CHAPTER II

CLASSIFICATION OF WARLI PAINTINGS

ON THE BASIS OF SUBJECT MATTER
Warlis live in thatched mud huts. The walls of these huts are embellished with the warli art. These paintings depict the scenes from rural India, where women at their daily household chores, men at respective vocations, babies in their cradles, animals and birds like peacocks, hens, cows, birds all form an integral life, all created in a loose rhythmic pattern.

They see themselves as joyous dancers in this time frame. This cyclic nature of time is played out in all spheres of their life and can be best seen in their annual cycle of work, thanksgiving, enjoyment and work again. Their art also expresses an interesting aspect of their inherent philosophy than of prosperity. All their stories with its various moods and views are expressed with just two basic colours- the brown of the earth and the white of the rice paste.
Tree which play a crucial part in the Warli’s livelihood are given careful attention in the paintings. Different varieties of trees are drawn in detail forming intricate decorative patterns. They prominently depict Tigers, Corn Fields, Peacocks, Cockroaches, Horses, Snakes, Birds, Squirrels, Monkeys and other manifestations of nature. Personified as Hirva, nature is seen as the provider of all their requirements and Warlis identify themselves with Pardi, the hunter companion of Hirva and see themselves as protectors of nature.

Warli paintings have various subjects or themes, which presents a picture of their daily life. This old tribal art is two dimensional with no perspective or proportion. Each painting has various elements giving a huge outlook. Symbols used in the paintings represent the whole world of Warlis. Most of them emphasize fertility, productivity in nature.

2.1 Marriage Paintings

The marriage season begins usually from the end of Magha (February) to Phalguna (March) bringing with it festivity and colour\(^2\). Marriage is the most important ceremony in the community. The process of painting during the

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wedding is as important as the complete itself. The Warlis believe that with the marriage of the bride and bridegroom all living things are fertilized and re-energized into creativity. Every single marriage is a cosmic event and the long process of marriage rituals, designed as it is to affect creation is carefully observed according to convention (Dalmia, 1988)³.

Girls are usually married at the age of 7 or 8 yrs. and boys at 12. Marriage with in clan is prohibited. Parallel cousins marriage on both maternal and paternal sides is prohibited⁴.

The Warli marriage lasts for four or five days and many minor rites are scrupulously performed.

The bridegroom pays the bride price; it shows the importance of women in Warli society. The groom also buys all the wedding saris of the bride and a sari for her mother and also clothes for her brother.

The process of painting

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during the wedding is as important as the completed picture itself.

Only a Savasini, or a woman whose husband is alive, can make the main portion of painting consisting of the Caukat. These Savasinis prepare the white paste for the painting by sieving the rice flour then the wall is leaped with cowdung over which geru (red mud) is smeared. After smearing the Caukat (the square) is made. All the paintings made on the occasion of the marriage symbolize the existence of Warlis and wedding cannot take place in the absence of these paintings. These drawings are called Chowks.5

All the elements in the chowk are replete with symbolism. These are designed around large ornate squares with elaborate concentric patterns, the groom’s precision is often depicted in a corner. The chowk is executed in the houses of both the bride as well as the groom.

The most significant symbol painted in the centre of the chowk is of mother goddess, Palghat. The Savasinis

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5 Dalmiya, Yashodhara, The Painted World of Warlis: Art and Rituals of Warli Tribe of Maharashtra, Lalit Kala Academy, New Delhi, India.
or Suhasinis, first start filling up the square frame (Cauk) towards inside from these four lines, with geometric strip (Tribhuwan & Finkenauer, 2003)\(^6\). First strip consist of triangles, symbolizes cymbals (Tal-a musical instrument) plays by Shaman to please the goddess of fertility. The next frame is known as Pasondi (a silver waistband). Further inside the triangles are drawn horizontally with small gaps symbolizing drums called Dhaks. Then again another silver chain called Sakli is drawn. This is followed by strip of squares representing the containers of Kunku (red powder used to put in the hair parting of married women). Then the main figure of Palaghat is drawing the centre with hands and legs widely spread out symbolizing a delivery position. In the corners figures of moon, sun, comb, and ladder are drawn. Some Suhasinis also draw Tarpa (wind musical instrument) and Ghangli (a string instrument)\(^7\).

The sun and moon and the earth (Palaghat) are believed to be the supreme forces, whose presence is required during the wedding ceremony, to bless the new

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couple to be fertile. The Tarpa and Ghangli are considered sacred. The Comb is symbol of engagement, whereas the ladder connects or links the Warlis with foodgrains stored on the house lofts. Outside the straight four lines a strip is drawn for decorative purpose only.

