incendium*** was conceived more like a project than a magazine. While working on this edition, during multiple brainstorming sessions, we collectively decided to go back to our roots, dig deeper into the stories, legends that have passed down to us through various cultural and familial mediations.

It became an exercise in developing a curious ear to openly absorb and analyze the many tales that surround us, whether in the form of folk songs, the art of wood carving, a tattoo on our bodies, a beloved fabric that we wear or a place we frequented in childhood. Stories are the lifeblood of culture, passed down through generations, shaping identities and preserving histories to delve into the rich and vibrant world of Indigenous culture and folklore—an enduring testament to the wisdom, resilience and artistic brilliance of communities whose voices have long echoed through time.

Indigenous folklore is more than myth and legend; it is a bridge to ancestral knowledge, a reflection of deep spiritual connections with the land and a repository of moral and philosophical truths. From trickster tales and creation stories to songs of resistance and survival, these narratives invite us to listen, learn and honor the traditions that continue to thrive despite centuries of change.

As editors and storytellers, our role is not just to document but to amplify these voices with respect and authenticity. This edition is a celebration of cultural heritage and a call to recognize the significance of Indigenous perspectives in shaping our collective human experience. It was a challenge that I gave to my team, hoping to inculcate a genuine reciprocity, curiosity and most importantly, to have plagiarism and AI free content. To my satisfaction and utmost delight, the tireless effort and enthusiasm of students resulted in the 13th edition of ***Verbos Incendium.***

May these pages inspire you to seek wisdom in old stories, to acknowledge the guardians of these traditions and to carry forward the fire of storytelling with reverence and responsibility.

Happy Reading!

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF, FACULTY

NOTE FROM STUDENT EDITOR

AMITOZ KAUR

Cathartic. That's the first word that lingers on my mind when I think of this journey—a journey that began with uncertainty and grew into something deeply transformative. When I first embraced the role of Editor-in-Chief of ***Verbos Incendium***, I was caught between the thrill of the unknown and the weight of responsibility.

To call it enthralling yet terrifying would barely scratch the surface. But, like all things that demand your soul, this magazine became more than a project—it became a part of me, a creation I am proud to have nurtured like a child finding its first steps in the world.

The vision began with a simple, almost fragile idea: to resurrect the silenced voices of forgotten stories, to cradle repressed narratives in a world often too loud to listen. Growing up, I was surrounded by stories—spoken, whispered, imagined—and they left imprints on my soul. This issue is my humble attempt to take your hand and lead you down the same memory lane that shaped me. Because storytelling is an act of universality—it binds us together—but it is also deeply personal, each tale etched in its own, distinct way.

Of course, no story is told alone. While I could attempt to list the names of those who stood beside me, who gave their time, their hearts, and their dreams to this magazine, words might fail to do justice to their contributions. They know who they are, and they know what they mean to me. To them, I offer not just my gratitude but a part of this journey itself—a shared triumph born from a shared vision.

As you turn these pages, I hope you feel the warmth of familiarity, the gentle tug of memory, and perhaps even the spark of discovery. May this issue remind you of your roots, your home, and the stories that built you. Because, in the end, there is no better way to define home than through the tales we hold close to our hearts—our own stories, retold and relived.

EDITOR- IN- CHIEF, STUDENT

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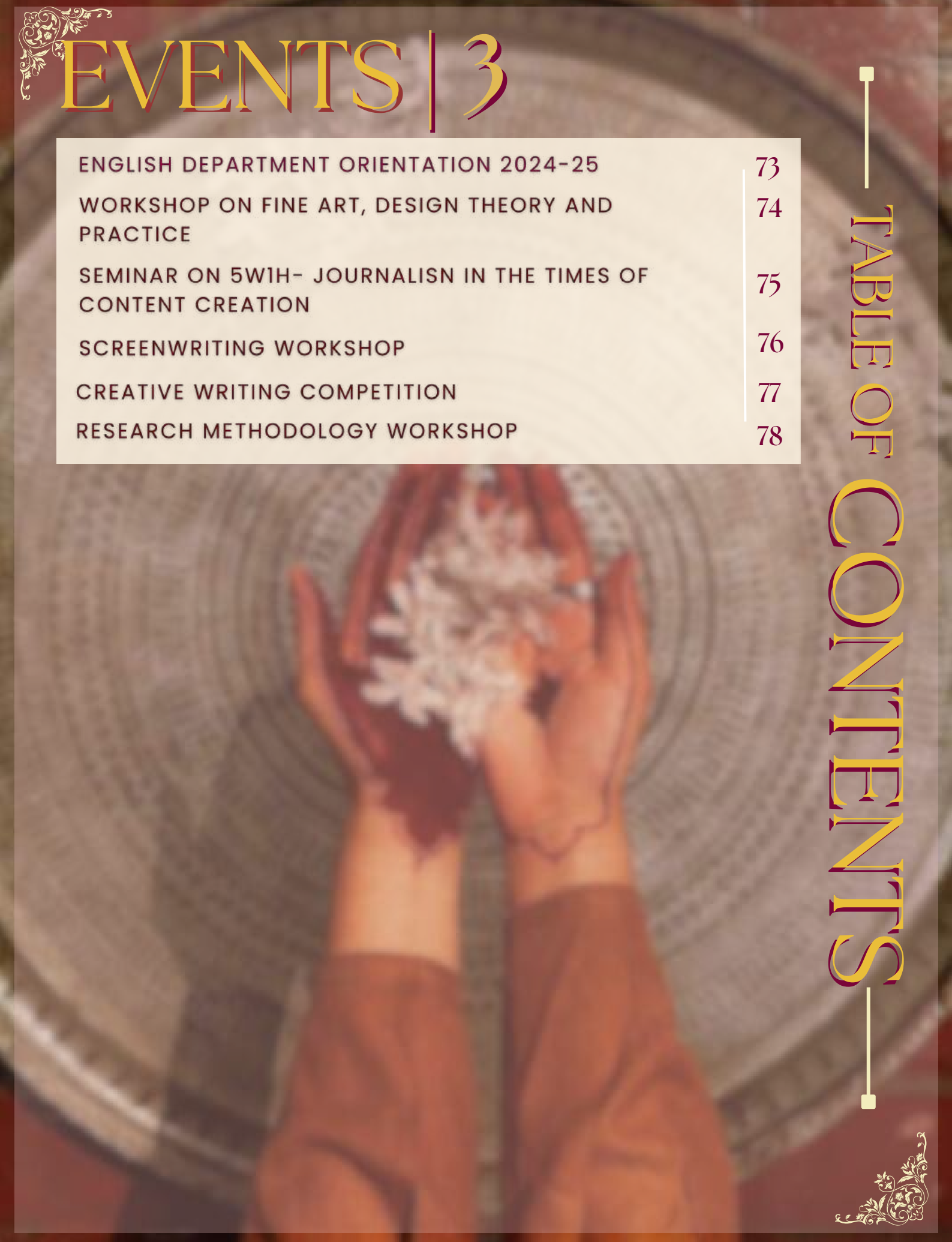

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A TIMELESS CRAFT:

THE ART OF WOOD CARVING

KAVYA DHAWAN (YEAR 3)

Wood carving is a deeply rooted art form in India, known for its intricate designs and skilled craftsmanship. Its origins can be traced back to the Mauryan and Gupta periods, with many hand carved figurines and other artistry can be found in temples, royal palaces and ancestral homes. During the reign of the Gupta Empire and subsequent dynasties, wood carving flourished and this period came to be known as the 'Golden Age of Wood Carving'. Temples particularly in regions like Odisha, Rajasthan, and Karnataka, became showcases of intricate wood carvings. They are home to many of the timeless pieces of this era, featuring detailed carvings depicting celestial beings, divine narratives, and intricate floral motifs. Wood carvings adorned not only religious structures but also royal palaces and homes of the elite

*(**Fig 1:** Wood carving, originated during the Mauryan and Gupta periods)*

One of the most prominent and celebrated traditions in Indian wood carving is the art of Kashmiri wood carving, a craft that has flourished for centuries in the picturesque region of Kashmir. This art form not only reflects the region's rich cultural history but also has a significant impact on Indian culture and artistic heritage.

A TIMELESS CRAFT:

THE ART OF WOOD CARVING

KAVYA DHAWAN (YEAR 3)

Kashmiri wood carving has its origins in the 16th century during the Mughal era, when the rulers introduced various art forms to the region. The Mughals, who were patrons of fine arts, played a crucial role in the development of wood carving in Kashmir. The craft reached its prime during the 18th and 19th centuries, when Kashmiri artisans began to produce intricate wooden masterpieces. They developed a distinct style that combined Persian, Mughal, and indigenous Kashmiri influences.

The region's abundant forests provided an ample supply of high-quality wood, especially walnut, which became the preferred material for carving. Walnut wood, prized for its durability, rich texture, and natural colour, allowed artisans to carve exquisite designs that were both functional and aesthetically pleasing.

Kashmiri wood carving is characterised by its intricate patterns, fine detailing, and elaborate motifs. Common themes in these carvings include floral designs, arabesques, geometric patterns, and depictions of nature, such as birds, animals, and trees. These carvings serve as a living record of the culture and beliefs of the inhabitants of that region. They display their love for nature, devotion to religion and embody the spirit and passion which guides artists.

(***Fig 2:*** *Kashmiri wood craving, a craft that has flourished for centuries*)

The craftsmanship can also be seen in a wide range of objects, from furniture like tables, chairs, and cabinets to everyday items such as trays, boxes, and doors. The carving process itself is a labour-intensive one. Artisans use chisels and gouges to meticulously carve the wood, often spending weeks or even months on a single piece. The skill required for this craft is passed down through generations, with apprentices learning the techniques from master carvers. This painstaking process brings to fruition the most unique and mesmerising works. The carver breathes their life and soul into their work.

A TIMELESS CRAFT:

THE ART OF WOOD CARVING

KAVYA DHAWAN (YEAR 3)

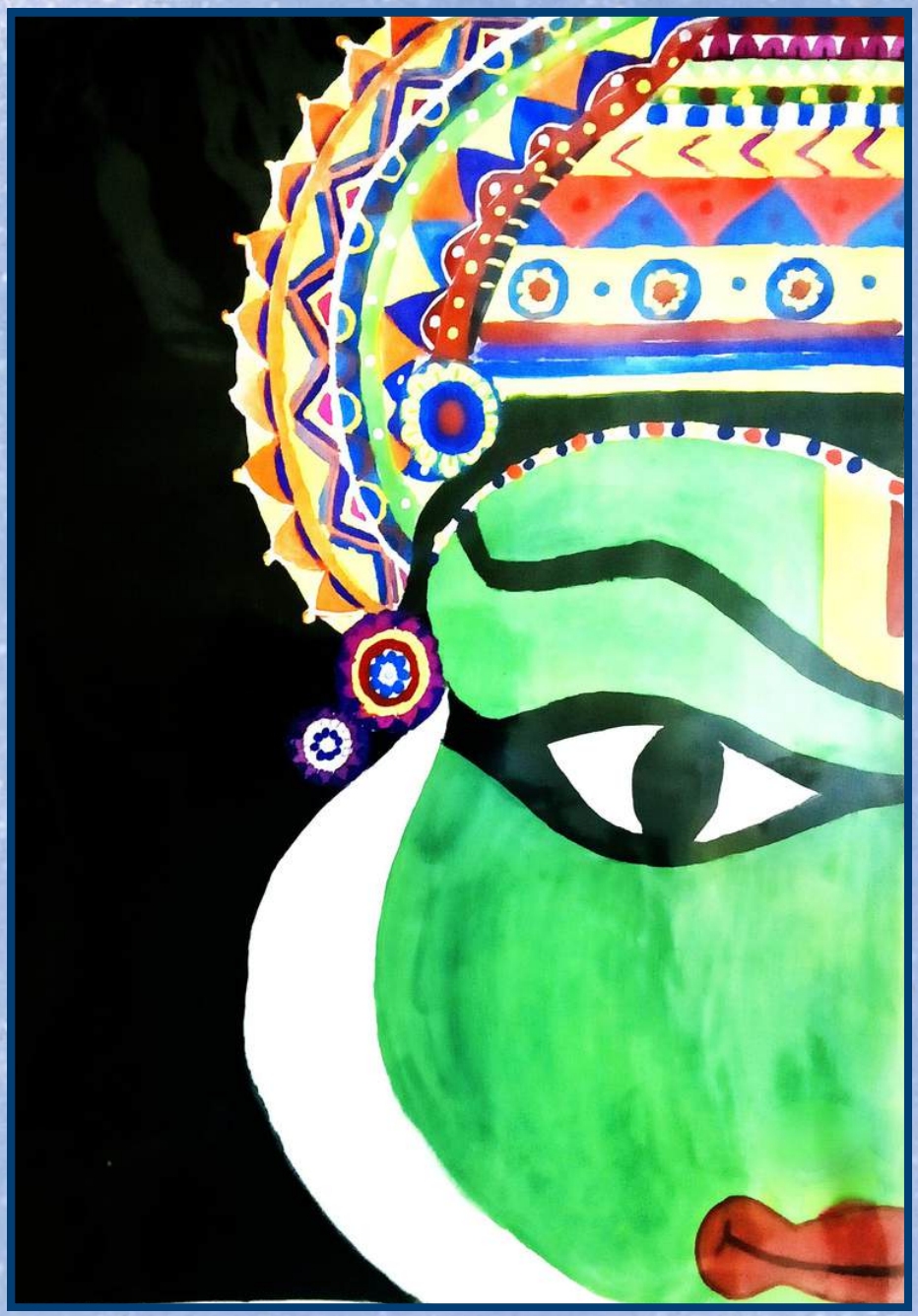
*(**Fig 3:** Kashmiri wood carving include floral and animal, birds, trees as prominent designs)*

The global impact of Kashmiri wood carving is also significant. The intricate designs and unique artistry have made Kashmiri wood products highly sought after in international markets. During the colonial period, Kashmiri wood carvings were introduced to European collectors and the global art community, further enhancing the prestige of the craft. Today, these carvings continue to be popular among collectors and art enthusiasts worldwide.

One of the reasons I chose to focus on Kashmiri wood carving was because of an article about Ghulam Nabi Dar, a wood carver from Jammu and Kashmir, who was recently awarded the Padma Shri for his life-long work. His legacy, passion and exquisite art style is inspiring; especially in a world where traditional arts are not as recognised as they used to be. Wood carving is a timeless craft that reflects the artistic richness and cultural heritage of India. Its impact on Indian culture is profound, serving as a reminder of the craftsmanship, beauty, and diversity that define the nation's artistic legacy. As the craft continues to evolve, it remains a testament to the enduring power of tradition and the creative spirit of artists

*(**Fig4:** Ghulam Nabi Dar, a wood craver from Jammu and Kashmir, who was recently awarded the Padma Shri for his life-long work)*

ARTWORK



EXPRESSIONS IN GREEN
NARRATING STORIES UNSEEN

GURLEEN KAUR

YEAR 2

The Artwork showcases a vibrant representation of a Kathakali costume, a traditional dance from Kerala, India. This art form is known for it's elaborate makeup, colourful costumes, and expressive facial movements. The green face symbolises a heroic character, often portraying gods or noble figures in the performance. The headgear and intricate patterns reflect the grandeur and attention to detail typical of Kathakali. Bright colours and symmetrical designs are prominent features, symbolising different emotions and roles.

