<u>This is a modified version of</u>

CREATING AN 'INTERSECTIONAL THIRD SPACE' FOR CONTEMPORARY ART IN INDIA

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by

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ABSTRACT

This study suggests an ‘intersectional third space’ as a conceptual framework to rethink the existing value creation systems and representation methods prevalent within contemporary art from India. As contemporary art worldwide becomes increasingly identified as ‘global’ and accommodates new art practices and mediums, it remains exclusive in treating art from self-taught and Indigenous art practices. This distinction gets further pronounced in geographies like India, where artists rely greatly on privately owned art galleries for their representation. The artists from rural or non-English speaking regions, artists practicing Indigenous or tribal art, and skilled and passionate artists who do not have the resources or opportunities to attend art schools lose out on access to representation in the mainstream art spaces. In the exhibition ‘Sheher, Prakriti, Devi’ that took place at Galerie Mirchandani + Steinruecke, Mumbai, India, between November 25, 2021 — January 5, 2022, Gauri Gill— an artist formally trained in art and photography; Vinnie Gill— a self-taught painter with continued practice of over sixty years, both living and working in the Indian capital city of New Delhi and Ladhki Devi— a Warli artist who learned art practices as part of her familial heritage, living and practicing in the village of Ganjad, exhibit aspects of world-making in their distinct approach. I interviewed the exhibiting artists and attempted to deduce the exchange of values, support, guidance, and opportunities this collaboration brought to them. I further support my findings with existing scholarly research. After examination, I propose the concept of an ‘intersectional third space’- one that dismantles the existing institutional structures of representation and display to accommodate multiple notions of art; one that does not entirely reject dominant knowledge but acknowledges and centers the different concerns and worldviews that come from a diverse and complex history of the country; one that culminates through mutual respect for various knowledge-building and

sharing techniques and creative processes, one that is constructed with collective forces that come together to serve purposes other than those already defined. Finally, I discuss the significance and relevance of such alliances in the context of India and conclude with what the artists and cultural practitioners can hope to achieve from the creation of an ‘intersectional third space’ that redefines contemporary art in India.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract…… ii

Acknowledgements …… iv

Table of Contents …… v

Introduction ……1

Literature Review …….. 8

What is contemporary? ……...8

What is contemporary art? ……10

What is contemporary art in India? ……...11

Attempts at redefining contemporary art in India ……...…..13

Methodology ……. 16

The Study …….. 20

Gauri Gill ……21

Vinnie Gill ……....….33

Ladhki Devi ……37

Observations and Discussions ……..……. 45

Conclusion ……..……...… 48

Next Steps ……..……...…. 51

References……..……...…..... 59

Appendix A ……..……..……..…… 64

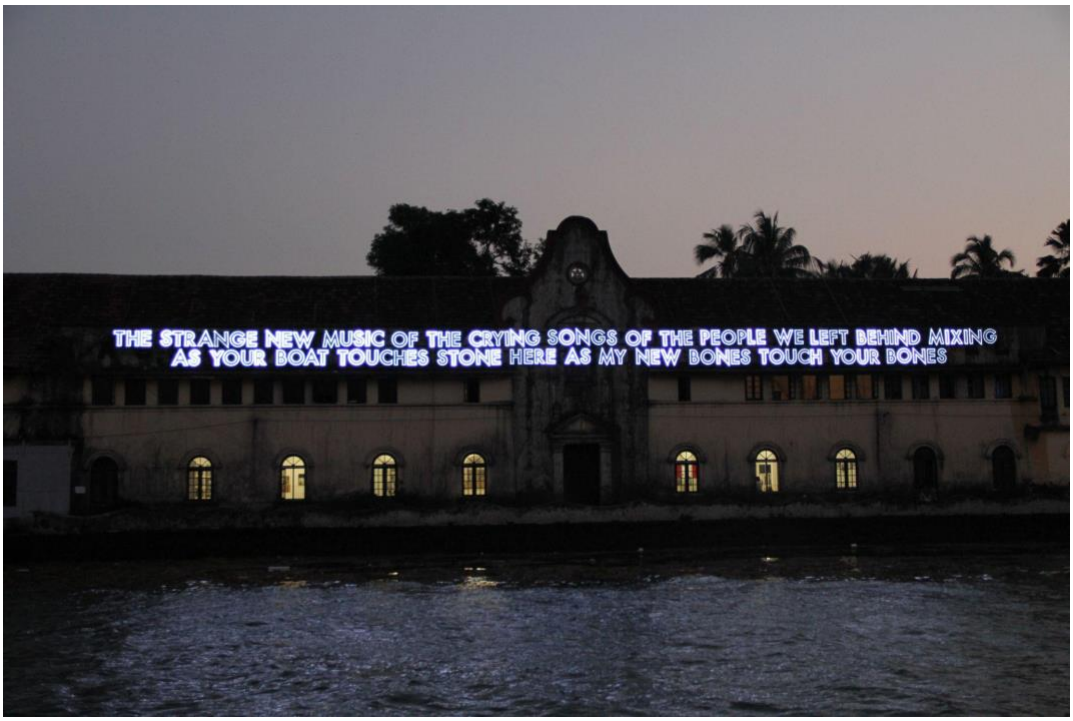
Appendix B ……..……..……..……89

Appendix C ……..……..……..……94

INTRODUCTION

Coming from a small town in India- a territory that is a little rural to be called a city and a little urban to be called a village, my life, like several other citizens of this town, exemplified an 'in-betweenness.' Situated away from the economic, political and cultural centers of the country, the field of 'art' as I know today did not exist for me. I remember using the terms 'art' and 'craft' together or interchangeably. It was what we saw closest to us in the form of handlooms, embroideries, for sketches or drawings in our art books, and even *rangolis*- the temporary floor murals made on festivals. Art taught in school focused on scenery and geometrical designs in elementary and middle school before completely being taken off the syllabus in high school, with little understanding and relevance of things meant for mere display and appreciation.