Another scene, surrounding the traditional picture of Palaghat, is newlyweds on a horse surrounded by musicians and dancers and leftside to it is drawn the people sitting under the pendol (a shade made out of wood and grass) enjoying food and drink. The remaining part just depicts the other village activities and also a Tarpa dance formation can be seen in the right corner. It is interesting to mention that the bride is always sits in front of the groom on the horse.

Simultaneously, other women of the village drew trees, animals and human figures around the square. Right above the Caukat, the sun tree was being drawn on the right hand side; the toddy tree and the basing tree were being completed. As they drew the women sang in the chorus:

Figure 9 Marriage painting
Cauk lila ge kaya ge riti
Cauk lila ge raya re riti
Mandava kila re kaya re riti
Mandava kela re raya re riti
Mandavaci daru piya re bara

Translation
What is the season for writing the Cauk,
We are writing because it is a convention
What is the reason for making the mandapa
We are making because it is the convention
It is good time to drink liquor served a mandapa.

While the women were busy inside, the men were setting the mandapa outside. As soon as the mandapa was ready the Vajantri (band) arrived and were welcomed with an arati. Traditionally band consists of three to five players and was known as tur or dholi. The band

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plays three musical instruments the *Dhol*, a drum leathered on both sides the *Tinki*, a small drum leathered only on one side and the *Pipori*, a flute like wind pipe.

The songs being sung inside intermingled with the musical noted being hummed by little girls outside, as they string flowers into garlands. The women continued to work in harmony almost magically bringing the world of trees, humans and animals to life. It is interesting that the act of painting itself is always seen as *writing* (Cauk Lihaane) for it is the primary means of expression for the artists. The usual forms and sometimes non forms are the only means that the artist had for mirroring their own well of experience, knowledge and emotions, as well as that of the community.

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A Warli marriage calls for a special wall painting. From early morning to dusk people are working on it. For it is to be finished in a single day, the day of the wedding. The picture is drawn in secrecy and kept veiled, a mystery to be revealed only at the auspicious hour. Three holy men arrive singing. One of them, chosen by the others for his special powers, waits for the divine spirit to enter his body. In this state of exaltation, his perceptions heightened by the coming event, he tears the veil down and names the bride. The wedding is on. The next day, wearing ceremonial headbands, the tribal couple leaves for their new home.

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2.2 Harvest Painting

Agricultural activities are prominent of all the themes, where men and women are shown sowing, transplanting, harvesting and threshing\textsuperscript{11}.

The agricultural season for the Warlis begins around Vaishakha (May). The first rain in June announces the birth of a new cycle of life. The seeds are sown and the first seeding that sprouts is celebrated as a gift from Dharitri (mother earth) with a rite known as Kaavali Khaane. Kaavali the first plant is cooked into a curry and shared by all the family members. Transplanting of seedlings takes place after this rite has been performed, and if by chance, it is forgotten the household members cannot eat kaavali for five years. On the eve of transplanting a lamp is burnt in the hut and some people even dance. From June to September, the Warlis are busy in their fields, managing water, weeding, tightening plants that become loose, choosing away rodents and cutting the abundance of grass and storing them for their cattle\textsuperscript{12}.

From the month of Bhadrapaksha (September) the people begin harvesting, but only after Saavri, the field goddess is thanked for her generosity.

Warlis celebrate Cheda Puja, every year, during harvest, when the people have enough money, is both an act of thanksgiving as well as a re-enactement of the first event of settling down at place.

By end of Ashwin (October) most of the rice has ripened has been cut. Harvest signs impounded on the door, after the first rice is brought home are impressions of hand. The first harvest sees row after row of first marks, impounded on the walls in white rice paste. These are done at places which are potentially weak the joints of the walls. These beautiful hand designs (fist) are like paisleys symbolize the plentifulness.

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After, harvest the puja of the Tiger God known as Vaghadeva, has to be performed before the threshing begins. Entire clan come together under the same roof prepare to eat the newly harvested grain for the first time. This is accompanied by joyous dancing, singing, drinking and merry making. The entire festival takes place over three days and nights. In form of Vaghadeva, sit the bhagats performing the rituals. Next to the bhagat sit a circle of people drinking toddy and next to them a group of figures are dancing to the tarpa.

The ritual begins with the story of Vaghadeva sung by the Dhak Bhagats and the others came to listen to it. The women do not take part in the celebration. No work goes on in the fields during this time. Men gather around and chat.