VIOLENCE AND BANTER:

VOICES OF WOMEN IN PUNJABI FOLKLORE

JASNOOR KAUR AHUJA (YEAR 3)

Music and literature have long served as tools to express societal themes and challenges, often addressing issues that society hesitates to openly discuss. In Punjab, one of the most compelling forms of this expression is *boliyaan*—traditional folk couplets that act as an outlet for emotions ranging from sorrow and celebration, to happiness and social critique. Through these vivid and evocative verses, Punjabi folklore gives individuals, particularly women, a powerful means to articulate collective struggles, express cultural values, and share personal stories in ways that are both poignant and humorous.

*(**Fig 1:** This image captures a lively and vibrant cultural celebration, where women dressed in colourful traditional attire joyfully dance together in an outdoor setting)*

Boliyaan occupy a central place in Punjabi cultural celebrations—whether at weddings, harvest festivals, or other social gatherings. At these events, people come together to sing, dance, and share their stories, emotions, and sometimes frustrations. The beauty of *boliyaan* lies in their versatility: they bring life to joyous occasions while also offering solace and togetherness during times of misfortune. Through the power of storytelling, *boliyaan* create a shared experience that builds understanding and unity.

In a culture where communal life and shared experiences are paramount, boliyaan foster a sense of belonging. When people come together to sing and dance, they create an inclusive environment that invites individuals to express feelings they might otherwise suppress. By bringing collective hardships into the open, these couplets enable those with similar experiences—often young brides or daughters-in-law—to find common ground and support.

Boliyaan and other forms of folk music help Punjabi culture preserve its oral traditions across generations. These folk songs convey shared values, morals, and wisdom while offering insight into the lived experiences of women in traditional Punjabi society. This oral tradition ensures that each generation inherits not only cultural customs but also a nuanced understanding of resilience, family dynamics, and survival within a patriarchal context. Each rendition of a *boli* reaffirms cultural values, creates bonds, and revitalizes tradition.

VIOLENCE AND BANTER:

VOICES OF WOMEN IN PUNJABI FOLKLORE

JASNOOR KAUR AHUJA (YEAR 3)

*(**Fig 2:** "Dhokli or Dholak" used as an irrepressible instrument used to create a tune that further enhance the impact of boli)*

Despite their often upbeat rhythms and celebratory settings, *boliyaan* frequently explore complex themes, including familial conflict and domestic violence. For instance, a popular *boli* sung during weddings humorously depicts a daughter-in-law's strained relationship with her mother-in-law by likening it to preparing a cup of tea:

"Tusi ki piyoge? Ik cup chaa.
Tusi ki piyoge? Ik cup chaa .
Chaa vich paaya paani, meri sass badi siyani.
Tusi ki piyoge? Ik cup chaa.
Chaa vich payi patti, meri sass badi kapatti.
Tusi ki piyoge? Ik cup chaa."

In these lines, the singer playfully refers to her mother-in-law as clever and deceitful, using humor to convey her frustrations. This indirect critique, presented through a humorous lens in a communal setting, allows the performer to address personal grievances subtly, without risking direct confrontation. The juxtaposition of light-hearted performance with challenging content epitomizes the dual function of boliyaan as both entertainment and social commentary.

Historically, when avenues for vocal protest were limited, Punjabi women used songs like these to communicate their frustrations with societal expectations and family dynamics. In doing so, they fostered a sense of collective struggle and resilience, particularly among daughters-in-law, who found solidarity in shared grievances. Singing about these experiences allowed women to release pent-up emotions and laugh about difficult situations in a supportive communal space.

The themes of *boliyaan* often reflect the patriarchal structures of Punjabi society, where women are expected to endure hardship and remain silent. Many of these couplets serve as coded critiques of gender inequality and marital challenges. A well-known lokgeet *sung* by Surinder Kaur Ji, *"Ik Meri Akh Kashni,"* and originally written by Shiv Kumar Batalvi Ji, reveals themes of domestic strife, hinting at the trauma of a broken marriage through subtle metaphor and poetic language:

VIOLENCE AND BANTER:

VOICES OF WOMEN IN PUNJABI FOLKLORE

JASNOOR KAUR AHUJA (YEAR 3)

"Ik meri akh kaashni, Dooja raat de oh neendre ne mareya,
Sheeshe nu tarred pe gayi, Waal waundi ne dhyan jadon mareya..."

The singer laments her wearied, sleepless eyes as she notices a crack in the mirror—a powerful symbol of a fractured household. She also reflects on her strained relationship with her mother-in-law, who disparages her family, and her brother-in-law's inappropriate gaze, underscoring her vulnerability within the household, further in the song.

In another verse, she portrays her husband as a weak figure, easily influenced by his mother's control:

"Teeja mera kantt jiwein,
Raat chann-ni ch dudh da katora.
Fikar Sandoori Rang da,
Ohde naina ch gulaabi dora.
Ni ikko gall maadi osdi,
Layi lag nu hai maa ne vigadiya."

This verse subtly highlights her husband's character flaws, describing him as both physically attractive and emotionally volatile, but ultimately "tainted" by his mother's influence. These lines illustrate the singer's isolation and despair, hinting at the domestic abuse she endures.

*(**Fig 3:** Boliyan are passed down orally through generations, with each generation refining and adding to them. They express emotions and situations, typically sung by women in a chorus with a lead singer)*

*(**Fig 4:** Boliyan are a testament to the rich cultural heritage of Punjab, and their continued popularity ensures that this tradition will be passed on to future generations)*

JASNOOR KAUR AHUJA (YEAR 3)

Songs like these provide a rare glimpse into the struggles Punjabi women face within traditional gender roles. Through these verses, they share their challenges and call attention to systemic oppression, exposing the emotional toll of forced obedience and silence.

Despite the difficult themes often present in *boliyaan and folk music*, their lively performance style serves as a source of communal resilience and healing. By exaggerating their hardships and presenting them through songs, women reframe their struggles, sharing wisdom in ways that younger generations can appreciate and learn from. Songs like these help individuals cope by normalizing discussions of personal challenges and offering a therapeutic release for those who may not have the means to speak openly.

In their cultural and historical context, Lokgeet fulfill a powerful dual role. It celebrates life while acknowledging hardship, allowing women to express their strength, share collective struggles, and build solidarity with one another. This resilient spirit is woven into the fabric of Punjabi folk culture, demonstrating that even in the face of adversity, joy and humor endure.

(***Fig 5:*** *festivals, weddings, and other celebrations, creating a lively and festive atmosphere, these are the occasions on which bolis are sung)*

Through LokGeet, women continue to carry forward the stories, wisdom, and resilience of previous generations. As artifacts of a deeply rooted oral tradition, these songs are as essential to Punjabi culture today as they have been for centuries. Through laughter, song, and solidarity, *boliyaan and folk music* essentially remind us of the strength and spirit embedded within the fabric of Punjabi folklore.

ARTWORK

MEHENDI MAJESTY

LAVANYA SAINI

YEAR 3

Exquisite mehendi art on silver showcasing Indian splendour. Intricate designs, delicate patterns and elegant lines. Inspired by traditional attire, this piece embodies beauty. Crafted with precision, passion, and dedication. A testament of Indian craftsmanship and artistry. A fusion of traditional and modernity. A true masterpiece, adorned with love. Forever treasured, forever cherished.

THE SHADOWS OF SUSPICION:

UNCOVERING THE DARK TRUTH OF WITCH BRANDING IN INDIA'S INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES

PRABNOOR CHANDOK (YEAR 2)

In remote villages tucked away from the eyes of modern India, a dark legacy lingers. When sickness strikes or crops fail, whispers rise, and a victim emerges; a woman, often alone and vulnerable, accused of harbouring dark powers. Branded as a 'witch', she becomes the target of fear, resentment, and violence. This is not a tale from ancient history but a grim reality for many Indigenous women; where centuries-old superstitions cross with deep-seated social injustices. The recent report by ActionAid India sheds light on this haunting practice, revealing the cultural and systemic forces driving witch branding across rural India

(***Fig 1:*** *India's 'witches' victims of superstition, poverty)*

Witch branding, falsely accusing someone, often a woman, of practicing harmful magic is a global phenomenon that has continues within specific cultural settings. In India, this practice has historically thrived in rural, Indigenous societies where poverty, limited access to healthcare, and superstitions intersect.

Within these communities, a 'witch' is often blamed for unexplained misfortunes and is scapegoated as a means to explain hardship. The report highlights that for Indigenous societies, the accusation of witchcraft is not merely a superstition but a symptom of larger societal forces. It is a means of asserting power, often used by more influential members of the community to eliminate or marginalize those who challenge social norms. Typically, accusations target women, particularly widows or single women who have limited social support. They become easy prey for such branding.

Witch branding in India is inseparable from the patriarchal structures that define much of rural society. In many cases, accusations of witchcraft serve as a tool for social control, punishing women who dare to deviate from expected gender roles. For Indigenous communities, patriarchal expectations are reinforced through local customs, making it challenging for women to break free from these accusations.

Furthermore, when women are branded as witches, they often face extreme violence, from beatings and torture to being driven from their homes or even killed. The report documents cases where women have endured brutal attacks from their own families and neighbors. In one instance, a woman was brutally beaten and ostracized after being blamed for misfortunes in her village, while another was driven from her community based solely on suspicion. These cases illustrate the fear and stigma surrounding accusations of witchcraft, often resulting in severe abuse or exile for those targeted.

*(**Fig 2:** Mainly women are made scapegoats for all the evils of society such as famine, drought, or lack of water in the wells)*

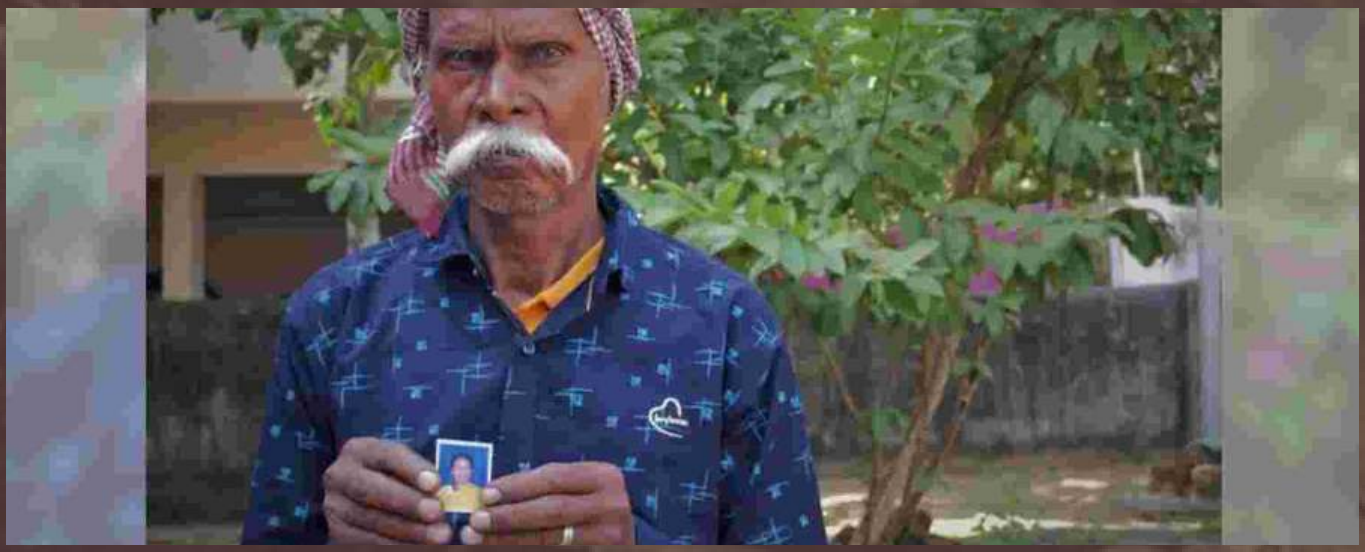
Witch branding is not only a gender issue but also one deeply tied to poverty and caste. In Indigenous communities where resources are scarce, jealousy or disputes over land and property are often the root cause behind witchcraft accusations. Wealthier or more powerful individuals sometimes use witch branding as a weapon to forcibly seize land or belongings from women who live alone or lack social power. This practice traps these women in cycles of poverty and social exclusion, as they are either forced out of their communities or denied access to support networks.

The study also highlights the role of healthcare access in sustaining witch branding. In communities with little to no access to modern medicine, illnesses are often attributed to supernatural causes. A death or sudden illness without an obvious explanation can quickly be pinned on an individual who then becomes the community's scapegoat. Without proper medical interventions or education, these beliefs perpetuate fear and mistrust, further isolating vulnerable individuals.

THE SHADOWS OF SUSPICION:

UNCOVERING THE DARK TRUTH OF WITCH BRANDING IN INDIA'S INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES

PRABNOOR CHANDOK (YEAR 2)



*(**Fig 3:** In Jharkhand, Poor Healthcare Drives 'Witch-hunting', Killings)*

The report by ActionAid India stresses that to stop witch branding, societal change is essential. Law enforcement plays a crucial role; however, legal measures alone are not sufficient to address the deeply rooted cultural beliefs that perpetuate these accusations. The report advocates for community-based interventions, such as educational programs that challenge superstitions, provide healthcare access, and empower Indigenous women through social support networks. Furthermore, the report calls for greater collaboration with Indigenous leaders to create culturally respectful programs that can dismantle these harmful practices. Community workshops, awareness campaigns, and storytelling can play powerful roles in changing public opinion and reducing stigma.

The cruel practice of branding women as witches has cast a long shadow over rural and Indigenous communities in India for centuries. This report underscores the urgent need for a multifaceted approach to combat this deeply rooted issue. Beyond legal intervention, addressing the socio-economic and cultural factors that fuel witch branding is essential. By raising awareness, providing education, and empowering Indigenous women, we can dismantle the systemic biases that perpetuate this harmful practice. Only then can we hope to break the cycle of violence and ensure a safer future for generations to come. The resilience of Indigenous women, who defy the forces of superstition and patriarchy, is a testament to their unwavering strength. Ending the brutal practice of witch branding is not just an act of justice; it's a step towards creating a society that truly values and empowers all its members.

THE SHADOWS OF SUSPICION:

UNCOVERING THE DARK TRUTH OF WITCH BRANDING IN INDIA'S INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES

PRABNOOR CHANDOK (YEAR 2)

Beneath the surface of these tragic accusations lies a complex tapestry of Indigenous beliefs and practices. While many of these traditions are rooted in harmony with nature and community, a darker side often emerges in times of fear and uncertainty. Myths and legends of powerful witches, capable of both healing and harm, have persisted for centuries. These tales, while often exaggerated, reflect a deep-seated belief in the supernatural.

However, it's important to distinguish between these ancient beliefs and the harmful practice of witch branding. True witchcraft, as understood by Indigenous cultures, is a sacred art, often passed down through generations. It is a tool for understanding the natural world and connecting with spiritual forces; it is not a weapon to be wielded against the innocent.

*(**Fig 4:** Witch-hunts: Atrocities from past and present-day India)*

*(**Fig 5:** Witchcraft in INDIA: An Alarming Reality)*

The perversion of these beliefs, fueled by ignorance and fear, has led to the persecution of countless women. By exposing the darkness that lies behind witch branding, we can reclaim the true spirit of Indigenous wisdom and ensure that these ancient practices are honored, not feared.