While pursuing education in architecture and art, this notion was continuously challenged and slowly, art became a term I associated with practices that were produced in a studio by formally trained artists and shown at or in conjunction with galleries and museums. In 2012, when I left my hometown to begin work at the inaugural edition of Kochi Muziris Biennale, facilitating renowned artists while they produced large-scale artwork, I saw how art worldwide had seamlessly accommodated new art practices and mediums into its fold. Claiming to have "opened the doors of Indian contemporary art to the opportunities and challenges of global art world" (Luis, 2014, p.55) and with the mandate of "democratizing art" (Luis, 2014, p.55), the art there, to a large extent, echoed the theme of "cosmopolitanism" (Luis, 2014, p.55) of the then art world— the idea of universality of art— an idea demonstrated predominantly by urban and trained voices from India. Though the biennale became an active zone of contact and connection for the local community and created new audiences which were previously excluded (Chandran



Robert Montgomery, 2012, *Exile’s Song*, Laser cut foam boards and lights on the sea-facing facade of Aspinwall House, Kochi. Image courtesy Kochi Muziris Biennale website

Ariel Hassan, 2012, *HFV Project*, Digital photography transferred on a lightbox, Site specific installation at the inaugural edition of Kochi Muziris Biennale. Image courtesy Artlink

2012, 5 and Crooke 2011, 170). It made me wonder why it remained exclusionary towards Indigenous art practices. These distinctions felt further pronounced when I began working at a contemporary art gallery in New Delhi and noticed a void in representation of rural or non-English speaking regions, artists practicing Indigenous art, and skilled and passionate artists who did not have the resources or opportunities to attend art schools, in the mainstream art spaces. I recognized that since artists relied greatly on privately owned art galleries for their representation, with limited galleries and museums to do so, entering the art circles was a matter of social, political and economic access. I could then comprehend how my upper-caste middle class background and English education had aided me in breaking into the institutional set up, despite not being formally educated in art and belonging to a semi-rural territory. However, my belongingness to the peripheries of urban and rural lent me an eye to observe this imbalance.

As a postcolonial geography, India has always faced the dilemma of negotiating its identity. As this exchange continues into the now neoliberal era, it is important, we, as artists and cultural workers, understand that we are active beneficiaries of ongoing structures of colonialism, though the ways we benefit vary greatly (Wolfe 1999, 2006). Identifying and addressing our positions in the equation means we can begin to visualize the grasps of inequity in the prevalent systems around us and understand how we are engulfed in the tenacious grips of invisible and invasive vines of colonialism, that we have become one with (Phillips, 2022, p.113). It is time to ask if contemporary art institutions truly represent the diverse pieces of the collective identity in an equitable, fair and just manner or are they merely apparatuses to imbibe Western ideologies into art, culture and valuation practices shaping the ‘contemporary’ in India. It is the time to question— What is contemporary? What is contemporary art? And moreover, what is

contemporary art in India— how does it differ from contemporary art elsewhere in the world? It is time to think about how we can decolonize our practices, spaces and institutions.

In *Decolonising Methodologies*, Linda Smith writes, "Decolonization… does not mean and has not meant a total rejection of all Western knowledge. Rather, it is about centering our concerns and world views and then coming to know and understand theory and research from our own perspectives and for our own purposes."(Tuhiwai Smith, 2012, p. 39) The question then is, instead of refuting already formed institutional structures of art representation, how can we create a space that holds all notions of art justly? How can we represent them all without imposing the ideologies of the dominant structures on the art produced through non-formal pedagogies? How can we redesign our institutions from a collective perspective so that they serve our purposes?

Post-colonial theorist Homi Bhabha, in his seminal work *Location of Culture* (1994) addresses this conundrum by proposing an in-between space of the cultural encounter, which he calls the 'third space of cultural enunciation.' This in-between space undermines "the binary thought" and does not merely produce a combination of two opposites. It is often interpreted by many cultural theorists as a process by which the hegemonic powers attempt to transform the identity of the marginalized people within a uniform global framework. However, I see it as a liminal space "which gives rise to something different, something new and unrecognizable, a new area of negotiation of meaning and representation." (Bhabha, 1994, p.211) In this "in-between" space, new cultural identities are formed, reformed, and constantly in a state of becoming— a

phenomenon I relate to what India embodies. Hence in this thesis I use the term ‘third space’ to refer to the interstices between colliding cultures.

In the exhibition ‘Sheher, Prakriti, Devi’ (‘City, Nature, Goddess’) curated by Gauri Gill, that took place at Galerie Mirchandani + Steinruecke, Mumbai, India between November 25, 2021 – January 5, 2022, addresses a notion of art that persists in the vastly ignored non-urban India, alongside the ‘contemporary’ art that is widely accepted and appreciated globally.

Installation view, ‘Sheher, Prakriti, Devi’. The exhibition took place at Galerie Mirchandani + Steinruecke, Mumbai, India between November 25, 2021 – January 5, 2022. Image courtesy Gauri Gill and Galerie Mirchandani + Steinruecke

Here, Gauri Gill— an artist formally trained in art and photography; Vinnie Gill— a self-taught painter with continued practice of over sixty years, both living and working in the Indian capital city of New Delhi and Ladhki Devi— a Warli artist who learned art practices as part of her familial heritage, living and practicing in the village of Ganjad, exhibit aspects of world-making in their distinct approach. The exhibition traverses through the “cartographies of the city, environment, and psyche,” brought together through their “distinct enquiries on world-making” (Curatorial note, Galerie Mirchandani + Steinruecke).