With the festival of tiger god over, the villagers begin preparing for the puja
of Kansari (the Corn Goddess). When the paddy has been cut and stacked in front of the huts, threshing cannot take place till the goddess has been propagated. The song of Kansari which is sung during this time is a long narration of the story of the Corn Goddess\textsuperscript{14}. The puja of kansari began in the evening. A heap of Nagali (black corn grown on the hill side and staple diet of Warlis) was placed at the centre and a circle of white rice is formed around it. On this heap sindur is sprinkled and green bangles and whole betel nut offered. A lamp is lit and burnt throughout the night. The bhagats begin singing in front of the Nagali as a representation of the Corn Goddess and continued to do so through the entire night.

Some of the lines of the song are as follows:

\textbf{On whose name is this puja being done}

Oh dear! Kansari cannot be found

Oh dear! On whose name is this puja being done

This puja is for Gamadeva

One who is named after me! Cannot find

This puja is for Great God

On whose name is this puja being done\textsuperscript{15}.

\textsuperscript{14}Dalma, Y. 1988. \textit{The Painted World of Warlis. New Delhi: Lalit Kala Academy p. 77.}

\textsuperscript{15}Dalma, Y. 1988. \textit{The Painted World of Warlis. New Delhi: Lalit Kala Academy p. 80.}
The artist has divided canvas for serializing Harvest related activities. Bottom right is the field with ripe crop, above it are portrayed various activities—harvesting, making bundles, piling them, cooking food, chasing away animals and the circular area on the left is the granary used for threshing grains from husk.

16 (Jain J., Other Masters: Five Contemporary Folk and Tribal Artists of India, 1998, p. 53)
2.3 Paintings at the time of Birth and Death

Warlis believe that death is not the end of human existence but another beginning. They believe that death is same as marriage and observe almost similar rites. Circular patterns are drawn both at the time of birth as well as at death.

After a person dies his body has been taken out of the house to a far off place, this place is surrounded by lot of trees, there it is kept on the ground and here people offer their prayers. At this time like wedding.
ceremony *Halad* (Turmeric) is applied to the body. They believe that by applying halad the dead man’s marriage is performed on proper time, even in his life after death.

The fertile powers of death are best solemnized by the wooden statue of the dead *Vira* installed in the backyard. A wooden plank with two large discs for eyes, the statue in its gravity conveys an all seeing wisdom. The Warlis consult a dead ancestor installed within the statue on all important occasions. They also consider the *Vira* to be all powerful, one who will protect them from any harm. They believe that the dead can be born again and the spirit of the old is carried on in the young. Since in their daily life the Warlis have to actively contend with nature God, thus there is not only the sun and the moon gods but the god of thunder, of Lightening, of the beginning of the tentative move towards sculpture. The ancestral spirit which seems to demand a molded form also allows the Warlis to find self-expression in wood and stone.

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In the centre on the bottom enshrines the deity with sun and moon forming its part, the raise rising from its figure turn into birds in the sky, the animal world, symbolized by a Tiger figure, sustains into its being, and from its energy grow trees and generates life around. The deity is the simplified of the cosmos and hence hardly any facial features except eyes—the eternal witness. Musicians, drummers, horn blowers and dancers apart, four abstract forms—men, birds, animals or whoever are playing it homage.

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18 (Jain J., Other Masters: Five Contemporary Folk and Tribal Artists of India, 1998, p. 52)
All families go through periods of illness, strife, misfortune. At such times the Warlis think of their forefathers and invoke their blessings through a special rite. The family installs a wooden image symbolizing the ancestor, after worshiping the idol, they appeal to the power they believe rests in the figure. “Bless us”, they pray. “You know what we are going through. You know best how to set things right again. Restore this family to the glory and prosperity that it enjoyed your times. Let the protective shadow of your grace shield us now, as it did in the past.”

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OTHER THEMES

(Warli Paintings)
Figure 63 Warli Life in its Fullness

Picture showing Warli life, is full of delight. A man on the top close to dancing ring is dragging his female partner to dance.
There was once a rich farmer who had plenty of grain. In poor years when the villagers starved he had enough to spare. But he always refused saying, “I have just enough. I am sorry, I cannot help you.” And the villagers go away disappointed. One year things were really bad. The cruel farmer gave them the same answer. To his surprise the villagers replied quite cheerfully, “We understand. You don’t have to worry. We have bearded farmers for friends. They will provide us with food.” The farmer followed the villagers into the woods for he was curious to see who these friends were. And he watched them as they moved through the forest pulling up plants from the ground. As they held them up he realized that what they had meant. The bulbous plants had long, hairy roots!

Figure 44 The Bearded Farmers

Figure 45 Warli Culture by Shantaram Tumbada

Marriage painting is the important ceremony of Warli community. In this painting the bride and the bridegroom are found sitting on an animal after completing the wedding rites and crossing the forest to go home. Group dancing, people playing the music, dancing peacocks, women cooking or busy in their other house chores and children playing communicate the importance of community in the Warli society.