ARTWORK

HEER RANJHA

NISCHINT KAUR

YEAR 2

This artwork is inspired by the traditional Punjabi tragedy folklore of Mirza Sahiba which was written by a 17th century poet Pilu and Heer Ranjha which was first written by Damodar Gulati. Both the stories have a common reason that led them to their death which was the opposition by family, both the lovers faced this and at the end had a tragic death. The artwork I have made is inspired by the inner feelings of the couple, you can see in the centre of the artwork we have a male and female figure who are crying and they depict the feelings of both the couple and around them we have the inner feelings of leaving everything behind and just being with the love of their life.

TATTOOS UNVEILED:

MARKED BY CULTURE AS A SYMBOL OF IDENTITY, EXPRESSION AND AESTHETICS

AVNI NEGI (YEAR 3)

Tattoos speak without words, marking the body with the language of memories, dreams, and identity. They remind us that our bodies are more than flesh—they're canvases for art, memory, and meaning, connecting us to a deeper self and telling tales that are unique yet universally human.

As I grew older, I found myself increasingly fascinated by tattoos, drawn to how cool they looked. By the time I turned 18, I got my first tattoo as a symbol of my newfound freedom. Coming from a traditional household, tattoos were viewed as a Western concept and an act of defiance. But when I entered college and connected with others, I discovered that many shared this fascination with tattoos, though most were forbidden from getting one.

Before long, I felt the urge to elevate my look and embraced a "badass persona," adding piercings to enhance my style. Not long after, I got a second tattoo, which became a way for me to cope with stress and anxiety—and, of course, I was ready to welcome the compliments!

With roots in social, spiritual, and even tribal traditions, tattoos have been a part of our culture for thousands of years. In ancient societies like Egypt, Japan, and Polynesia, tattoos served as symbols for identity, social status, and life transitions.

(***Fig 1:*** *Traditional Japanese and Egyptian tattoos)*

Over centuries, tattoos underwent taboo cultural shifts and were often associated with sailors or marginalized individuals, especially in Western societies. However, the 20th-century tattoo resurgence was influenced by mainstream media, countercultural groups, and famous individuals. Today, tattoos have transcended past stigmas to gain global acceptance as wearable art and a form of self-expression.

In India, tattoos serve as a bridge between traditional and modern identities by symbolizing both personal stories and cultural heritage.

TATTOOS UNVEILED:

MARKED BY CULTURE AS A SYMBOL OF IDENTITY, EXPRESSION AND AESTHETICS

AVNI NEGI (YEAR 3)

In India, traditional tattooing termed "Godna" holds a significant place in the cultural fabric of India, particularly among tribal communities and rural societies. Unlike modern tattooing, which often focuses on personal aesthetics or individual identity, *Godna* is deeply rooted in cultural heritage, tribal identity, and social customs. Traditional designs are chosen, usually symbolic of tribal identity, protection, or milestones. Natural ink is prepared using soot, ash, or plant extracts mixed with water or oil. A sharp tool, often a needle or thorn, punctures the skin in a patterning process frequently accompanied by rituals and songs, reflecting cultural and spiritual meanings. For instance, the *Baiga tribe* of Madhya Pradesh are renowned for their elaborate and symbolic tattoos, which perfectly capture who they are.

The first tattoo is made at the age of 7-8, which corresponds to the girl's specific age and is symbolic of her becoming eligible to marry and have children. *Baiga* women are proud of their extensive tattoos. A *Santhal* woman's (tribe from Bangladesh) tattoo is a treasure she carries into the afterlife. Those tattoos are thought to help a person survive in heaven after death. No one knows exactly how or why this tradition started. However, the meaning and procedure of tattooing evolved. Furthermore, it is currently in style!

In the community I belong to, a profound belief exists in the spiritual power of tattoos, especially when placed on the right hand. In Hindu culture, tattoos carry a deep-rooted spiritual significance, intertwining faith with the physical self in a unique form of devotion and symbolism.

*(**Fig 2:** Traditions of skin: women and their tattoos)*

Traditionally, Hindus believed that tattooing sacred symbols or the image of a deity on the right hand, customarily used for giving and receiving, could serve as a channel for positive energy and blessings. This practice was not merely decorative; it was a meaningful ritual grounded in the concept of *punya*, or spiritual merit, which is believed to be accumulated through good deeds and acts of charity.

TATTOOS UNVEILED:

MARKED BY CULTURE AS A SYMBOL OF IDENTITY, EXPRESSION AND AESTHETICS

AVNI NEGI (YEAR 3)

My grandmother has a meaningful and culturally significant set of tattoos on her body. Among them are five lines, each representing one of her five children, symbolizing her love and devotion as a mother. Additionally, she has a tattoo that embodies a symbol of marriage, reflecting the deep-rooted traditions and values of her culture. These tattoos not only hold personal significance for her but also serve as a testament to the heritage and identity she cherishes.

(***Fig 3:*** *Tattoos as a way express their heritage and identity)*

In the contemporary world, tattoos have transformed from being emblems of custom, religion, and social identity to potent representations of individualism and self-expression. Even though tattoos have a lengthy history that links them to tribal, spiritual, and cultural roots, they have overcome their taboo status to become a popular art form. For many people, including myself, tattoos serve as a link between the past and present, tying self-expression and ancestry together in distinctive ways. They provide a way to deal with emotions, mark significant occasions, and question social conventions in addition to providing a platform for creativity and individuality. In the end, tattoos serve as a reminder of the enduring human desire to make a lasting impression on the world, our society, and ourselves.

ARANA PURANAM (THE LEGEND OF RED TAILED SKINK) AND OTHER STORIES

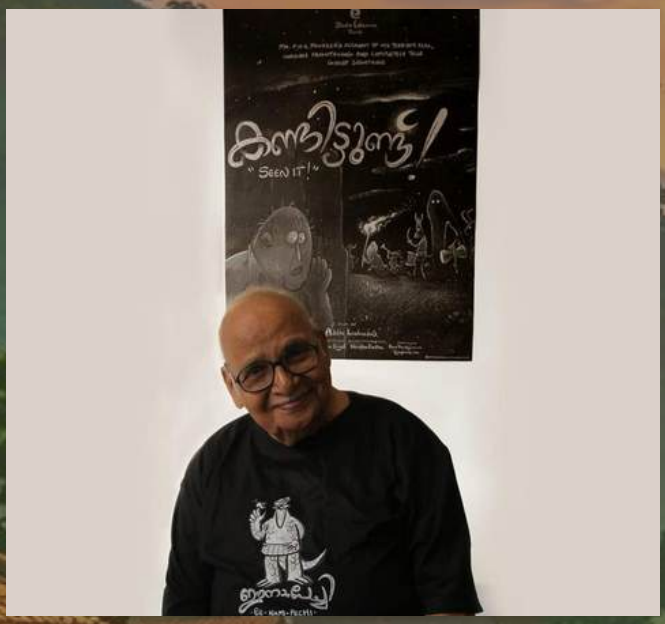
അരണപരാണവം മറ് കഥകളം

DEVIKA. S. PILLAI (YEAR 3)

The animation facility Studio Eeksaurus, based in Kerala, incorporated folktales and myths that are told to us by Mr. Pazhu Madathil Narayana Panicker, commonly referred to as Keshava Panicker, who is over 90 years old. A kind elderly gentleman with a knack for storytelling is Mr. P.N.R. Panicker. He delivers the tale in Malayalam, which happens to be his mother tongue. The motion picture may be streamed online via Studio Eeksaurus' YouTube account.

According to legend, God once commanded the Red-Tailed Skink and Chameleon to collect water. As opposed to gathering water, the chameleon collected his urine and presented it to God. On the other hand, the skink collected a tiny bowl of water from rivers and rain. In the course of events, the chameleon was declared cursed and punished, and Skink received a boon from God that he may request.

"I want poison in me so that whenever I bite someone, they get killed," he replied when asked what boon he desired. God surprised and granted him that pleasure. His body therefore contained poison.



*(**Fig 1:** Mr.P.N.K Panicker)*

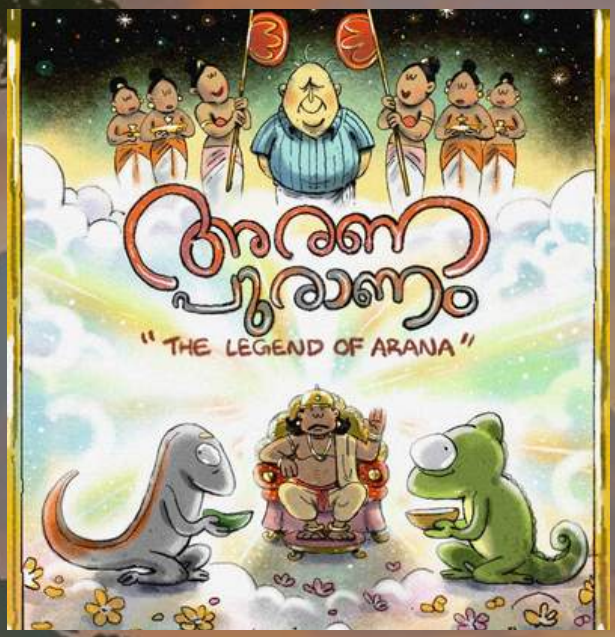
As a result, individuals were poisoned and murdered quickly. On Earth, the beast started to cause chaos. As the scenario worsened daily, God called forth the Skink. "Why am I here again?" He said, "I bought you water as you asked me to, and you granted me the boon in return." "I am so pleased with you for providing me the water, "God remarked with a smile. I believe I ought to bestow upon you even another blessing. He blessed the skink with small bursts of memory loss after drawing him nearby.

From that point on, the Skink will run swiftly to bite at any disturbance, but once he gets close to it, he will forget what he was meant to accomplish. For this reason, albeit the Red Tailed Skink is fatal, it is safe since it does not bite, even when it is quite close to you.

Great fables like this one have been credited to P.N.R. Panicker, and Studio Eeksaurus employ his expertise to generate remarkable short animation movies that give us a taste of those historical legends and folktales.

He also obtained a collection of folklore referred to as "Kandittund" (കണ്ടിടണ്), which corresponds to "Seen It." It includes a number of additional folktales within this short video, which Panicker recounts in an engaging and fascinating manner. His other collection, "Appuppan" (അപ്പപ), which translates to "Grandpa," is also on the horizon.

Small episodes and accounts of intriguing creatures that are believed to be prowling in the darkness around us can be found in "*Kandittund*." Among them is "Eenam-Pechi" (ഈനാംപേച്ചി; a pangolin monster/creature). It is alleged that the wicked soul of a pregnant woman is turned into Eenam-Pechi when she died in an unforeseen manner. It is easily recognised from a distance as it runs by itself and emits the sound "Thonni Path," which is its way of counting cashew nuts and mangoes, which are generally preferred by mothers-to-be.



*(**Fig 2:** **"THE LEGEND OF ARANA"** BY ADITHI KRISHNADAS)*

It arrives at 2:30 am and waits for its prey, which are pregnant women, by tossing the cashew nuts and mangoes it has gathered. They believe that it slits their stomachs open and confines them. Nevertheless, it is terrified of men; the mere mention of a man causes it to vanish and turn away.

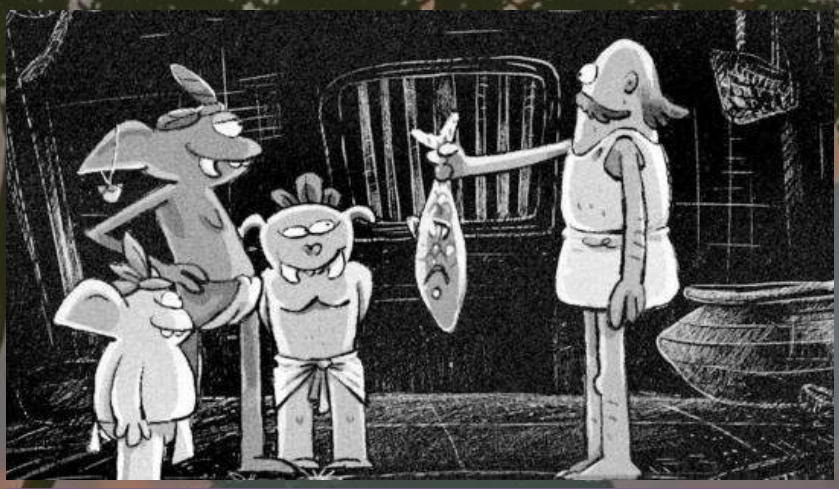
*(**Fig 3:** **"PANICKER"** has seen 1,228 full moons and has had as many or more encounters with the unreal, or so he will make you believe)*

He additionally pointed out the massive beast known as "Arukola" (അറകകാല), which floats behind you. You are able to feel its presence, following you during the night, and scream and howl at you until you turn to face it at that point it; will attack you. Men who are slain are deemed to become Arukolas. No living human has ever seen its face, and it has been said to be enormous. People thus advise against turning around if one hears or perceives something like this wailing or screaming at them. Still, if you do spin around, be sure to do it with both arms on your waist and peer from the gap between them. This will give him the impression that you are going to put him in an armlock and, afraid of strangling, it will vanish.

(***Fig 4:*** *Short film "**KANDITTUND**")*

"Kuttichathan" (കടിചാത) is your ally when you seek to defeat your rivals. Through fervent devotion, prayer, and worship, you may draw them to your service. When they are pleased and in front of you, they will follow your commands like a servant. They will continue to harass your adversaries until they are at their wits' end and are either destroyed or despondent, just as you intended. Some isolated locations adore them and even idolize them by creating idols of them, maybe as a result of the service-oriented assistance they offer.

A harmless creature is "Anna-Marutha" (ആന മരത്). It is claimed to be 1.5 feet tall and to appear at midday or midnight.It seems like a newborn elephant that seems to have an iron chain around its ankles. It rattles because of the shackles and walks like a little elephant. When it detects a human presence, it disappears and is totally harmless.



(***Fig 5:*** ***"Monsters' ball: A spooky"*** *Malayalam short film)*

(***Fig 6:*** *illustrious Mr. Panicker and his wonderfully charming tall tales! -* ***Aanamaratha*** *)*

The other creature Panicker has discussed is called "Neet-Arukola" (നീറ്അറകകാല), a malevolent and terrible entity believed to be the ghosts of drowned and deceased individuals. It has been stated that Panicker encountered this malignant demon. He once got lost on his way back from shopping at 8 p.m. When he saw the thing emerge from the water, he was attempting to follow a canal back home. When humans are alone and close to bodies of water, Neet-Arukola follows them, traps them, and drowns them. It chased him till he came to a well and proceeded to touch the iron bucket around it.The only way to get rid of this creature and save one's life is to touch iron, as it is anxious of iron.