From left to right: Vinnie Gill, Ladhki Devi and Gauri Gill at the opening of ‘Sheher, Prakriti, Devi’. Image courtesy Gauri Gill and Galerie Mirchandani + Steinruecke

For this study, I interviewed the exhibiting artists and attempted to deduce the exchange of values, support, guidance, and opportunities this collaboration brought to them. I further support my findings with existing scholarly research. After examination, I propose the concept of an ‘intersectional third space’- one that dismantles the existing institutional structures of representation and display to accommodate multiple notions of art; one that does not entirely reject dominant knowledge but acknowledges and centers the different concerns and worldviews that come from a diverse and complex history of the country; one that culminates through mutual respect for various knowledge-building and sharing techniques and creative processes, one that is constructed with collective forces that come together to serve purposes other than those already defined. Finally, I discuss the significance and relevance of such alliances in the Indian context and conclude with what the artists and cultural practitioners can hope to achieve from the creation of an ‘intersectional third space’ that redefines contemporary art in India.

The thesis is divided into six parts. This introduction, which initiates the premise of the research, is followed by Literature Review, Methodology, The Study, Observations and Discussions, Conclusion and Next Steps.

LITERATURE REVIEW

For this research, the literature becomes the foundation and an informing component of the study. It not only gives an insight into the theoretical journey and progression of my thought processes, it becomes a process to continually question and find answers, forming an integral core to the case study.

I began the inquiry by delving into the following research questions mentioned in ‘Introduction’

- What is ‘contemporary’?
- What is ‘contemporary’ art? Who has the agency to define it?
- What is ‘contemporary’ art in India?

I follow it up by getting into the literature to understand the past attempts at the inclusion of arts within its umbrella in:

- Attempts at re-defining the ‘contemporary’ art in India

In the section below, I elaborate by defining what is contemporary and move on to understand if that definition coincides with the term’s usage in art. I then give an idea of how contemporary art is perceived in India at the time and how the structures of representation define the practice of art.

What is contemporary?

Etymologically the term “contemporary” comes from the Latin word *con temporare*, which literally translates to “with the times.” Seemingly simple, the word has accumulated immense depth and meaning over time. In colloquial understanding and usage, ‘contemporary’ has always adhered to the original meaning— of the most recent action; however, ontological questions defining the ‘present’ have been asked over and over again by Kant, Heidegger, Sartre, Foucault,

and the many philosophers who questioned the Enlightenment, criticism, literature, philosophy, metaphysics. Despite their attempts, we often ask these questions in different times and spaces, expecting new and different responses.

Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben begins his essay ‘What is Contemporary?’ by asking, “Of whom and of what are we contemporaries?”, “What does it mean to be contemporary?” (Agamben, 2009, p. 39). In this essay, Agamben defines contemporaneity as “a singular relationship with one’s time, which adheres to it and, at the same time, keeps a distance from it.” (Agamben, 2009, p. 40). He compares complete engagement with the present— absolute up-to-dateness with blindness, as it blocks the light of the future or vision of the past. He terms distance from the present within close proximity of the implication as a necessity for a contemporary being.

As Babette Babich in her essay “The question of the contemporary in Agamben, Nancy, Danto” explains, “Some are more contemporary than others; some, Nietzsche argued, are born posthumously, contemporaries of an era yet to come; or, and this is indistinguishable, there are those whose time is past and those who belong to no time at all” (Babich, 2019, p. 49). Moving beyond being a mere temporal marker of time, ‘contemporary’ becomes an ambiguous and subjective space meant for contemplation and transition to the future. It seems to be an intermediate transitional space in conjunction with the past and the future, overlapping and stretching where relevant, transcending the modalities of time and notions of history and future, and multiple, co-existing realities. It is transient and evolving, borrowed from the past, progressing towards the future, a “conceptual gesture of dividing the present into a present

irrelevant and a future manifest, a forcing of the present to leap out of itself to stake out a desired future” (Adajania, 2017, p. 104). I adjudge it as a juncture that is non-binary, multidimensional, complementary and contradictory- in essence, a space that is personal, malleable, and holds immense potential.

What is contemporary art?

In art, ‘contemporary’ originated to denote the most recent production of modern art. Stretching over a century, modernism, with its experimental agenda, claimed universal authority, somehow putting the Western narrative at the center and guarding the West from ‘contamination’ from the non-Western art (Belting, 2007). With exhibitions such as “‘Primitivism’ in 20th Century Art” at Museum of Modern Art, New York and Magicien de la Terre at the Centre Georges Pompidou and the Grande Halle de la Villette, Paris, the 80s did see modernity accept art from other parts of the world but not without the loss of meaning. It is no wonder that the contemporary that sprung from the well-meaning and inclusive movement of universality created a movement of globalized art that, in a certain way, homogenized the local and national art from non-Western centers. Today in narratives created mainly by those inside it, the understanding of contemporary “is that it marks the radical, the new, or the unprecedented; that is, whatever is ahead of the times” (Adajania, 2017, p. 104).

In the book ‘Radical Museology’, Claire Bishop urges the art world to leap out of the current presentism to a possibility of ‘dialectic contemporaneity’– “an anachronic action that seeks to reboot the future through the unexpected appearance of a relevant past” (Bishop, 2013, p. 61). Through the mention of anachronism, Bishop brings the discussion to the complex, varying, and

entangled histories and questions the concept of universal contemporaneity. Terry Smith, one of the few art historians to have acknowledged the anachronism in contemporary art, argued that the discourses of contemporary, should be set equally against the individual regionalistic discourses of modernism and postmodernism, as the separate histories are often characterized by several antinomies and asynchronies themselves. Today, despite the global spread of telecommunications systems and the purported universality of several markets, the differences persist and are evident in the simultaneous and incompatible co-existence of different modernities and ongoing social inequities (Smith, 2009).

