

Representation of Elephant in Tribal Art and Culture of Central India

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ABSTRACT

The Central India consists of plateaus and mountainous belt between Indo-gangtic plain to the north and roughly to the Krishna River to the south. Because of its central location, it is often called the 'Heart of India'. The largest numbers of tribes are in the states of Odisha. Madhya Pradesh is the 2nd largest state of India. Each of these tribes has its own identity and culture which varies greatly from each other. The tribes have their distinct socio-economic, cultural, political and religious institutions which are part and parcel of cultural heritage of India. They have immensely contributed towards the history and culture of India. In the present paper, the tribal residing in Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, south-eastern Rajasthan, northern Maharashtra, northern Telengana, northern Andhra Pradesh, Odisha, Jharkhand, southern Utter Pradesh and south-western West Bengal are considered tribes of central India. The important tribes inhabiting in this zone are the Agaria, the Asur, the Baiga, the Bhils, the Bhuinya, the Bhumij, the Birhor, the Bondo, the Borida, the Gadava, the Ho, the Juang, the Kamar, the Katkari, the Kharia, the Kharia, the Kol, the Gonds, the Kondh, the Koraku, the Lodha, the Munda, the Muria, the Oraon, the Pardhan, the Santal / Santhal, the Savara etc.

Elephants have been the subject of various cultural depictions in mythology, symbolism and popular culture of these tribal communities. They are both revered in religion and respected for their prowess in war. Ever since the Stone Age, when elephants were represented by ancient petroglyphs and cave art, they have been depicted in various forms of art, including pictures, sculptures and even architecture.

Mahashweta Devi has shown that both Shiva and Kali have tribal origins as do Krishna and Ganesh. In the 8th century, the tribal forest goddess or harvest goddess was absorbed and adapted as Siva's wife. Ganesh owes its origins to a powerful tribe of elephant trainers whose incorporation into Hindu society was achieved through the deification of their elephant totem.

In the present paper an attempt has been made to find out the representation of elephant motif in art of tribal communities of Gond, Baiga and others. An attempt has also been made to find out various legends, folktales and stories associated with their depiction in tribal art.

Keywords: *Tribal, Gond, elephant, mythology*

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