Panicker also encounters an entity called "Thendan" (തണ). It is a giant, six-foot-tall, blood-eyed phantom that is worshiped and doesn't hurt humans since it is a divinity. At 4:30 am, Panicker met "Thendan" on his way to the temple to worship. It was massive, sitting near the entrance. When he prayed to it, it vanished.It was his first and final experience with it. Studio Eeksaurus has skillfully adapted these folktales and short stories about these mysterious animals into an animated picture that narrates an intriguing narrative of the paranormal. Fans of fantasy, horror, and animation should not miss it. "In addition to winning other accolades, including the National Picture Award for Best Animation Film, 'Kandittund' picture was well-reviewed by critics. It was also commended for its distinct aesthetic and tense, ominous mood.The animation and narrative of the 'Arana Puranam' film have also won praise from critics. Among the many honors it has received is the National Film Award for Best Animation Film.

THE VOICE OF GARGI

JIGYA SINGH (YEAR 3)

A stillness atoned in the courts of JANAK,
The debate - discussion found no initiation;
Saviour - Came voice of GARGI
Enthralling the halls of Ancient India.

Where pandits withdrew,
Competition in doldrums,
Gargi - A Woman - stood by her goals

Janak was saved;
Yajnavalakya got slayed
By the thunders of women's knowledge
And the depth of HER state

Brihadaranyak Upnishad bolds down it straight;
How a WOMAN crushed the arrogant, wisdomful sage
Accumulating the unified thinking of the AGE.

Broken ego, frustration rising,
Yajnavalkya's wisdom funds its demise.
Politeness of HER proved a dissociation -
That knowledge and control
Have different origin of creation

The question of Immortality stood against the Sage,
Women's empowerment tasting the salty rage
of MALE AUTHORITY'S blinding Cave.
Attained the real win Gargi's heads on with the cape.
Exemplary embodiment of WOMEN IN RAGE.

A CANVAS OF RESISTANCE, HOPE AND TRAGEDY:

THE POST COLONIAL MODERNIST ART MOVEMENT

KAVYA DHAWAN (YEAR 3)

Every aspect of Indian culture, society and identity was reconstructed in the aftermath of India's independence. While we were free of colonial rule, there was a growing realization of the extent of colonial influence. People struggled to define themselves in a society which was suffering from the aftermath of the violent partition, changing social hierarchies and a growing nation. In the midst of this traumatic and confusing time, artists like Maqbool Fida Husain, Francis Newton Souza, and Nalini Malani were projecting their emotional turmoil, disillusionment and grief into their canvas.

The modernist art movement in India is most clearly understood through a postcolonialism lens. Not only did artists during this time draw inspiration from art styles in Europe and North America but they also broke the boundaries of traditional art work. They were not to be contained within a particular art style and preferred a more abstract and emotional one. Paintings in post-colonial India expressed a sense of helplessness and loss of agency when faced with the realities of this new world.

*(**Fig 1:** Bombay Progressive Artists' Group)*

United in their rebellion from tradition and the shackles of society, a group of 'Progressives' formed what came to be known as the Bombay Progressive Artists' Group (PAG), founded by FN Souza and SH Raza. This group endeavoured to unite different art styles as opposed to the teaching of the Bombay School which sought to revive the lost traditional Mughal-style painting technique. PAG, formed just months after the Partition of India, had witnessed the brutal rioting and killings of thousands of displaced people. This led them to establish the group as a way of encouraging artists to paint with absolute freedom and with no rules or standards. Their archaic and abstract style gave them the freedom to express their emotions, experience and current situation at a time where words had failed them. The British and Portuguese settlers had shaped their language, religion and their identities. Thus, painting provided artists with an unbiased, untouched and unconfined tool of expression.

THE POST COLONIAL MODERNIST ART MOVEMENT

KAVYA DHAWAN (YEAR 3)

While this group had vastly different artistic styles, European Modernism as well as Indian imagery and landscapes were very influential to them. One of the most influential artists who used dynamic imagery to depict deities, figures like Mother Teresa and even animals, was M. F. Husain. His work has had an everlasting effect on the Indian Modernist movement and explores topics such as Motherhood, Colonisation and even religious figures.

His 'British Raj' series embraces his modernist style while capturing the past of British India in vivid detail. Painted in the late 1980's, this series is influenced by not only the everyday lives of people under British rule but also encapsulates the political and cultural changes taking place during this time.

*(**Fig 2:** Credentials Of Gwalior, Nizam And Patiala; Princess Nisha Raje. Afternoon Tea With Lady Mcbull) (left to right)*

Husain used freehand drawings and vibrant colours, and depicted Indian subject matter in the style of contemporary European art movements, particularly Cubism. This mixture of different art styles was a defining feature of the modernist movement. This painting, 'Princess Nisha Raje. Afternoon Tea With Lady Mcbull' uses these techniques to portray a very engaging scene. It was also a part of the Raj series and depicts the princess as a poised and powerful figure who is full of confidence. Her posture may signify India's independence and powerful spirit. The background is also a mix of the colours of the Indian flag.

Paintings such as the 'Credentials Of Gwalior, Nizam And Patiala!' show a very problematic power dynamic between the British coloniser and the three rulers which eventually led to complete British establishment. From the coloniser's relaxed and dominating position of authority to the distressingly meek postures of the three kings, Husain paints a very ominous and menacing scene. It is through paintings like these that artists were able to represent India's long and complex history with the British empire.

A CANVAS OF RESISTANCE, HOPE AND TRAGEDY:

THE POST COLONIAL MODERNIST ART MOVEMENT

KAVYA DHAWAN (YEAR 3)

(***Fig 3:*** *Mother by M.F Husain)*

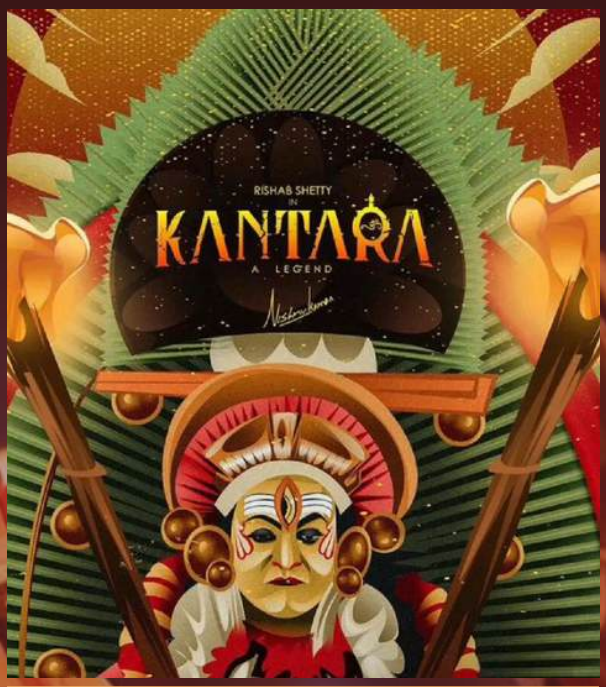
Thus, the modernist art movement in India helped not only artists but also India itself assert its identity as a free and prosperous nation. The movement emerged as a response to the country's socio-political landscape. Artists sought to break away from traditional forms and embrace new ideas, reflecting the complexities of a rapidly changing society. This period witnessed a blending of indigenous and international influences, resulting in diverse artistic expressions. It paved the way for future generations of artists, encouraging innovation and experimentation, while continuously engaging with the evolving cultural narrative of India. This dynamic legacy remains influential in contemporary Indian art.

BHOOT KOLA:

EXPLORING THE SACRED DANCE OF SPIRIT WORSHIP AND ITS SPIRITUAL RESONANCE.

MUSKAN SHARMA (YEAR 2)

After watching the film *Kantara*, I found myself deeply moved by the portrayal of *Bhoot Kola,* a unique and ancient ritual from the Tulu-speaking regions of Karnataka, South India. Though I am not a part of the Tulu community, the ritual's profound spirituality left a lasting impression on me, resonating with my sense of spirituality and connection to tradition. Here, I hope to share the origins and significance of Bhoot Kola and why it has captured my interest as a subject of reflection and writing.



(***Fig 1:*** *Kantara, Indian Kannada action thriller film)*

What is Bhoot Kola?

Bhoot Kola, or "spirit worship," is a traditional ritual practiced in the coastal and Malnad regions of Karnataka, especially among the Tulu-speaking communities in Dakshina Kannada and Udupi districts. It is more than a ritual; it is a form of folk art, spirituality, and community bonding. During a Bhoot Kola, performers embody the spirits, or **Bhootas**, representing local deities believed to protect the land and its people. Through dance, music, and elaborate costumes, these performers invoke and celebrate the presence of these spirits, who are seen as guardians of the natural world.

Bhoot" refers to spirits integral to Tulu culture's local deities and ancestors. Unlike spirits associated with fear or negativity in some cultures, the Bhootas in Bhoot Kola are revered and worshipped for their benevolence and protection. These spirits are believed to be forces that govern and protect the land, and they are called upon to guide, bless, and ensure the community's well-being.

Origins and Evolution of Bhoot Kola

Bhoot Kola has ancient roots, thought to date back over a thousand years. It likely originated as a form of animistic worship practised by indigenous communities in the region. Over centuries, it has evolved to incorporate elements from various local belief systems while maintaining its core as a ritual of respect and reverence for spirits of nature, ancestors, and local deities.

BHOOT KOLA:

EXPLORING THE SACRED DANCE OF SPIRIT WORSHIP AND ITS SPIRITUAL RESONANCE.

MUSKAN SHARMA (YEAR 2)

Today, Bhoot Kola is recognised as an essential part of the region's cultural heritage. Despite the growing influence of modernity, it remains a living tradition, with communities actively participating in the ritual year after year. Local families take on the responsibility of organising the event, and it is not uncommon for people to travel from afar to witness or participate in a Bhoot Kola.

(***Fig 2:*** *Bhoot Kola, likely originated as a form of animistic worship)*

Why do I feel drawn to write about Bhoot Kola?

Watching *Kantara* and seeing Bhoot Kola being portrayed on screen brought about a strong emotional and spiritual response in me. The film depicted the intense connection between people and their land, spirits, and heritage. Though I don't come from the Tulu culture, I felt an immediate sense of resonance with the ritual's spirituality and symbolism. Bhoot Kola, as shown in the film, seemed to embody universal themes of respect, humility, and an awareness of forces greater than ourselves.

The experience reminded me of how rituals—regardless of their cultural origins—can evoke a shared sense of reverence and connection. For me, Bhoot Kola is not just a fascinating cultural artefact; it is a living, breathing reminder of humanity's deep-seated need for spiritual expression and connection to the natural world. This inspiration has driven me to explore and write about this topic, hoping to honour its beauty and significance.

The Spiritual Essence of Bhoot Kola

Bhoot Kola is a spiritual experience for both the performers and the spectators. The central belief is that during the ritual, the performer is possessed by the spirit or deity they represent. In this state, the performer becomes a vessel through which the spirit communicates with the community. The transformation is marked by a trance-like dance, expressive movements, and powerful chants.

BHOOT KOLA:

EXPLORING THE SACRED DANCE OF SPIRIT WORSHIP AND ITS SPIRITUAL RESONANCE.

MUSKAN SHARMA (YEAR 2)

The spirituality of Bhoot Kola goes beyond the mere act of performance. It is an acknowledgement of the sacredness of the land, the ancestors, and the spirits. It is a moment when the boundary between the human and the divine blurs, and the people believe they are in direct communion with their protector spirits. This sacred experience is what gives Bhoot Kola its depth and significance, and it is what I found so compelling in my exploration of this tradition.

*(**Fig 3:** The performer acts like a vessel for the spirit to shine through their devotion)*

Symbolism and Universal Appeal of Bhoot Kola

One reason Bhoot Kola resonates with me, and perhaps with others who encounter it, is that it embodies universal themes. The ritual's symbolism, where humans transform to embody spirits, speaks to our collective desire to connect with forces greater than ourselves. This is especially relevant in today's world, where there is often a disconnect between people and the natural world.

Through Bhoot Kola, the community reaffirms its respect for nature and acknowledges its dependence on the forces that protect and sustain them. This idea is something that many cultures and religions around the world share. Whether through reverence for nature, honouring ancestors, or invoking deities, these practices reflect humanity's search for meaning and connection. Bhoot Kola, therefore, has a universal appeal that transcends cultural and linguistic boundaries.

BHOOT KOLA:

EXPLORING THE SACRED DANCE OF SPIRIT WORSHIP AND ITS SPIRITUAL RESONANCE.

MUSKAN SHARMA (YEAR 2)

The Cultural and Heritage Significance of Bhoot Kola

Bhoot Kola serves as a link to the past. It connects the people to their ancestors, who performed the same rituals, believed in the same spirits, and shared the same reverence for the land. In a rapidly modernising world, Bhoot Kola stands as a reminder of the community's roots and the cultural identity that continues to shape their lives. Writing about Bhoot Kola feels like an opportunity to contribute to the preservation of this unique heritage, sharing its beauty and importance with a wider audience.

Conclusion: A Personal Journey Through Bhoot Kola

For me, writing about Bhoot Kola is both an exploration of Tulu culture and a reflection on my own spirituality. The ritual has given me a new perspective on how deeply cultural practices can touch our lives, even when they originate from a community different from our own. In studying Bhoot Kola, I feel a sense of spiritual awareness—a reminder that, despite our differences, we share an innate desire to connect with something greater than ourselves.

*(**Fig 4:** Bhoot Kola, has a universal appeal that transcends cultural and linguistic boundaries)*

In Bhoot Kola, I find a reminder of the power of tradition and the beauty of cultural expression. My hope is that by writing about it, I can contribute to its appreciation and preservation, encouraging others to see it as a valuable piece of human heritage. Bhoot Kola is not just a ritual; it is a testament to the spiritual depth and cultural richness that define us as human beings.

ARTWORK

Artwork in reference to the article "Bhoot Kola: Exploring the Sacred Dance of Spirit Worship and Its Spiritual Resonance" by Muskan Sharma (Year 2)

BHOOTA KOLA

MUSKAN SHARMA

YEAR 2

A mesmerizing portrayal of the sacred ritual dance from Tulunadu, where vibrant colors, intricate details, and dynamic expressions bring to life the deeply spiritual connection between humanity and the divine. This traditional art form celebrates the ancestral spirits and showcases the cultural richness of coastal Karnataka, blending mythology, folklore, and devotion into a timeless spectacle of faith and heritage.

INDIAN VILLAGES AND THEIR LEGACY OF HUNDREDS OF YEARS :

OLD FOLK TALES

BHUMI DAHIYA (YEAR 1)

*(**Fig 1:** Childhood in Indian villages is a tapestry of dusty lanes, sprawling banyan trees with hanging roots, endless fields to explore, and stories shared under starlit skies)*

Have you ever heard of a folk tale associated with the name of your native village? As of 2019, India had around 6,64,369 villages, with a considerable number of people still living in villages, and most of these villages have a folk tale synonymous with their names. Later generations of many native villagers that have been born and brought up in cities hardly know anything about their villages and their folk tales because they don't visit their villages enough to know about them, me being one of them. But I recently revisited my native village and learnt many interesting things about it, one of them being a folk tale associated with the village's name. This got me interested in researching and reading about other such villages, and I'm going to talk about some of those villages in this article.

Shani Shingnnapur

Shani Shingnapur is a small village in the Ahmednagar district of Maharashtra, where none of the buildings have any front doors or locks because of their immense faith in Lord Shani, the god of Saturn, who is believed to be guarding the village from any kind of theft. Legend has it that about 300 years ago, after a lot of rain and flooding, a heavy black slab of rock was found washed up on the shores of the Panasnala River, which once flowed through the village. A villager picked the black slab of rock stick, and blood started oozing out of it. Later that night, Shani appeared in the dreams of the village head, revealing that the slab was his own idol and ordering for the slab to be kept in the village, where he would reside from here on.