As we still grapple with defining the parameters of ‘contemporary’ in art that fit and justify the plurality associated with art, as Bishop urges, we must look to devise an alternative value system to adjudge value to the various art coming out of different histories. The present-day neoliberal, economically driven valuation system, how do we redefine value systems in contemporary art?

What is contemporary art in India?

In India, like with the rest of the world, the discourse about the ‘contemporary’ cannot precede the ‘modern.’ The advent of the modern inside of the structures of art production began in the mid-19th century when the categories of ‘high art’ and ‘artist’ began to emerge in the modern Indian context. Art historians Tapati Guha-Thakurta and Partha Mitter, in their extensive research on the period ranging from its initial beginnings— when traditional art practices and practitioners were designated the category of ‘craft’ and Indian artists began to follow in the footsteps of European painters and engravers to make realistic oil paintings. The art schools set up by the British Empire — the School of Industrial Arts in Madras, Sir J. J. School of Art in

Bombay, and the Calcutta School of Art in 1854, followed by the Mayo School of Arts in Lahore in 1857 — led to the evolution of a new group of artists who differentiated themselves from other practitioners of folk artists, bazaar painters and printmakers in the field. Along with the art schools, an exhibition circuit mirroring the salons of Europe too had begun to emerge. (Guha-Thakurta, 1992, Mitter, 1994 & Shivdas, 2017) Hence, in India, modernism had arrived as a “part and parcel of colonialism, and paradoxically became politicized in conjunction with the anti-imperialist movement” (Shivadas, 2017, p. 148).

Post-independence, in a quest to build a new identity for India, the country’s first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru (1947-64), promoted a host of programs with a clear mandate of the modern, including founding the National Gallery of Modern Art (NGMA), allocating funds to sponsor murals, sculptures in public buildings and the planned city of Chandigarh, designed by modernist architect Le Corbusier. As a newly independent nation-state, India was negotiating between reclaiming independence and aspiring for a modern future. Vidya Shivdas, a scholar who has studied and written extensively about the post-colonial institutes of art in India, claims that “The nation was, thus, an ambivalent site that both acknowledged and disputed modern universal knowledge as its paradigm.”

NGMA, since its inception, functioned with a classical understanding of a museum, collecting and displaying modernist national art, thus absolving itself from the responsibilities to respond to emerging discourses on art (Shivdas, 2017, p.168). These duties were handed over to other autonomous cultural institutions like the artist-governed Lalit Kala Academy which became active sites for documentation and ongoing representation of art and culture.

In the last three decades, with the advent of neoliberal economic policies, modern and contemporary Indian art has witnessed an evolving institutional framework with a greater reliance on the private sector, art market, and global art exhibitions (Shivdas, 2017, p.168). Additionally, a broader Western interest in the emerging art scenes has translated into an increase in exhibitions of Indian contemporary art locally and globally (Querol, 2014). This expansion, while turning the Indian art world’s attention to the West, also stretched the realms of contemporary art represented within the institutions to accommodate mediums such as performance, written, and conceptual art into its fold. The exchange has steadily altered the definition and the purview of contemporary art in India, turning it into an ambivalent site negotiating for its identity once again. The recognition from the West, by virtue of its influence, further worked to infuse the ‘global’ into the Indian art education, production methods and institutional structure into Indian contemporary art, which worked to reinstate further the divide between ‘art’ and ‘craft’ and created stauncher verticals between their representations.

Attempts at re-defining the ‘contemporary’ art in India

In the 1960s, about 20 years after independence, two prominent figures, Geeta Kapur and J. Swaminathan, attempted to re-define what ‘contemporary’ could mean to a new India. Kapur, while pursuing a Masters degree at the Royal Academy of Art, London (1968-69), introduced the concept of *Indigenism* in her thesis “In Quest for Identity: Art & Indigenism in post-colonial culture with special reference to contemporary Indian painting.” Explaining the concept, she writes, “[The] relationship between the artist and his indigenism (either ideologically or simply for the love of his tradition) must change, compromise or even reject the language if it does not

suit his purpose. In short, there is no such thing as a historical graft of languages, only an organic growth in which the individual artist assimilates the elements from all that is available to him. As his own culture is immediately available, indeed pressing, urgent and intimate, his organic growth must be nourished by it and, in turn, feed the emerging culture” (Kapur, 1973, p. 20). Swaminathan, on the other hand proposed a concept of contemporaneity that accommodates all “coexisting cultures" including those of India’s folk and tribal artists within its egalitarian framework. He explains, “The term contemporary here is not used with any avant-garde pretensions, but is taken in its literal sense so that the creative effort of our artists, whether they be creating in urban centers or in rural surroundings, is presented simultaneously. This unburdens us of the weight of historicity and brings us nearer to the sources of creativity” (Swaminathan, 1983). Their views, no matter how opposing, insisted on reflecting and looking inwards to form an identity.

While Kapur established herself as an art critic and curator with ‘Place for People’ (1981)- a significant exhibition that signaled the transition from modernist to postmodernist art in India, Swaminathan established a unique museum of contemporary, folk and tribal art called Roopankar Museums of Fine Arts- a multi-arts complex, in Bhopal in 1982. The museum was a ‘never before’ attempted model of representation; however, Swaminathan displayed the urban art in a separate gallery from folk and tribal art, and it is not clear whether he wanted it to be shown alongside each other. The museum carried out massive research in the field of tribal art from the central states of India, bringing attention to Gond artists like Jangarh Singh Shyam. This precedence helped mobilize efforts in the direction, and some of the tribal communities did get visibility; however, the movement was short-lived. The museum never got its due for this effort

and fell into a decline after Swaminathan’s resignation in 1990 when the conservative Bhartiya Janata Party, which is now the ruling party in India since 2014, came to power in Madhya Pradesh and sought to exercise control of the institute.

