

Bindu: The Dot Personified

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In Gujarat, the Chaudhari tribals on the day of the dead remember their ancestors. They feed them by placing food on their roof. They also clean their house and apply cow dung and clay on their walls and floor. They prepare a liquid out of jawar-flour and buttermilk with which they print their hands on agricultural implements, on cattle and also on their walls of their huts. They also draw primitive figures on the walls and sprinkle this liquid (figure 1) everywhere in the corners as well as on the walls. This sprinkling which they call “Chantana”, are dots of white on brown coloured walls. Visually one may say that these are just ‘bindus’ or dots. But for the tribals its the act of feeding the walls. To us artists and designers these are merely a part of the painting but to these tribals, these dots mean a great deal. This ceremony of sprinkling this liquid is performed on the new day called “Navo Dahado”.



Figure 1

In the same way the dots are sprinkled, in a methodical manner, on the walls of the houses of the tribals of Orissa. Three splashes put together form a triangle which represents the heap of grain. Here also it is this sprinkling of the white liquid by which the patterns is created. The tribals of Chhota Udaipur region in Gujarat, the ‘Rathwas’, offer the terracotta to their Gods. But they won’t buy a terracotta horse, elephant, or tiger without the sprinklings of white on it, which they call painting. If the terracotta is not sprinkled with these dots they say they cannot buy it, because it is not painted.

In tattooing, the dot means a great deal. In fact each dot is called a “dano” which is the grain. If it is one, then they say ‘ek deno’ (figure 2). Four dots are called “Char dana” which is four grains (figure 3). When it increases, there are fabulous meanings given to the motifs created if it is just a triangle, that is one dot placed on two, and the three together placed on another three its called a heap. (figure 4). But if it is one more grain on top of this heap, it is called a “DEAADI” ‘temple’ (figure 5). Two triangles joined together make the ‘cobra’ or a ‘yoke’ which is the bull’s harness made out of ropes (figure 6).

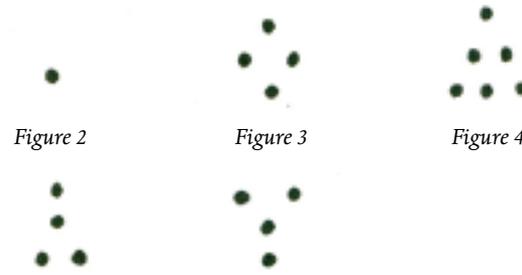


Figure 2

Figure 3

Figure 4

Figure 5

Figure 6

But if the same form is repeated four times around a centre to form a square form, the it becomes a step-well (figure 7). If there are six dots placed around the dot it becomes a flower (figure 8), but if there are eight dots around a central dot, it becomes a 'kaudi' a unit of currency of Kutch Gujarat (figure 9). Eight Dots placed in a diamond shape with one in the centre, represents a leaf (figure 10). A vertical line flanked by two dots on either side denotes a fly (figure 11). A semi circular line in the middle of two dots, one on the top and the other on the bottom makes it the moon (figure 12). Four semi circular lines with four dots and one dot in the centre make the 'mango tree' (figure 13). And if it is just a plus or a cross mark with a dot in each section it becomes a symbol for the 'Der tree'. (figure 14). The cradle is represented by three dots placed horizontally and 2 semicircles on either side with a dot within (figure 15). Similarly, a semicircular line with a dot within and the triangular 4 dots at its apex make a woman with water pots (figure 16). Similarly, a mole on a cheek is called 'Saseme' seed i.e. 'Til' which is always seen as an auspicious sign and also as an adornment of the body.

The dot is seen as a grain or a 'Sesame seed'. Also while stitching a quilt, the stitch itself is called 'makudio' — an ant. In the same way sometimes, the dot becomes the star or flower or is just placed on the very first page of an account book with red kum-kum marks forming the Ganesha (figure 17). The account-book does not start without the placing and worshiping of the dotted" Ganesha.

In the account books, every page is started by these five dots. The credit word 'Jama' is represented by a dot and a floating line (figure 18) which shows the importance and use of the simple dot in our daily life.

There is a caste known as "Vagharis" where the women wear a cloth 'thapedu' which is red in colour with a pattern of white dot, created as a part of design on the fabric. These people know exactly the amount of dots they need to put.



Figure 7



Figure 8



Figure 9



Figure 10



Figure 11



Figure 12



Figure 13



Figure 14



Figure 15



Figure 16



Figure 17



Figure 18



Figure 19

They do not accept lesser amounts of dots than those. In the same way a large number of forms are created in the tie and dye known as 'bandhani'. It is again here, that the dot converts an ordinary cloth into a priceless fabric. Small little dots scattered over the fabric give it the name of moonlit night called 'chand Rokhani'. It has a black base with red dots on it. The technique of making a dot and creating a fabulous environment in colour through dots makes another fabric called "Chundadi", which is worn by the women of Gujarat in the marriages. In fact, a square piece of cloth with tie-dye dots, is offered to the Mother Goddess in which she adorns herself. The bright dots have always been used to adorn the garments of both men and gods. Like the 'Sitara' or Mukesh' — the star which is either silver or gold in colour and is used all over the surface of the cloth. These dots themselves makes such an environment that it really takes you into another world that which is above human. In the terracotta of Gujarat women make small primitive figures of man and women, so beautifully that the dots themselves become the ultimate expression. At times, they become the eyes, at times the ears, the breasts, the nostrils and at others the navel or the sex organ itself.

One of the untutored painters from Gujarat, has created a variety of different meanings from dots. For example, in one of his paintings (figure 19) he uses the dot at one point to describe the texture of the trunk of a tree, in another the pattern of the body of an animal. In the squirrel the dot denotes the inside of the body may be the blood cell, in the Sun the diffusing rays, on the mountains it becomes grass and through the dots he creates a whole world of creatures. In one of the paintings of tribals the grain merchant is shown with heaps or grains through dark and light thick and thin dots. (figure 20–21)

Most of the folk and tribal forms have the hidden dot or the play which creates a larger imagery of visuals. For example, in the rangoli, the dots guide all the patterns whether they are lamps and flames, beetle boxes, turtles, snakes and so on. In the same way in the South, in Kolam the dots again guides all patterns and design.

Beautiful play of material for the visuals to create a meaningful result is seen all the time whether it is a brocade sari in Gold or a clay used as resist on red ground. The skill is so beautifully shown that sometimes even our eyes become oblivious to the elemental dot, for example the jamdani' from Dhaka. How beautifully the fabric itself shows the fragrance



Figure 20

of the body and soul of a woman. The visuals and their meanings have achieved a height of expression. The example is one of the blouse pieces of Jat which has a dot in the centre of the breasts. These are embroidered with cardamom seeds and cloves, with mica mirrors and bright colours. These dots of cardamom seeds and cloves not only adorn the blouse piece but also leave a fragrance which is turn, enriches and enhances the meaning of the visual.



Figure 21

So we have taken just one element the dot' or 'bindu' and seen how much is woven around it, what a variety of meanings is lent to it through various ways of representation and use. Not only that, the material is enormous from clay to gold, precisely used for very definite purpose and meaning. It has become very much a part of life. One cannot afford to separate this visual in any way—it is no decoration Separate from life: it is life itself.

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Reprint

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