Shani blessed the leader and promised to protect the village, but on one condition: that the black stone slab need not be sheltered so that he can oversee the village without any hindrance. Following that, the villagers placed the black slab on a roofless platform in the heart of the town. The temple in the village is considered to be a “jagrut devasthan” or “alive temple” with the deity "Swayambhu," “self-born god,” residing in it.

The villagers decided to discard all the doors and locks from all houses as they had a guardian protecting them from then on, and this has continued for generations now. The villagers are so relaxed that they leave their money and jewelry in the house without any locks even when they go out of town for holidays, as it is believed that those who try to steal anything or go against the rule of not locking their homes will be punished by the god himself by either getting blinded or getting into a mysterious accident.

(***Fig 2:*** *Shani Shingnnapur is the only place that has houses with no doors)*

This village has been crime-free for centuries now; a proof of that is the police station of the village, which was opened in 2015 and has not registered a single complaint ever since. Respecting the beliefs of the villagers, the police station doesn't have any front doors or locks. Even the United Commercial Bank—UCO Bank—has opened India’s first lockless branch and has a barely visible lock in the village.

Naunangli

Naunangli is a small village about 120 kilometers from Delhi, in Muzaffarnagar district of Uttar Pradesh, where no one belonging to that village ever dies of a snake bite until and unless that person is taken out of the village boundary or has been bitten by a snake outside the village boundary. My grandparents belong to this small village as well and recently told me the legend of our village, telling me how much they still believe in it even though they have not lived in the village for decades now.

It is said that many centuries ago, the area of our village that is the farmland right now was a small village of nomads (banjaras), which had succumbed to the earth, leaving a large portion of land unoccupied for years. This came in notice of some people of Dahiya gotra living in Sisana Village in Haryana (also pronounced as Susana by local people), and they decided to recce the place to see if it was fit for their living. They didn't think they would be able to live there when they visited the place and decided to return, but met with nine snakes (naag) on their way back. They took this as a sign from Naag Devta and decided to live there only instead of going back to prevent any bad omens.

The Naag Devta gave the people of the village a blessing that no person in this village will ever die of a snake bite until and unless they go out of the village boundary, and the people will coexist peacefully with the snakes of this village. This led more people to come and start living there, expanding and making it a village. The name of the village, Naunangli, House of Nine Snakes, is also based on this folk tale. Since then, there have been no incidents of death by a snakebite in the village, and the villagers have immense faith in the Naag Devta. Even though it has been opposed by many others, the villagers living there are still firm believers in this legend.

(***Fig 3:*** *Naunangli: The village where snake bites don't kill)*

Miragpur

(***Fig 4:*** *Miragpur, a small village in the Sahara pur district of Uttar Pradesh)*

Miragpur is a small village in the Saharanpur district of Uttar Pradesh, known for the commitment of its people to a drug-free and vegetarian life due to their dedication to Siddha Sanyasi Guru Baba Fakira Das Ji. It is said that around 500 years ago, Siddha Sanyasi Guru Baba Fakira Das Ji introduced the principles of living a Satvik lifestyle to the villagers. The villagers have since then adapted this form of living wholeheartedly, showing their faith in the Guru.

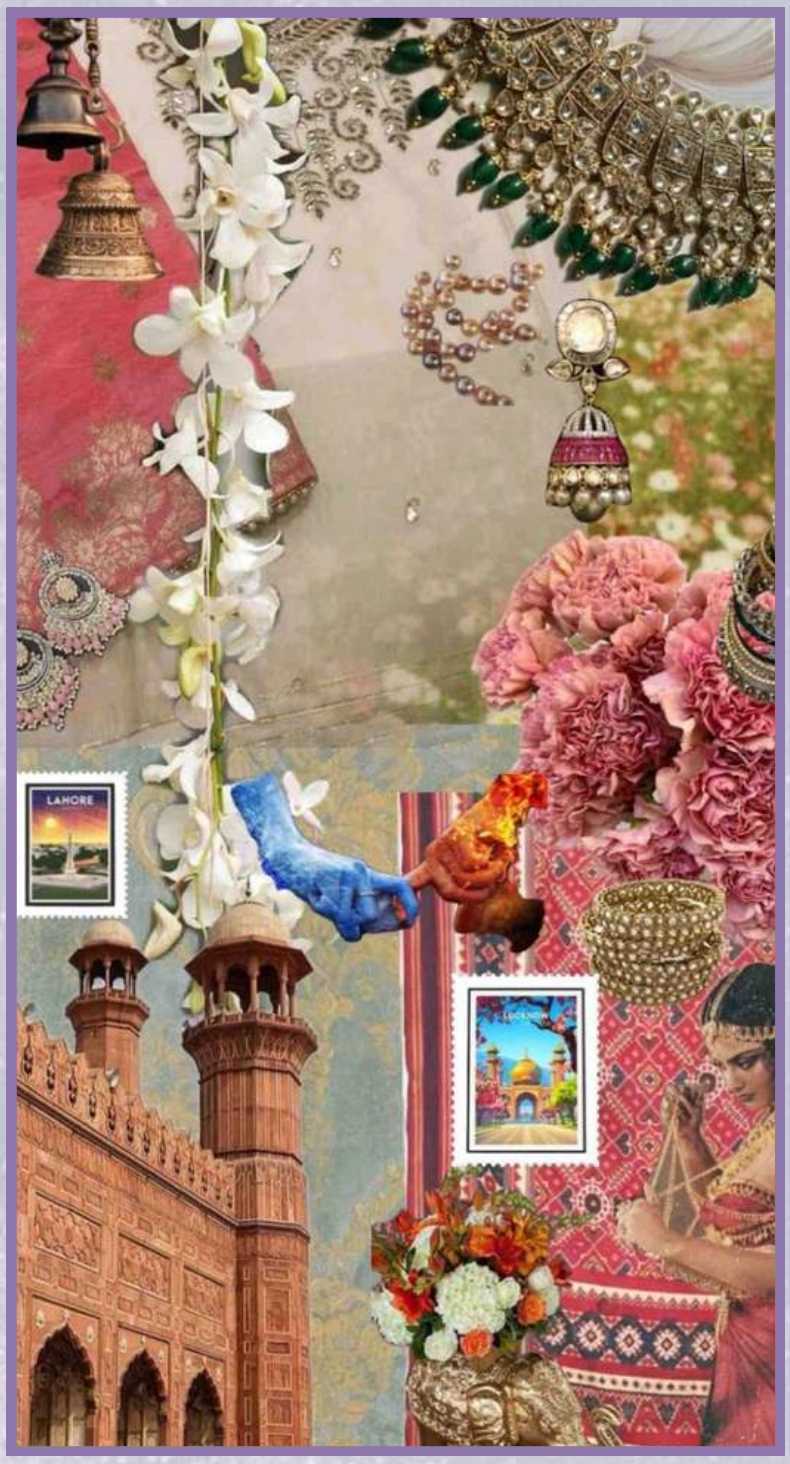
The people of this village have since lived a very simple lifestyle devoid of any kind of drug or non-vegetarian food. They don't even eat onions or garlic, following a strict Satvik diet. The people of this village are so dedicated to this lifestyle that they don't eat any non-vegetarian food or drink any alcohol even when they go outside their village. These people are maintaining this strict diet in spite of where or in what condition they are in. This lifestyle of the villagers has also earned it recognition in the India Book of Records and the Asia Book of Records.

(***Fig 5:*** *Folktales strengthen community bonds, preserve traditions, teach values, and inspire unity in village life*)

To conclude, there is one thing that is common in all these cases, that is, the strong faith and belief of the people in their local deities. This also tells us how spiritual and divine India as a country is. Not just this, almost every small village in our country has a story of their own, about the name of their village or their local deities, highlighting their belief system.

(***Fig 6:*** *Folktales in Indian villages preserve cultural heritage, teach morals, and connect communities through oral storytelling traditions*)

ARTWORK



THREADS OF TRADITION: A TAPESTRY OF HISTORICAL ELEGANCE

RAUNIKA SINGH

YEAR 3

This collage beautifully captures the essence of South Asian heritage, blending vibrant traditions, iconic architecture, intricate jewelry, and cultural motifs. The elements like Lahore's historic mosque, floral garlands, and traditional ornaments symbolize timeless elegance, while the imagery of Lucknow and vivid art pieces celebrate a harmonious fusion of history and artistry.

THE STORIES THAT SHAPE US:

THE MAGIC OF INDIAN STORYTELLING

SARGUN KAUR (YEAR 1)

We have all grown up surrounded by tales and myths, be it bedtime stories from our family or by popular books. In fact in many communities across India, these stories are passed on through generations and are preserved as dearly as material heirlooms are. Even though we enjoy these stories because of the entertainment they provide, they serve a far bigger purpose. These tales are a journey into worlds where wisdom and wit carry moral lessons that help children form a sense of right and wrong. They help to teach children good values, critical thinking and respect for others.

*(**Fig 1:** The Foolish Lion and the Clever Rabbit is a tale of wit , courage and humour)*

Take for instance, *Panchatantra*, a collection of tales of animals that use clever foxes, loyal elephants and cunning jackals to encourage children to think critically and value their unique qualities. One such tale from The Panchatantra that stuck with me was *'The Foolish Lion and the Clever Rabbit'.* This tale taught me how patience and cleverness are more important than brute force. In the story, the rabbit outsmarts a powerful lion by tricking him into thinking that another lion wants to encroach on his area. He leads the lion to a well and tells the lion that his reflection is the other predator; this causes the lion to jump into the well to fight his reflection and he ultimately drowns. Even though I didn't realise it at the time, this tale caused me to subconsciously learn that it is important to think things through level-headedly and that greed and lack of information leads us to our self-imposed downfall.

Then there are the stories of Akbar and Birbal; tales filled with wisdom and wit that leaves the reader in complete awe of Birbal's clever thinking and his solutions to seemingly impossible problems. One memorable story is 'The Pandit's Mother Tongue'. This story highlights the deep connections we have with the languages of our childhood and how we always return to familiarity when times get tough. In the tale, a learned pandit comes to Akbar's court and challenges his courtiers to identify his mother tongue.

THE STORIES THAT SHAPE US:

THE MAGIC OF INDIAN STORYTELLING

SARGUN KAUR (YEAR 1)

The courtiers decide to take the obvious course of action and test his proficiency in the languages but he is able to speak flawlessly in all of them. When they finally admitted defeat, Birbal decided to take the matter into his own hands. At nightfall, Birbal quietly crept into the pandit's room and while he was asleep, Birbal tickled him with the feather. The pandit woke up, startled and scared and he cried out in Telugu. Birbal declared that Telugu was his mother tongue. He explained how in moments of surprise and fear, a person instinctively reverts to his mother tongue. It's a clever reminder that no matter how much we change, our true selves emerge when we face the unexpected and unfamiliar. The story is a beautiful reflection of how our core identity remains tied to the language, culture and experiences that have shaped us.

(***Fig 2:*** *Akbar and Birbal were not only a beloved children's tale but are also real people that are remembered fondly)*

(***Fig 3:*** *Goddess Kali, the fierce embodiment of divine feminine energy, symbolizes destruction, transformation, and the triumph of good over evil)*

Another powerful tale comes from the story of the revered Goddess Kali. In many mythological tales, she embodies courage and protects the innocents. Her story is full of strength and compassion. It inspires children to stand up for what is right. In India's tribal communities, the moon and stars are also central to storytelling. One such common fable speaks of a young girl who wanted to touch the moon. Her dream taught her patience and resilience and though she couldn't reach it, her efforts inspired others to dream big and persevere. This story beautifully illustrates that while we may not achieve all our dreams, the journey can still inspire us and others.

THE STORIES THAT SHAPE US:

THE MAGIC OF INDIAN STORYTELLING

SARGUN KAUR (YEAR 1)

And lastly, my personal favourite, The Vikram Betal Tales! A collection of stories from Indian folklore that are both adventurous and philosophical. The series follows King Vikramaditya and his encounters with a spirit named Betal. Each story in the series is an intricate puzzle, and the tales are laced with profound moral lessons.

The general crux of these stories is that King Vikram is tasked with capturing the Betal, who resides in a tree. The spirit, however, won't let himself be captured without presenting a moral dilemma in the form of a riddle. Vikram, who is bound by his oath to bring Betal to the sage, must answer the riddle correctly. But there is a trick! If he speaks anything at all, he'll release the spirit and will have to start the journey again. These challenges test Vikram's intellect and his ability to reason through paradoxical situations.

*(**Fig 4:** Vikram and Betal is a tale of King Vikramaditya and a riddle-speaking spirit testing his wisdom)*

For instance, in one riddle, Betal asks King Vikram, "There is a man who has been married for many years and has many children. One day, he is asked how many children he has, and he answers, 'I have five children, each one with a different name.' When asked about the first child's name, he says "I have a child called Dumb.""Who is the first child?" King Vikram, after a moment of thought, answered, "The first child is the one who asked the question." This riddle highlights the idea of perception and wordplay.

To conclude, such stories are not only entertaining but they also impart timeless wisdom. They teach us about cleverness, kindness and the importance of making thoughtful decisions. These tales teach the youth important values and different perspectives and help them in navigating life's challenges. They reflect India's rich culture and emphasise wisdom, morality, respect for nature and the importance of community and harmony in one's life.

TEA'S TIMELESS TALE

AMITOZ KAUR (YEAR 3)

Tea, as we commonly know it today, has roots that trace back to various indigenous cultures, particularly in Asia. Each region has its own unique traditions and uses for tea, often intertwined with cultural practices, spirituality and medicinal applications. In many indigenous cultures, tea is not just a beverage but a means of connecting with community, nature, and tradition. It often features in rituals, celebrations and everyday life, serving as a reminder of cultural identity and heritage.

The origin of tea in India is rich with history and lore, blending myth and fact. While tea is believed to have originated in China, it is thought to have made its way in India around the 17th century. The British East India Company played a significant role in promoting tea cultivation in India. In the early 19th Century, the British began to cultivate tea in Assam and Darjeeling to break China's monopoly on tea production. The first tea plantations were established in these regions, leading to a boom in tea production.

(***Fig 1:*** *The cultivation of tea began in Assam and Darjeeling to break China's monopoly on tea production)*

One popular story claims that Bodhidharma, the founder of Zen Buddhism, discovered tea when he fell asleep during meditation. To stay awake, he is said to have chewed on tea leaves, thus beginning the connection between tea and spiritual practice. The establishment of tea gardens in India is steeped in stories of perseverance. Many laborers, including those in China and Indigenous communities, worked under challenging conditions to create the lush tea estates we see today.

The story of tea in India is interwoven with legends, colonial history, and cultural evolution. *The Romance of Darjeeling Tea*, The Darjeeling tea narrative reflects how British colonists sought to recreate home comforts in India. In the 1830s, Dr Archibald Campbell, a civil servant in Darjeeling, experimented with tea plants brought from China. He found the cool, misty slopes of Darjeeling ideal for cultivation. By the 1850s, tea gardens were flourishing in the region. The unique combination of climate and soul produced a tea with a distinct flavor, delicate, floral and often called the “Champagne of Teas".