As elaborated in the section ‘What is contemporary art in India?’, the advent of neoliberal policies in India saw a paradigm shift in understanding, acceptance, and definition of contemporary art. I feel this could be a significant reason that the attempt initiated by Swaminathan could not be completely put into practice. Today in the newfound globalized and transmigrational world, where contemporary art has managed to accommodate non-western art practices and mediums into its fold, due to several social, economic, and cultural factors, the art ecosystem in India finds it challenging to move towards a dialectic contemporary— “that does not designate a style or period of the works themselves so much as an *approach* to them” (Bishop, 2012, p. 9).

METHODOLOGY

While the methodology for this thesis can be mainly classified as Qualitative Research, I decided to conduct this study following my instincts and curiosity to gather information with authenticity. I approached it organically hence, the methodology entails a form of "emergent strategy". Emergent strategy, a term coined by adrienne maree brown (2017) refers to a "strategy for building complex patterns and systems of change through relatively small interactions" (brown, 2017, p.2) that are ever-mutating and emergent. In the book, brown reminds us that change is constant and evident and recommends learning from feeling, mapping and assessing it, rather than fearing it.

They also insist on having breathable "living agendas" that leave room for movement and perspectives. Further underlining the significance of "intentional adaptation" (brown, 2017, p. 69) that lies at the core of emergent strategy, that brown iterates is different from pure adaptation. Explaining they say, "This is the process of changing while staying in touch with our deeper purpose and longing" (brown, 2017, p. 69). I unexpectedly and unknowingly followed the course of the research with the willingness to mold the methodology into a living agenda, in order to create possibilities in the flux of constant change that was at times internal and at times external.

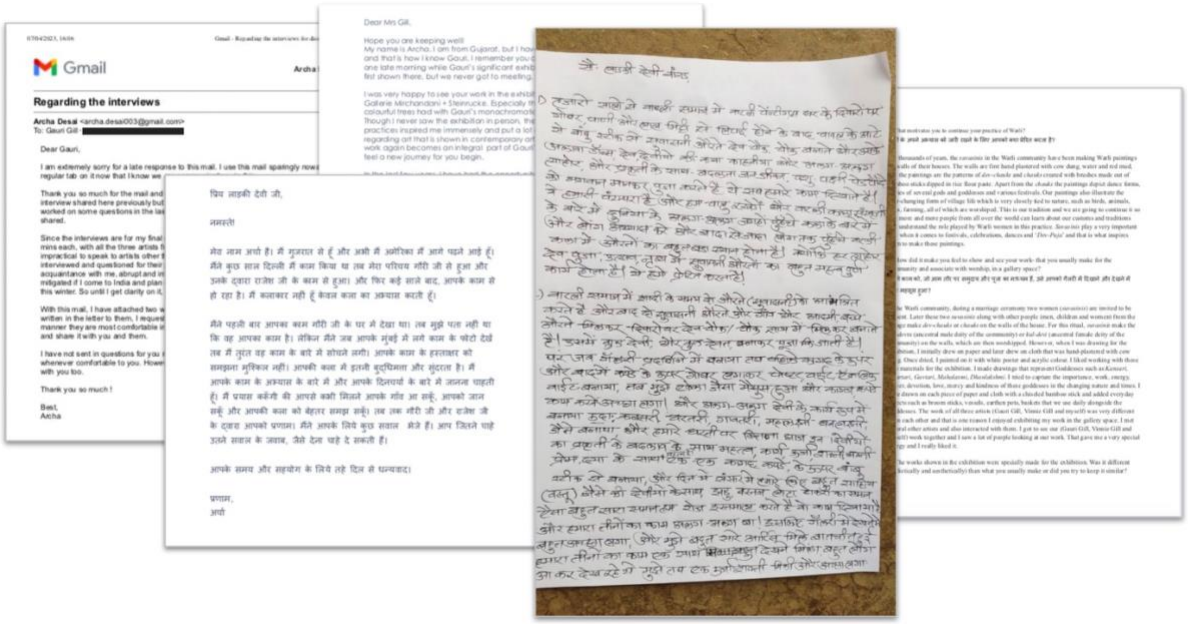
My primary research questions were initiated and informed by the foundation of radical museology and postcolonial theories elaborated in the previous section. I augmented my initial beginnings by identifying a relevant case study in India where a contemporary art gallery exhibited artwork made in three distinct pedagogies. I interviewed the three exhibiting artists.

The decision to interview the exhibiting artists came from the fact that other than Gauri Gill, the life and practice of the two exhibiting artists, Vinnie Gill and Ladhki Devi, was not documented through literature. Despite practicing art for nearly six decades, this exhibition was the first time these two artists exhibited their work in a contemporary art gallery. It also stemmed from the curiosity about the exchange of values and knowledge between the participating artists. Since the exhibition was curated by Gauri Gill, a participating artist in the exhibition, the interviews were also meant to explore how the exhibition was conceptualized and realized.

This research does not intend to conclude the exhibition as a success or failure in curatorial or capital gains it generated but hopes to derive cultural and social significance of such collaborations for the participating artists and consider ground realities of such collaborations, to look for sustainable approaches for an equitable representation.