TEA'S TIMELESS TALE

AMITOZ KAUR (YEAR 3)

(***Fig 2:*** *Emergence of Chaiwalas and Tapris to sell tea locally)*

The rise of Indian 'Chai' (Masala Tea) is also a prevalent aspect. During the colonial era, Indian laborers were introduced to tea on plantations. To stretch the use of expensive tea leaves, vendors began mixing tea with milk, sugar and spices like ginger, cardamom, etc. Chai became popular among the working class; and soon, *Chaiwalas* emerged, selling steaming cups at railway stations, markets and street corners. Their tea stalls came to be known as *Tapri*, where men would sit, chat and relax, giving rise to generation-long friendships and stories about the mundane. By the 20th century, chai had become a daily ritual across the country, marketing tea's transformation from a colonial beverage to an intrinsic past of Indian life.

Tea and Indian Railways: *The Journey of Chai on Tracks*. The marriage of India Railways and chai is a charming story of how tea became ubiquitous. As the railway network expanded across India in the early 20th century, vendors began setting up stalls on platforms and selling tea to the passengers, eliciting and popularizing the notion of *'Chai pe Charcha'*. These Chaiwalas played a key role in making chai a household drink. With their shouts of *"Chai, Chai! Garam Chai!"* echoing across the stations, they ensured that every traveler was introduced to the soothing warmth of tea.

Though tea is now deeply associated with Indian culture, it was not widely consumed or cultivated as a mainstream beverage before the 19th century. However, certain indigenous communities in India, particularly like Assam and Arunachal Pradesh, had long standing traditions of using tea leaves, though their methods were different from the brewed tea we recognize today. Tribes used tea for indigenous purposes too, The Singpho and Khamti tribes of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh are believed to have used wild tea plants for centuries. They brewed tea in unique ways, distinct from the conventional British or Chinese methods. One traditional preparation involved smoking or fermenting tea leaves and mixing them with hot water. The result was more akin to a broth, rather than the clear infusion familiar to modern tea drinkers. In some communities, tea leaves were pickled and used in cooking or chewed for refreshment. This practice reflects a cultural similarity with neighboring countries like Myanmar, where "lahpet" (fermented tea) is still popular.

TEA'S TIMELESS TALE

AMITOZ KAUR (YEAR 3)

*(**Fig 3:** By the 20th Century, chai had become a daily ritual across the country, marketing tea's transformation from a colonial beverage to an intrinsic past of Indian life)*

While India's mainstream tea culture owes much to British influence, the existence of wild tea plants and indigenous brewing methods in the northeast suggests that tea had a deep-rooted, though localized, presence in Indian history. Indigenous tea practices, which were overshadowed by colonial tea estates, are now being rediscovered and celebrated, bringing full circle the story of tea as an indigenous Indian tradition.

While tea plants were native to India, the commercial tea industry was cultivated and expanded under British colonial influence. Over time, tea has not only become an integral part of India's economy but also deeply ingrained in its social and cultural fabric through the tradition of chai.

The story of tea in India is not just a tale of colonial exploitation or economic success; it's a saga of cultural adaptation and innovation. From the indigenous tribes of Assam to the tea gardens of Darjeeling and Nilgiri, and from railway station chaiwalas to modern-day tea cafes, tea has become an inseparable part of India's identity. Today, it connects people across generations, regions, and social classes, embodying stories of resilience, adaptation, and community.

*(**Fig 4:** Tea plantations in India during British Raj)*

THE SONG OF THE FOREST

AVNI JAIN (YEAR 1)

In the heart of the dense Sal forests of Central India, there lay a small village named Surajpur. To an outsider, it was an ordinary cluster of mud huts nestled between towering trees. But for the people of Surajpur, it was a place of sacred stories, a land guarded by the spirits of ancestors and the gods of the forest. They lived simply, as their forefathers had, growing millet, gathering honey, and honouring the forest's bounty with reverence.

Aadi, a spirited young boy from the Gond tribe, had grown up learning the songs of the forest and the stories of his people. Every evening, after the day's work was done, he would sit by his grandmother, Amma Bai, and listen to tales passed down through generations. Amma Bai's voice, crackling and soft, carried the magic of old legends. She spoke of Jangli Ma, the spirit who protected the forest, appearing only when the trees and animals were threatened.

(***Fig 1:*** *Sal forest of Central India)*

"It is she who watches over the trees and the rivers," Amma Bai would say, her eyes gleaming. "Jangli Ma is our guardian, and she only reveals herself to those with pure hearts."

Aadi was captivated by these stories and spent hours imagining Jangli Ma—a figure made of leaves and earth, her eyes as deep as the forest itself. He dreamed of meeting her someday, hoping he might be pure-hearted enough.

AVNI JAIN (YEAR 1)

One summer, the peace of Surajpur was disrupted by the sound of machines. A group of city loggers had arrived, bringing axes, chainsaws, and loud trucks. The villagers watched anxiously as the men eyed the Mahua trees. For the Gond people, the Mahua was sacred. Its blossoms, used in food, drink, and medicine, were symbols of life itself. The elders tried to reason with the loggers, explaining that these trees had been there for centuries, standing guard over the village. But the loggers were only interested in profits and saw the forest as just timber waiting to be claimed.

*(**Fig 2:** Gond Community is a group of indigenous people in India who are known for their rich culture, vibrant traditions, and unique art)*

*(**Fig 3:** Fictitious representation of Jangli Ma, the protagonist of the strory)*

Aadi was devastated. The forest was his friend—it's trees, his playground, its animals, his companions. One evening, after hearing the adults' fearful whispers about the loggers, he slipped away into the woods, his heart heavy with worry. As he walked deeper into the forest, he whispered prayers to Jangli Ma, hoping she would hear him.

"Please, Jangli Ma," he murmured. "Protect our trees, our home."

Night fell, and Aadi, exhausted, curled up beneath a Mahua tree. He gazed at the moonlit leaves, feeling a strange comfort. Slowly, he drifted to sleep, lulled by the sounds of the forest around him. In the stillness of the night, a gentle breeze brushed his face, stirring him awake. And there, bathed in silvery moonlight, he saw her—a figure draped in leaves and vines, her skin the rich brown of the earth, her hair adorned with Mahua blossoms. It was Jangli Ma.

AVNI JAIN (YEAR 1)

(***Fig 4:*** *Jangli Ma had come to talk to Aadi about his pleas)*

Aadi nodded, feeling a warmth spread through him as her touch lingered. He ran back to the village, his spirit light with hope, and told the elders of his encounter. Though sceptical, they knew Adi's heart and trusted him

The next morning, strange things began to happen in the forest. As the loggers tried to start their machines, shadows darted around them, followed by the low growl of unseen animals. Trees appeared to close in around them, and the air grew thick with an eerie silence. Spooked and unnerved, the loggers decided that the job was cursed. They abandoned their plans, leaving the forest untouched.

Aadi's breath caught, awe washing over him as he gazed at the spirit he had only ever heard of. Her eyes, deep and kind, seemed to hold the stories of ancient forests and rivers and of all that had ever lived within them.

"Why do you call me, child?" She asked, her voice soft but carrying the strength of the earth itself.

Aadi explained the plight of his village, the threat to the Mahua trees, and the loggers' plans. Jangli Ma listened, her expression sombre, and then she kneeled, placing her hand on Aadi's forehead. "You have a pure heart, Aadi," she said gently. "Return to your people and tell them that the forest will protect itself."

(***Fig 5:*** *City loggers have arrived to destroy the forest)*

AVNI JAIN (YEAR 1)

The villagers rejoiced, celebrating with songs and offerings to the spirits of the forest. Aadi, now seen as a special child, was asked to lead the ceremony. He sang the songs he had learnt from Amma Bai, his voice merging with the beat of drums and the clinking of anklets. That night, as he sat with Amma Bai, he told her of Jangli Ma, of her beauty and kindness. Amma Bai listened, smiling, and nodded.

"Aadi, you have seen her because your heart belongs to the forest," she said. "Now it is your turn to carry these stories and keep our connection alive."

From that day on, Aadi became a storyteller, passing down the memory of Jangli Ma and the forest's resilience to new generations. He reminded the children of Surajpur that the forest was not just trees and animals—it was a living, breathing protector. And as long as they respected and loved it, the forest would always watch over them, just as Jangli Ma had done.

(***Fig 6:*** *A happy and prosperous Jangli Ma)*

ARTWORK

CHILD OF THE WILD

SARGUN KAUR

YEAR 1

This artwork represents a young tribal girl in traditional attire, which includes a feathered headgear. In northeastern India, tribes such as the Naga, Mizo, Garo, and Adi use such adornments primarily for festivals and dances. They hold cultural significance and showcase the vibrant heritage of these communities. The type of headgear anointed is symbolic to identity, strength, position in tribe and connection to nature.

THE WATCHFUL EYES OF THE UNKNOWN

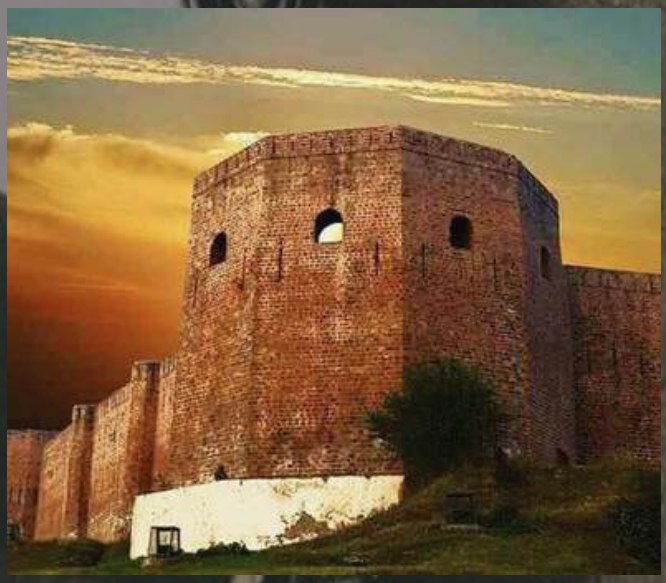
PARI KHAJURIA (YEAR 2)

In the heart of Jammu, there exists a hill that watches over River Tawi, where stands the Bahu Fort, a place shrouded in history and held sacred by its people.

The fort exists as an example of nostalgia and heritage that has witnessed it all. Rich history makes it up, and it stands as a living embodiment of the myths, legends, and stories. Among the most cherished of these stories is the legend of the watchful eyes.

The fort of memories had a paranormal figure or spirit who watched over the people there. When the dusk falls and the skies over Jammu shift from amber to deep indigo, whispers of this spirit's presence fill the air. Locals tell that when the wind moves into the passages of the fort, it feels as if her breath lingers in the gentle evening breeze, casting a quiet blessing upon the city below.

Pilgrims who climb the winding path to Bahu Fort often feel a sense of protection, an inexplicable warmth. Some say they have felt her gaze upon them, a kind of invisible watchfulness that is neither oppressive nor cold but rather reassuring and warm. For it is believed that this spirit remains bound to her land, ever vigilant, her watchful eyes seeing beyond the limits of time, keeping safe the people of this land.



*(**Fig 1:** Bahu Fort is the oldest Fort in Jammu, India)*

On moonlit nights, the Tawi River shimmers like silver, and the shadows of the fort seem to deepen. During these nights, legend holds that the spirit wanders the fortress, her spirit roaming the walls, her footsteps light as the cool evening mist. She looks over the rivers, the homes, the people—and as she does, it is as though she is whispering to each soul, "You are protected, you are loved."

(***Fig 2:*** *The river Tawi divides the Jammu city into two parts- old city and new city)*

For the people of Jammu, this is more than a tale; it is a piece of their heritage, a reminder of the fort whose love transcended life itself. This legend of the spirit's watchful eyes is a part of their identity, a symbol of resilience and timeless protection, bound forever to this land. This spirit has no name, no origin, no history, but all we know is that this fort and land are its "home."

SAPTAPADI

THE JOURNEY OF LOVE

ISHA WADHWA (YEAR 1)

Marriage in India is steeped in rich cultural heritage, blending tradition and rituals with love. From the earliest scriptures of the Vedas to the vibrant folklore passed down through generations, marriage is portrayed as a sacred bond, intertwined with myths, oral traditions and symbolic customs imbued with spiritual, emotional, and social responsibilities. It is not only the relationship between two individuals but also the blending of two families.

In many indigenous cultures, marriage is believed to align with cosmic forces.

India is a cultural heritage and every religion has their own way to perform different rituals but the most common in all is *'pheras'* (sacred rounds).

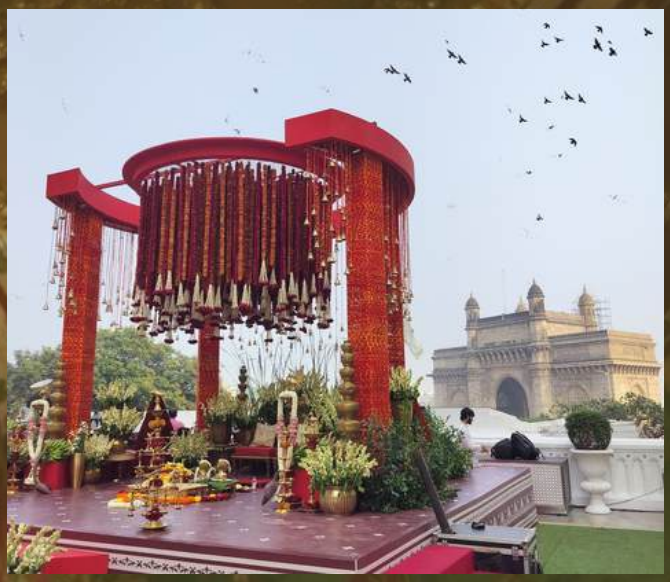
In *Sanatan Dharma*, a total *seven number of pheras* (Saptapadi) are taken around the fire *(Agni)* as it signifies the purity, growth and eternal light of knowledge. Each *phera* describes one promise between the bride and the groom throughout their life.

Significance of the Seven Pheras

1. First Phera – Prayer for Nourishment.

"Om prathama ṛtuḥ prathamaṁ karma prathamaṁ vayunam"

The groom asks the bride to take the first step towards the prosperity of their household and the bride agrees to share the responsibility with love and respect.They vow to provide and support each other throughout life.



(***Fig 1:*** *Mandap for Hera ceremony, decorated in rich accents)*

2. Second Phera – Strength and Protection.

"Om dvitīya ṛtuḥ dvitīyaṁ karma dvitīyaṁ vayunam"

They seek strength and courage to face life's challenges together. The groom promises to protect his wife, and she vows to stand by him.The couple prays for mental, physical, and spiritual well-being to lead a strong and fulfilling life together.

3. Third Phera – Wealth and Prosperity.

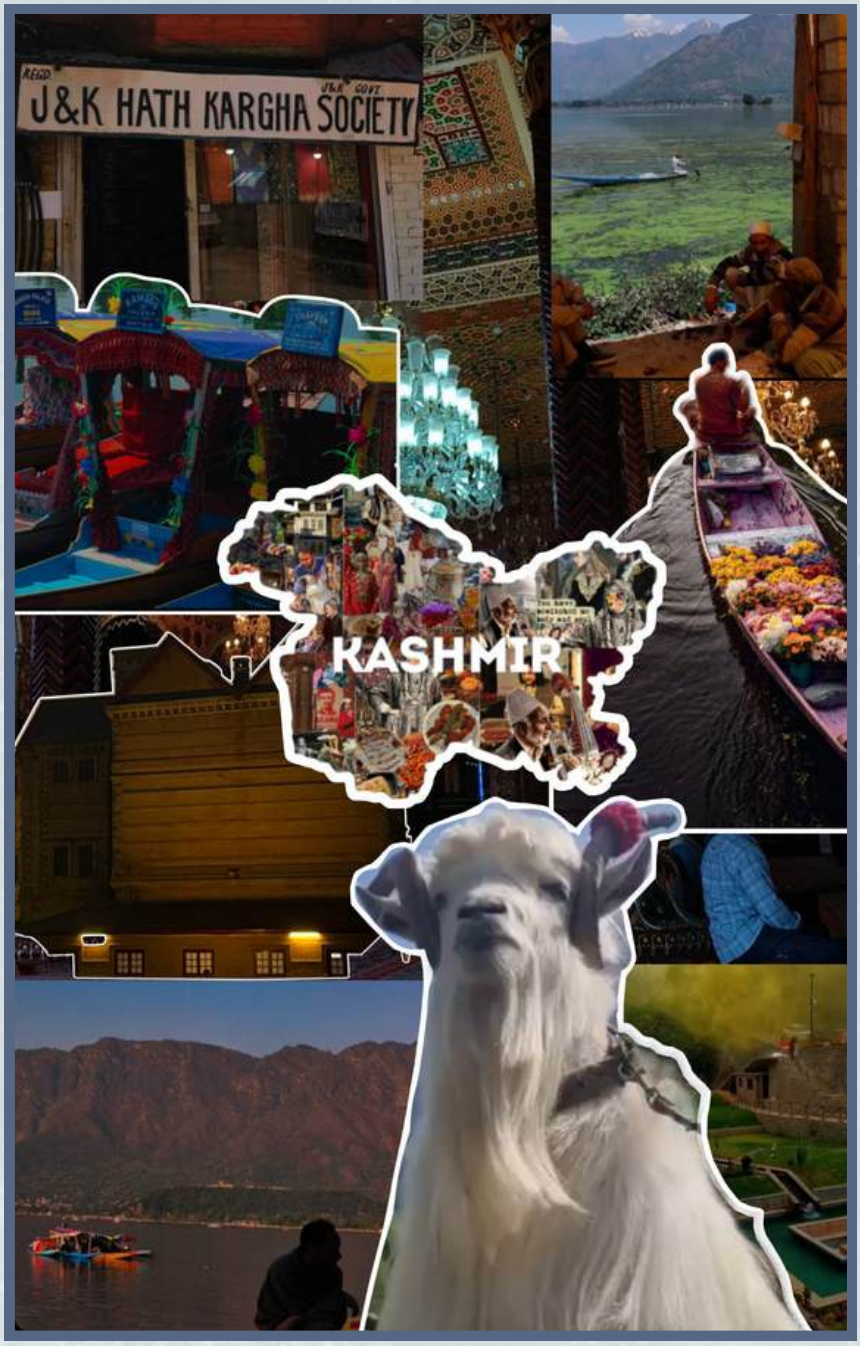
"Om tṛtīya ṛtuḥ tṛtīyaṁ karma tṛtīyaṁ vayunam"

They pray for financial stability, success, wealth and ethical living. They commit to working together to build a secure future and pray for an abundant life, free from financial struggles, and for their bond to grow in harmony and happiness.

4. Fourth Phera – Family and Spiritual Growth.
"Om caturtha ṛtuḥ caturthaṁ karma caturthaṁ vayunam"
With this step, the groom thanks the bride for bringing happiness and sacredness into his life. The couple prays for happiness, harmony, love, and mutual respect. The couple seeks blessings for a peaceful and joyful family life, free from negativity.
5. Fifth Phera – Blessings for Children and Generations.
"Om pañcama ṛtuḥ pañcamaṁ karma pañcamaṁ vayunam"
*This step signifies the cou*ple's commitment to their family as they seek divine blessings of all loved one's for healthy and virtuous children. They promise to be responsible parents and role models.
6. Sixth Phera – Health and Long Life.
"Om ṣaṣṭha ṛtuḥ ṣaṣṭhaṁ karma ṣaṣṭhaṁ vayunam"
This step represents a prayer for a long, healthy, and peaceful life together.
They pray for good health and a disease-free life. They promise to stand by each other in times of joy and sorrow, ensuring mutual support and understanding.
7. Seventh Phera – Eternal Love and Companionship.
"Om saptama ṛtuḥ saptamaṁ karma saptamaṁ vayunam"
This step symbolizes the couple's eternal bond, loyalty, and friendship.
The couple pledges lifelong loyalty, love, and companionship.The couple seeks divine blessings for a strong, unbreakable bond, full of trust and commitment.
With this phera, the marriage is considered complete, and the couple is united in a sacred and lifelong relationship.
After completing the seven pheras, the priest blesses the couple, signifying the completion of their sacred bond The *saptapadi* are the most sacred part of a Hindu Wedding ceremony, symbolizing spiritual and emotional bond between the couple with respect to their values towards each other. The marriage is considered sacred and official, and the couple is now bound together for seven lifetimes according to Hindu traditions. As modernization changes marital practices, it becomes even more important to preserve these indigenous traditions, folklore and values to inspire future generations.

(***Fig 2:*** *Anand Karaj ceremony)*

ARTWORK



A PALETTE OF TRANQUILITY: KASHMIR'S MOOD BOARD

PARI KHAJURIA

YEAR 2

This collage captures the essence of Kashmir, where nature and culture weave together like a Pashmina shawl. It speaks of serene shikaras on calm lakes, vibrant flower markets, and misty mountains guarding timeless beauty. Intricate woodwork, glowing chandeliers, and the proud Changthangi goat reflect the region's artistry and famed Pashmina wool. Bustling markets and the aroma of spices tell tales of a paradise where every detail holds a story.

ARTWORK

EMPRESS OF THE EAGLE'S FLIGHT

AYUSHI

YEAR 2

Eagle feathers, which are earned through acts of bravery and wisdom. The headdresses are deeply intertwined with the wearer's identity, values, and connection to their community and spirituality. Symmetrical patterns on her face, such as straight lines, dots, and chevron-like shapes, symbolise cultural motifs. She has a calm yet confident expression, capturing a sense of strength and individuality. Her hair is styled into thick, flowing strands with braided sections, enhancing the cultural depth of the drawing. Then there sits a circular ornament resembling a dreamcatcher.

SAKHIS:

SPINNING THE YARN OF SIKH SPIRIT

AMITOZ KAUR (YEAR 3)

A Sakhi (pronounced Sakhi-ī) in Punjabi culture refers to a short, impactful narrative or a story that often carries a moral lesson or spiritual teaching. These stories are generally based on the lives of religious or historical figures, particularly the Sikh Gurus, their companions, and other figures of the Sikh faith. The word "Sakhi" comes from the Punjabi term meaning "companion" or "witness" , reflecting the role of the narrator as someone who shares a meaningful or transformative experience with others.

(***Fig 1:*** *Sakhis, they are oral narrative used to preserve wisdom, import lessons, and spread the teachings of the Gurus)*

Sakhis are an integral part of Sikh tradition and Punjabi folklore. They are oral narratives used to preserve wisdom, impart moral lessons, and spread the teachings of the Gurus, often through storytelling in Sikh Gurudwaras and households, community gatherings, and festivals. Sakhis are not just stories; they carry deeper meanings that resonate with spiritual values and lessons for daily life.

The origin of Sakhis is closely tied to the early development of Sikhism in the Punjab region of India. The Sikh Gurus, starting with Guru Nanak Dev Ji (the first Guru), were not only religious leaders but also social reformers who interacted with people from diverse backgrounds- Hindu, Muslims, and others- often through stories and teachings. The events from their lives, their spiritual encounters, and their wisdom were passed down orally in the form of Sakhis.

(**Fig 2:** *Gurudwara Sahib, a place for worship, and where Sakhis, as an oral tradition developed in the form of Katha)*

Initially, these stories were shared to reinforce the values of Sikhism, to preserve the teachings of the Gurus, and to offer the practical wisdom on how to live a life of righteousness and devotion to God. Many of the early Sakhis were recounted in the Gurudwaras, especially during Gurbani (Sikh hymns) recitations and Katha (storytelling sessions). Over time, these stories were compiled into various scriptural texts and historical accounts.

However, the central tradition of sharing Sakhis orally, especially among common people, persisted for centuries, and continues to be a cherished practice in contemporary Punjabi and Sikh culture.

(**Fig 3:** *Gurbani: Sikh Spiritual text)*

Guru Nanak's Visit to Makkah: Guru Nanak Dev Ji once traveled to Makkah (present-day Saudi Arabia). While resting at a mosque, the local imam asked him to move, as his feet were pointing towards the Kaaba. Guru Nanak calmly responded by telling the imam that whatever his feet pointed, that was the direction of God. This story highlights the universal nature of God, transcending geographical boundaries, and teaches the importance of religious tolerance and respect of all faiths. God is beyond the confines of any one religion, and spirituality is about the search for the Divine in every aspect of life.

The Creation Of The Khalsa: On the day of Vaisakhi in 1699, Guru Gobind Singh Ji, the tenth Guru, called for the creation of the Khalsa, a community of spiritually disciplined soldiers committed to standing up for justice and equality. Five men (the Panj Pyare) were initiated, and the Guru gave them the title of Singh and Kaur, symbolizing their equality. The creation of Khalsa emphasizes the importance of courage, duty, and the ability to fight injustice while maintaining spiritual purity. It also marks a profound shift in Sikh identity, reinforcing the equality of all people regardless of caste, class, or gender.

(***Fig 4:*** *Makkah, present day Saudi Arabia)*

(***Fig 5:*** *Panj Pyare, intitiated under Khalsa Raj by Guru Gobind Singh Ji)*

One of the most repeated teachings in Sikhism, as exemplified in numerous Sakhis, is the equality of all human beings. There is no distinction between castes, classes, or religions. Sikh Gurus like Guru Nanak Dev Ji preached that everyone is equal in the eyes of God. Selfless service is a central tenet in Sikhism.

Many Sakhis emphasize the importance of doing Seva without expecting anything in return, as an offering to the Divine and a way of contributing to the welfare of others. Sakhis reiterate that there is only one God, and all religions ultimately lead to the same Divine source. The teaching of Ek Onkar (One God) is repeated across the stories and hymns in the Sikh tradition. The Sikh Gurus emphasized living a life of humility, honesty, and simplicity. Sakhis often showcase how the Gurus demonstrated these Virtues through their actions.

(***Fig 6:*** *Ek Onkar, One God)*

Today's fast-paced world experiences everything in the form of social media and visual platforms. Today, Sakhis are shared through social media, YouTube channels and animated videos. Sakhis, to spread knowledge, are also mass produced as large scale cinema films ensuring their continued transmission.

The latest rendition of one of the most wide spread Sakhi, *Story of Bibi Rajni, devotee of Guru Ramdas Ji* was published as a large scale movie in Indian theaters, retelling the story of the princess Rajani and her faith in her God. The intuitive way in which this story is produced helps people understand it better. The simple miracle of the story is visually represented for the youth to find interest in. Sakhis are not just historical accounts but are vessels of spiritual wisdom, moral guidance, and cultural identity in the Sikh tradition.

In the modern era, despite the influence of technology and globalization, Sakhis continue to hold great cultural, moral, and spiritual value in Sikh communities and beyond.

The universal values found in Sakhis- such as truth, selflessness, compassion and justice- are timeless and continue to resonate with people of all ages, especially in a world that often struggles with issues of materialism, greed and social justice. In the age of growing secularism and spiritual disconnection, Sakhis provide a way for people to reconnect with spiritual teachings. Stories of selflessness, Seva, and devotion continue to guide individuals on how to live a balanced, meaningful life in a fast-paced world.

(***Fig 7:*** *Bibi Rajni, devotee of Guru Ramdas Ji, a famous Sakhi, published as a large scale movie*

In the modern world, their relevance remains high as they address fundamental human values such as justice, freedom, equality etc. By reflecting on these stories, individuals can draw strength and guidance to navigate the complexities of contemporary life, while staying connected to the timeless wisdom of the Gurus.

A JOURNEY THROUGH INDIA'S HANDCRAFTED LEGACY

BHUMI DAHIYA (YEAR 1)

Since time immemorial, India has been known worldwide the best for its rich heritage of local craftsmanship. In the expansive nation of India, one can come across different cultures, languages, traditions and people every few kilometers. Similarly, one can find distinctive arts and crafts with their own distinctive stories and histories all over the country. The Indian handicrafts industry has always enjoyed a distinctive position in the global market, known for their exquisite materials, craftsmen and exclusive techniques. In this article we are going to explore some of those artistic wonders of our culturally rich country.

Dhokra

Dhokra is a traditional art form that dates back to around 4000 years and is regarded as one of the greatest heritages from the Harappan and Mohenjo-Daro civilizations. *The Dancing Girl* of Mohenjo-Daro which is said to be dated back from 2500 BCE is one of the most well known examples of Dhokra art worldwide. Dhokra is a tribal art passed onto generations from the ancestors of the Dhokra Damar tribe of metalsmiths, prominently from West Bengal and is now also practiced by the tribal populations of Chhattisgarh, Odisha, Jaharkhand, Kerala and Rajasthan.

(***Fig 1:*** *Dancing Girl of Mohenjo- Daro)*

Dhokra sculptures are made with the use of lost-wax technique, through the procedure of non-ferrous metal casting. To make Dhokra sculptures, traditionally , the artisans first make a core clay mold mixed with rice husk. Then a mixture of beehive melted wax, melted tar and resins from local trees like the Dammar gum tree (Damara Orientalis) is fashioned into discs, this wax mixture is then made into string by hand.

A JOURNEY THROUGH INDIA'S HANDCRAFTED LEGACY

BHUMI DAHIYA (YEAR 1)

The clay model is then decorated with these strings to make fine decorations and details by hand on the Dhokra piece.

Dhokra art symbolizes people going back to the old ways of living in tribes, in the age of hunting. Which is why figures of various animals, like elephants, owls and horses can commonly be seen. But all these figurines have special meaning attached with them, like, the elephant symbolizes wisdom and masculinity, the horse symbolizes motion, the owl symbolizes prosperity and death and the tortoise symbolizes masculinity.

Kantha

Kantha is a centuries old tradition of stitching patchwork cloth from rags that originated in the pre-vedic era, before 1500 BCE though the earliest written record can be found dating 500 years ago. It is the oldest form of embroidery born in the rural villages of Bengal, and is now practiced by millions of south-asian women as a means of their livelihood. The art of Kantha has been passed down from mothers to daughters since ages now as a learning and dowry. The word Kantha is believed to have been derived from the Sanskrit word "Kontha", meaning rags. Traditionally old sarees, dhotis and lungis which had been used over time were used to make Kanthas, with the thread used for stitching drawn out from the fabric itself

(***Fig 2:*** *Kantha is a centuries old tradition of stitching patchwork cloth from rags)*

Usually around five to seven fabrics would be layered together, with the lightest fabric placed on the outside to make the embroidered designs more visible. The embroidery would be spread across the cloth to strengthen it. The women in every rural household would be Kantha experts, spending their free time between daily chores on embroidery. Kanthas would take months and even years to complete.