Though visualized as one-on-one Zoom or telephonic interviews, they were finally conducted in varied manners according to the comfort of the interviewees. The interview with artist Gauri Gill, also the curator of the exhibition, was conducted over a Zoom call. Having shown her work as an artist for nearly 20 years, the artist was accustomed to spontaneously talking about her work and thought process. However, the other two artists- Vinnie Gill and Ladhki Devi, having spent most of their time making art for reasons other than representation and exhibition in cultural spaces, were not used to talking about their work unprepared. Hence, the interview with artist Vinnie Gill and Ladhki Devi was conducted as a questionnaire that I shared with them via artist Gauri Gill. While communication with artist Vinnie Gill was possible in English, the questions for artist Ladhki Devi, who does not speak a common language with me, were

prepared in Hindi- a language commonly spoken in northern and western regions of India. The questions were passed on by artist Gauri Gill to her son Rajesh Chaitya Vangad, also a renowned Warli artist, who then transcribed the questions orally to Ladhki Devi in Marathi- a language spoken in the region of Maharashtra. Ladhki Devi chose to respond to them orally, while Vangad jotted them down in Hindi. The images of the responses were shared with Gill, who shared them with me. The responses were translated into English by me and fact-checked by Gill. It is imperative to note that the responses by Ladhki Devi used in this research have undergone two set of translations by Vangad and me, and editing by Gill, and hence, would be a modified version of her original responses. The conversation with Gauri Gill was transcribed word by word and shared with her for an edit to confirm the clarity of meaning. Though only excerpts of the conversations were used for research, the conversation and the questionnaires in their entirety have been included in this document (See Appendix A, B and C).



A snippet into the process of communication with the artists through artist Gauri Gill— a combination of in-person interviews, questionnaires and translations.

The nature of the questions posed to the artists was simple and varied based on the artists. They did not involve any specific matrices for evaluation. They were uncomplicated to better understand the artist, their thoughts and their processes. However, after the interviews, to present my arguments more clearly, I decided to divide the responses into the following indexes:

1) The **motivation or inspiration** for art making in the three pedagogies
2) Their **self-perception** about seeing their work in different contexts or settings
3) The **adaptations** they made in their art practices to participate in the exhibition
4) The **effect** of the exhibition on their practice
5) The nature of their **relationship** and trust between the artists
6) The **future** of their practice after the experience of the exhibition
7) The **significance** of this exhibition for them

I superimposed the findings from the interview based on the above indexes, and the literature review findings to come up with the concept of the ‘intersectional third space’ for a just and ethical representation of the indigenous or tribal art within the realms of contemporary art in India. The supplementing literature review of the historical context of representation of the indigenous or tribal community in India served as a significant spine to understand the efforts that have already been made and the results they yielded. I support the recommendation of ‘intersectional third space’, by looking for ways to implement the concept.

THE STUDY

This section gives an insight into the conversations I had with the artists— Gauri Gill, Vinnie Gill and Ladhki Devi through the interviews. It is an attempt to understand their practices and processes. I discuss each interview comprehensively here; however, the interview in its entirety will be included in this document (See Appendix A, B and C).

The questions for Vinnie Gill and Ladhki Devi were shared with Gauri Gill over an email on November 24, 2022. I received their responses from Gauri Gill on December 20, 2022. Interview with Gauri Gill was conducted over Zoom on November 28, 2022. She had been busy working on her critical survey exhibition at Schirn Kunsthalle Frankfurt, Germany. In the midst of her busy schedule, she agreed to a one-hour Zoom meeting which turned into a two-hour conversation. The conversation began with how the exhibition came to be and flowed naturally to topics of gender and exclusion. Gill's section is divided into two parts— *The curator* and *The artist*. The former talks about the genesis and process of exhibition building and the latter attempts to introduce parts of Gill's illustrious practice.

I could not attend the exhibition in-person: hence, I use an excerpt from Natasha Ginwala's essay "The Goddess Who Created This Passing World," which gives a visual recitation of the exhibition:

> I wonder if the ensemble *Sheher, Prakriti, Devi* is a kind of metaphysical document, one that is vibrantly located in material grounds and fecund imagination—ways of remembering earth through a common sense of belonging, protection and recovery. It is

> meta-speculation as manna, offering generational perspectives and ways of seeing between three women across cities, mountain valleys and a village. Benevolent and fierce mythical forces are activated amid infrastructures of sustenance and accumulation. These pictures avow the ‘disorder of things’ and refute the violence of total legibility. Bringing to the fore, an aesthetics of ‘bewilderment’ (as Jack Halberstam puts it;) becoming lost in space and time, in order for unknowing, unthinking and unbecoming to take hold, as we are living in the ruins of other worlds and their visions for the future.
>
> (Ginwala, 2021)

Gauri Gill

The curator

In 2020, Gauri Gill was supposed to exhibit photographs from a body of work she had never shown before titled ‘Re-memory’ in a solo exhibition, at Galerie Mirchandani + Steinruecke. Constructed from Gill’s archives of the built landscape of urban India since 2003, ‘Re-memory’ draws upon the “tensions between history’s impulse to erase and memory’s tendency to reify” (Curatorial note, Galerie Mirchandani + Steinruecke, 2021). However, like the several discourses that were transformed during the pandemic, this solo exhibition adapted bearing imprints of the time. In India, when the government announced a lockdown overnight on March 24th, 2020, Gill was deep into editing for the series. With the lengthy restrictions of the lockdown, she found herself looking at the “dark and dystopian” images from the series for long hours. When she would go down a floor to meet her parents, who live in the same building, she would find her mother in her study, also engrossed in art making. Gill had always seen her mother paint over different periods of her life; however, it was the eerie solitude of the pandemic combined with