The original and traditional form of Kantha is a straight running stitch called the 'Running Stitch', which can be further classified into that using figures and storytelling 'Nakshi Kantha' or geometric patterns 'Par Tola Kantha'. There are other forms of Kantha as well such as, Lik or Anarasi Kantha, Lohori Kantha and Sujni Kantha in areas of Bangladesh.

A JOURNEY THROUGH INDIA'S HANDCRAFTED LEGACY

BHUMI DAHIYA (YEAR 1)

Bidri

Bidriware is a traditional art of metal handicraft from the Bidar region of Karnataka. The name Bidri is derived from the town of its origin Bidar in Karnataka where the craft first flourished during the fourteenth century under the rule of Bahamani Sultan. The craft was patronized by Bahamani rulers, who set up training camps for Bidri workers. The 500 year old art is Persian in origin and was brought to India by migrants to Ajmer in Rajasthan but Bidriware is an Indian innovation completely. The craft is believed to have originated in the fourteenth century even though the earliest recorded Bidriware is a 1625 Deccani miniature painting. The craft then spread through Hyderabad, Purnia, Murshidabad and Lucknow in the following centuries.

The art of engraving and inlaying is handed down by generations and is exclusive to Bidar. Bidriware craft is an alloy of zinc, copper and other non-ferrous metals. Bidriware is an ancient craft of inlaying pure silver and gold wires in metals. Beautifully detailed designs are carved on metals and then thin silver wires are hand etched on a zinc based metal.

This contrast between the black-oxidized background and the shiny silver inlay give prestige and radiance to the Bidriware. In terms of designs the Bidri objects in the first half of the seventeenth century were inspired by Mughal decorative art, Persian and Islamic metalware and Chinese porcelain.

There were still some motifs which were popular, such as the poppy flower from Mughal art, the double-fished insignia of the Nawabs of Awadh (present-day Lucknow) and then the kothmir (coriander) leaf motif by the mid-nineteenth century. Towards the end of the twentieth century the range of motifs also included zodiac signs and paintings of the Ajanta caves; they also displayed some European influence. The motifs introduced in the Bidriware were also from the fort of Bidar. Bidriware is also known to be an art of the rich and royal because of its elegant and imperial look.

(***Fig 3:*** *Bidriware is a traditional art of metal handicraft from the Bidar region of Karnataka)*

A JOURNEY THROUGH INDIA'S HANDCRAFTED LEGACY

BHUMI DAHIYA (YEAR 1)

Ajrakh

Ajrakh printing is one of the most ravishing and radiant block printing techniques using natural plant-based colours with a long history that is believed to have originated in the Indus Valley Civilisation around 3000 BC.

The Mohenjo-daro people are thought to have brought printing to the Indus Valley. It signifies the transference of culture from Sindh, Pakistan to Gujarat and Rajasthan, where they continued to excel at creating the marvelous print. The oldest evidence of the existence of Ajrakh printing was found from the bust of a priest-king from Mohenjo-Daro, who was found wearing a shawl with circular designs, which are believed to be Ajrakh.

Traditionally Ajrakh refers to the name of a block printed fabric dyed an elegant crimson red or indigo along with white jewel-like symmetrical motifs symbolising natural elements such as leaves, flowers and stars and the word Ajrakh is also derived from the Arabic word "Azrak", which means blue as blue is one of the primary colours used in this printing technique. Ajrakh is a cultural and symbolic designing technique synonymous with the Kutchi and Sindhi communities to reflect their rich cultural past, social status, and traditions.

(***Fig 4:*** *Ajrakh- eh- Dastan)*

Ajrakh printing technique is considered to be a tedious, labor-intensive and time-consuming process.
There are two main steps in the Ajrakh printing process: In order to print on Ajrakh print fabric, detailed motifs are carved onto wooden blocks and then transferred from the block. After printing, natural dyes like indigo, madder roots, and turmeric are used to colour the cloth.

Blue, white, red, and black are the main colours utilised in Ajrakh printing, while there are other colours as well that are used. Natural dyes and hand-carved wooden blocks are used by skilled artisans to create elaborate designs; therefore, the Ajrakh prints are not only soothing to the eyes but are also environmentally beneficial.

A JOURNEY THROUGH INDIA'S HANDCRAFTED LEGACY

BHUMI DAHIYA (YEAR 1)

Papier-mache

Paper-mache is a beautiful art which first originated in China, where paper was invented. The oldest evidence of the existence of papier-mâché has been found dating back to the Han Dynasty (BC 202 - AD 220) in China. There they first used the technique to make helmets, which they toughened by making many layers of lacquer. From China, the art then started spreading to other parts of Asia, such as Japan and Persia, where it was used to make masks, ornaments, and other decorative pieces, and eventually spread to other parts of the world. In spite of a French-sounding name, the handicraft first came to Europe in the seventeenth century only, though it did come to France first in all of Europe.

Papier-mâché was introduced to India in the fourteenth century by a Persian mystic, Mir Syed Ali Hamdani, who was visiting Kashmir with his skilled artisans and craftsmen. The Persian method of making papier-mâché blended with similar art forms from Central Asia, and a unique branch of art was born in India. The Kashmiri artisans over time added their own flair to the art form, bringing attention to their creations from all over the world.

The word papier-mâché literally translates to "chewed paper" in French and is believed to have gotten its name from French workers in papier-mâché shops who probably did just that.

There are two main aspects of Kashmiri paper-mâché: Sakhtsazi and Naqashi. The first step, Sakhtsazi, involves making the foundation of the paper-mache figurine with the paper pulp; meanwhile, the final step, Naqashi, involves painting and decoration on the piece of art. In the Sakhtsazi stage of making Kashmiri papier-mâché items, the paper pulp is soaked in water for three to four days and then put in a stone mortar and ground so that all of the paper is uniform in its consistency.

(***Fig 5:*** *The art of papier-mâché*)

The pulp is left in the sun to dry before being mixed with atji, a kind of rice glue. A mould or clay or wood allows the artist to shape the paper and glue mixture around it. During the Naqashi stage, a base coat of paint is applied, and then the artist makes their design by hand on the outside of the papier-mâché object, which means no Kashmiri papier-mâché item is similar. Traditional artists often use natural colours derived from minerals, organics, or vegetable bases.

A JOURNEY THROUGH INDIA'S HANDCRAFTED LEGACY

BHUMI DAHIYA (YEAR 1)

Common themes that appear on Kashmiri papier-mache products include flowers, box patterns, jungle motifs, and symbols that reflect the Kashmiri culture like almonds and the chinar, a five-pointed leaf. Some of the older designs involved intricate paintings of kingfishers, maple leaves, and other designs such as "Arabesque," "Yarkand," and "Hazara.". Because Kashmiri papier-mâché items are all individually created, each one tells its own different story, reflecting the culture and surroundings that the artisan was in while creating the art piece.

(***Fig 6:*** *A glimpse into Indian Handicrafts)*

This magnificent and illustrious art continues to this present day, taking on new methods and ideas, but consciously and intrinsically staying true to its foundations brought to Kashmir centuries ago by Mir Syed Ali Hamdani. Papier-mâché is an art in which various different techniques have been passed down from generations, with families doing this work for centuries now. It's an art that is exclusive amongst the traditionally skilled artists that have learnt it from their elders and have been practicing it for years, but it's equally interesting and attractive for the new people to learn it, who are not associated with this art in any way. This is something that takes the art of papier-mâché to the global level.

THE ECHOES OF PARTITION

AVNI JAIN (YEAR 1)

In the twilight of a nation's birth
A moment of adversity, a time of dearth,
The partition of India, a wound so deep,
scars that even time could not reap.

Amidst the havoc, the cries of the displaced,
Families torn apart, their futures erased.
The streets that bustled with life and cheer,
now echoed with the sounds of sorrow and fear.

The trains that once carried dreams and hope,
now bore the weight of a nation's elope.
Millions uprooted, their lives in disarray,
Forced to leave their homes, a fateful day.

Yet, in the midst of this darkest of nights,
glimmers of hope, like candles in lights.
Stories of courage, of kindness and care,
shone through the darkness, a beacon to share.

The Hindus, the Muslims, the Sikhs, and the rest
Bound by a common thread, a shared quest.
To rebuild, to heal, to find a new way
To forge a future brighter than the past's dismay.

The partition, a scar that will never fade,
A testament to the price that a nation once paid.
But from ashes, a phoenix shall rise.
A united India, where peace and harmony resides.

The rivers of blood flowing through the land,
bore witness to the violence, grim to withstand.
Neighbours turned foes, trust shattered; torn
A nation's unity, forever forlorn.

THE ECHOES OF PARTITION

AVNI JAIN (YEAR 1)

The echoes of partition, a haunting refrain,
A reminder of the cost, the loss, the pain.
Yet, in the resilience of the human spirit,
we find the strength to move forward and inherit,

A future where the wounds of the past are healed.
where the lessons of history are firmly sealed.
A nation reborn, people united,
A dream of unity, forever ignited.

THE TALE OF SEPARATION

RAUNIKA SINGH (YEAR 3)

(***Fig 1:*** *refugees crowd from Pakistan onto a train as they try to flee India near New Delhi in 1947)*

On the night of 14 August 1947, a new nation was born; *Pakistan.* While the birth of this new nation was planned by the Indian and British governments, the partition left lasting scars across generations. During this traumatic period, people were forced to leave their native lands and relocate to a country that was unknown to them. It disrupted not only households but also their culture and roots.

This story is about a Sikh family who belonged to Lahore, Pakistan; they were *zamindars* and were a very prosperous. During the partition, moving to India was the best option for them due to the immense influence of religion in deciding which country to settle down in. Thus, being a Sikh family meant that moving to the other side of the border was much safer than staying back in Pakistan.

The Partition became one of the largest-ever mass migrations. In its brutality, it left many people dead and women kidnapped or raped. Some women drowned themselves to avoid getting raped and their bloated bodies floated through contaminated, blood-stained rivers. The acrid stench of death and destruction embedded itself into the two nations' topography. Fearful of his daughters suffering the same fate, their father contemplated ending the lives of his unmarried daughters and juvenile granddaughters. But even the devil would lack the courage to stain their hands with the blood of their own kin.

Reports of trains dripping in blood and railways blanketed with the dead led to these treacherous journeys becoming known as "blood trains."

RAUNIKA SINGH (YEAR 3)

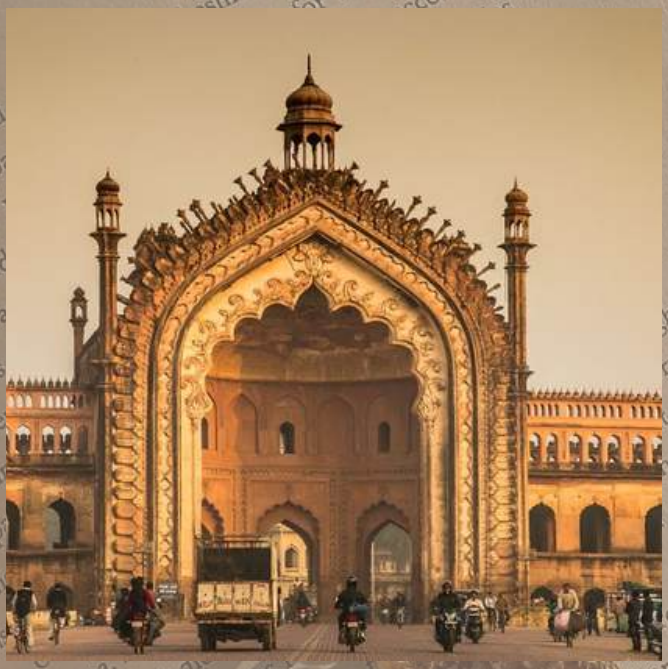
*(**Fig 2**: A Punjabi bride from the 1900s carried not just the weight of her heirloom jewellery, but the essence of generations before her. Each piece, handcrafted with love, symbolized the timeless connection between past and present, making her wedding a true celebration of heritage and culture)*

The migration compelled the family to bury their assets in the earth in order to safeguard themselves from being robbed of their only material memory. The hope still lingered inside their hearts of returning one day and starting a new life, again, in Pakistan; but little did they know it was now a dream far-fetched.

The real challenge came with hiding whatever assets they were travelling with. From concealing the gold jewellery inside their clothes' linings to keeping them safe near their bodies, their hardships had no measure. Eventually, this led to rashes and injuries; yet, their valuables couldn't be saved. Treachery walked to them on its own when the railway officers asked for money forcefully and looted them, claiming the train wouldn't move forward due to coal exhaustion.

Death after death of many family members followed and there was no count to this grotesque struggle. Fighting betrayal, ghastly situations, and the deadly partition, they finally arrived at the refugee camp in Delhi. Survival in Delhi was a challenge on its own, leading the family to sell off their valuables to sustain their lives. Slowly and gradually they became stable in the new country and later, moved to Lucknow starting a better life. There they grew financially and expanded from a family of four to ten. They educated all their children; some had basic elementary education while others became college graduates in the future. The sun had finally risen for the family, fulfilling all their desires and dream. Life was finally taking shape and making meaning!

RAUNIKA SINGH (YEAR 3)



*(**Fig 3**: Rumi Darwaza - a symbol of Lucknow's tryst with destiny -Rumi Darwaza was built by the fourth Nawab of Lucknow, Nawab Asaf-ud-Daula and is believed to be identical to an old gate in Istanbul)*

As time passed and life moved forward, they made a home away from home, but the pain of separation was still there after so many decades; the wounds of their losses never healed. While they enjoyed a happy life in India, they could not make this country their home; deep down, their hearts still belonged to their home in Lahore. Still, this new life was enough for them to heal from the wounds od the past. The jewellery that once bruised their soft bodies was now adorned again by their future generations. The struggle, pain, and grief faced by them for those no longer present faded, yet the gratitude and love for them was everlasting.

*(**Fig 4**: Photo taken from the collection: "35Akhri", depicting the transition from the eldest generation to the youngest generation)*

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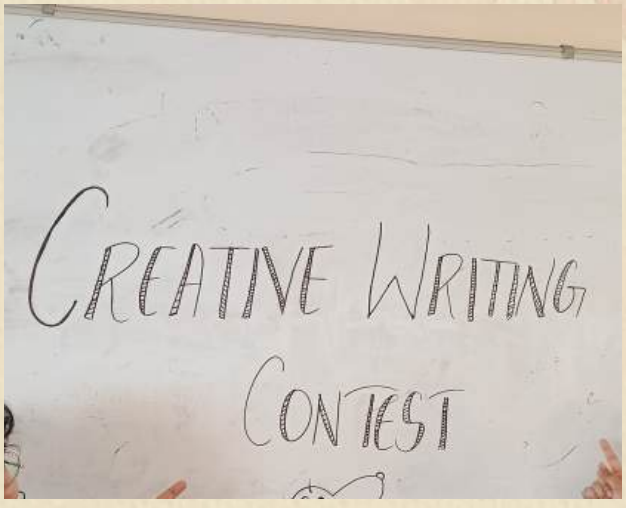

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