the somber landscapes of ‘Re-memory’ that brought into focus the contrasting nature of their work that materialized at the same time and in the same space. Furthermore, it made her wonder, “… it's so odd that one of us is exhibiting work as a so-called artist, the other is not.” She began to consider more deeply how despite inhabiting many of the same spaces, their eye, mind, and senses registered the world in distinct ways. It is then that it occurred to Gill that her series ‘Re-memory’ would gain a new perspective when interspersed by the language and interpretation of her mother Vinnie Gill’s world-viewing. Soon after, she began to imagine the exhibition punctuated by V. Gill’s art practice. The process of putting her ideas into action required a lot of thought as she was aware that their practices were distinct and complex in their own ways. Gill remembers reflecting upon V. Gill’s practice and pondering upon what parts of her practice to include in the exhibition. Her vision was to interweave their work in a manner that would intersect at specific points and then disperse to determine themselves in their own right. She was sure that she wanted to do justice to V. Gill’s practice of many years. After much thought, Gill decided to include aspects of V. Gill’s practice, that had to do with nature and the historical city. Gill believed that V. Gill’s work springs from love and a tender appreciation of the world, as opposed to her own more critical take in *Rememory*. Hence, Gill decided to bring V. Gill’s work into conversation with her own work which was looking at different “aspects of the city—of the nascent city, the city as it's being formed, as it's dissolved, because even the city is not a fixed entity. So, these kinds of processes—visible processes, but as seen through material culture.” (Interview with Gauri Gill)

Around the same time Gill discussed this idea with Rajesh Chaitya Vangad, a well-respected Warli practitioner and her long-time collaborator. Gill had met Vangad in 2013 by chance when she was invited to make portraits for the local school in Ganjad, Maharashtra. They had slowly

come to the idea of working together and realized a critical body of work titled *Fields of Sight*. However, after working together for a decade, the random encounter has turned into regular collaboration and friendship between the two. Vangad, familiar with V. Gill and her work, loved the idea. Gill further discussed with him, including Ladhki Devi- Vangad’s mother, also a lifelong practitioner of Warli, in the exhibition. Gill had met Ladhki Devi several times and had observed her work while visiting Vangad in the past. Gill saw her as an inspirational figure. Talking about her practice, Gill says, “Her work is (much more) instinctive and has this kind of raw and very beautiful feeling- this kind of *bhavna* (sentiment or emotion) which is very sincere.” As a traditional Warli practitioner, Ladhki Devi had only drawn on the walls of the houses making *chauks* and patterns in and around the village as part of the rituals during festivals and celebrations. Elaborating on her decision to include her in the exhibition, Gill says, “(And) I thought very specifically of her because so much of that iconography is sacred. Because in a sense, Adivasis very much feel that everything around us is also sacred, that there are gods and goddesses all around us, and it's your perception (that determines) how you're looking at everything.” Showing her work in the exhibition meant modifying the techniques, medium, and context for Ladhki Devi, who had practiced Warli in its original form until now; however, she was willing to take this chance. Once she agreed to show her work in the exhibition, Gill discussed with Ladhki Devi how she would like to contribute to the exhibition. Gill recollects, “I asked her if she would like to consider interpreting the Devi in her various forms and to highlight or isolate or emphasize this Devi figure. The Devi is very prominent in drawings made by the Suvasini and in Warli life, as a matter of course. But I also suggested that she be seen through the prism of ordinary women in the world, so as in some way make her relatable to our own experience.”

When Gill shared her changed plans for the exhibition that was supposed to be her solo at Galerie Mirchandani + Steinruecke (Galerie M+S) with owner and Director Ranjana Steinruecke, she wanted to see a few elements of the exhibition. Galerie M+S has represented and worked with Gill since 2016 when they showed three of her series in an exhibition titled ‘The Mark on the Wall.’ In hindsight, Gill thinks of it as a significant moment in her journey as an artist. Reminiscing upon it, she says, “… we had shown *Fields of Sight* with *The Mark on the Wall* and *Traces*, and it was a very layered exhibition, and a lot of things came out of that exhibition. I didn't realize it at the time, but it was a very rich exhibition because there were many ideas in it. I was trying, at that point, to not just show *Fields of Sight*, but the antecedents alongside, and since the first time I started to think of rural artists was in *The Mark on the Wall*, I thought, can I connect the dots between that (series) and *Fields of Sight*? And then can we also bring it to human presence and remains as in *Traces*? And so, there too, it was three bodies of work in conversation.” Owing to their past experience, Steinruecke trusted Gill’s vision of creating this exhibition and immediately came on board with it. Gill believed the exhibition would enhance each participating artists’ practice. Set side-by-side in an evident and inter-relational manner, it would lend relationality to the other point of view. Finally, she concludes, “It's not so neat and tidy as to say it worked or it didn't work, but I think there was a decision there.”

Her thoughts and perspective become vivid as she shares the introduction to the exhibition she had written. Though it ended up not being used within the exhibition, I feel it is an integral element of this exhibition. It clearly states the ideas, intent, concerns, and position from which her practice, and in particular this exhibition stems. She writes:

“‘Sheher, Prakriti, Devi’ brings together personal documents of experiential reality as observed by three artists, two of whom have thus far been unseen within the art world context. The exhibition has been constructed around the nucleus of the long-term diary of the contemporary built landscape of Indian urban India that I have traversed and inhabited since 2003. Titled *Rememory* after Toni Morrison, these photographic fragments and typologies encompass both public and private worlds from the dystopian to the dynamic. (Because there's also a lot of dynamism in how the city is being constructed, and without a blueprint, you see a kind of mishmash of all these different influences and aspirations and desires.) The exhibition shifts register from my own psychological portraits of the city to idealized life forms, from observed nature assiduously expressed as a kind of visual diary by my mother, Vinnie Gill, for roughly 60 years now. Here is a vocabulary of trees, flowers, animals and mountains, a warm embrace of the natural world. We must then further broaden our view to take in the infinite forms of the *devi* or the goddess who appears to engage in, while simultaneously transcending, a wide variety of everyday activities, usually performed by women, as well as the fundamental duties of various aspects of Mother Nature, as expressed by Ladhki Devi, an indigenous artist and lifelong practitioner of the Warli School of Painting. She's the mother of Rajesh Chaitya Vangad, with whom I have collaborated for close to a decade. Indeed, collaboration has been a cornerstone of my photographic practice. And by bringing together three diverse women artists here, I hope to raise questions about who is included within the narrow confinements of the contemporary art world. Both Vinnie Gill and Ladhki Devi have practiced their art mainly on their own, sharing their work only within their families and local communities, completely outside the circuits and networks of professional artists, contemporary art discourse, galleries and markets. Their labor and solitude has continually provided them with spaces of refuge and solace. As lifelong

homemakers, they have contributed in other capacities, unrecognized as “work”, and so are familiar with forms of exclusion. The exhibition hopes to consider the dualities of the depleted and regenerative, manmade and natural, colonial and indigenous, English and non-English, mundane and magical, absent and present, and finally through addressing current categories of inclusion and exclusion to attempt to enlarge the circle in terms of who “we” might define as an “artist”, what constitutes art practice, and perhaps reflect upon the underlying structures that enable or undermine such practices.”

Installation view of the exhibition ‘Sheher, Prakriti, Devi’. Gill thought of the exhibition as a space to juxtapose and connect the work from the three artists while also giving the artists their deserved individual spaces.

Installation view of the exhibition ‘Sheher, Prakriti, Devi’.

In the exhibition, Gill’s intention of displaying each artist in their own right while also maintaining the unity of a group exhibition came through. She placed the work in seemingly rhythmic notes of collision and solitude. At certain instances she consciously punctuated the exhibition by bringing the work together for a direct conversation— to celebrate their familiarity and togetherness, before reassigning them to their respective spaces to emphasize their uniqueness and individuality. She thoughtfully curated vistas that showed juxtaposition to underline the implicit connections between their distinct worlds, and attempted to forge connections through stark contrasts. One may say, Gill took the liberty to treat the work from the three artists in the exhibition as a single piece of work. However, this exhibition is built from personal knowledge, comfort, care and kinship of one another. This way of exhibition making,

strikingly distinct from instances where artists not necessarily acquainted with each other are brought together by the virtue of the curator's vision and idea, could possibly make the viewer uneasy. However, in an increasingly exclusive and universalized Indian art world, this exhibition sets a precedent in creating a distinct language, by turning inwards in practice while looking outwards in its approach, redefining and stretching the limits of ‘contemporary’ in Indian art.

The artist

Gauri Gill began her career in the discipline of photography through painting, education, and working as a photo-journalist documenting the stories from the margins. After pursuing undergraduate studies in Applied Arts at the Delhi College of Art, New Delhi, in 1992, when she did not find suitable avenues to further her interest in photography (since there were no full-time programs for photography in India at the time), she left Delhi to pursue a second undergraduate degree at Parsons The New School, New York. In 1994, upon her return, she began work as a photo-journalist, documenting ground realities of the newly becoming India post-liberalization. In 1999, well into her flourishing career as a journalist, on a short visit to Jodhpur, Rajasthan, with her school friends, Gill witnessed a girl being violently beaten by a teacher in a government school a few hours away from Jodhpur. After dwelling upon it, once back in Delhi, she proposed an essay on what it is to be a girl in a village school in India to the political weekly she worked with at the time. Her idea was set aside, claiming the story lacked the ‘news peg’ or a core the magazine’s readers would relate to. This incident instigated her to take off on a month-long sabbatical from work and document local schools and other educational institutions and organizations across the villages of Rajasthan. This journey turned out to be an impetus for her lifelong associations with India's rural landscape and communities. Listening to their stories and

bearing witness to their ongoing lives in the country’s long-forgotten and often neglected regions, Gill’s record of their tales, beliefs and spirit through her lenses lead her to experiences and realizations that could hardly be represented or assimilated through journalism.

Gauri Gill, (1999-ongoing), Untitled (26) from the series *The Mark on the Wall*.
Image courtesy the artist and Galerie Mirchandani + Steinruecke.

Soon after, she left journalism and returned to the United States to pursue the Master in Fine Arts program at Stanford University. While there, she managed to keep in touch with the communities through letters and bi-yearly visits. There, being the only student working with photography in her year, she began to think of her own medium differently, in conjunction with the practices of her colleagues in the class. It urged Gill to turn her focus towards the ideas represented through her practice rather than just the form. On her return to India, with the award money she received

from the Fifty Crows Award (formerly a project of Mother Jones magazine) for documentary photography, she continued documenting the lives of marginalized communities in rural Rajasthan, India.

Gill’s first solo exhibition within the realm of contemporary art only took place at the age of 38. Today, in a decade, she has managed to not only get the stories of the margin to a wider audience through art, but through collaborative projects and scholarship, enabled the communities with whom she has worked by ensuring the exchange is equal. She has managed to keep in touch with all the people she has worked with, including those in Rajasthan that she first met in 1999, revisiting them at regular intervals, and becoming an indelible part of their journeys. That is why many of her series are often ongoing collaborative projects produced in equal authorship with the communities.

As mentioned earlier, Gill exhibits her series ‘Re-memory’ in the exhibition that she has been working on since 2003. The series can be interpreted as a historical document that accumulates the collective aspirations and ‘in-betweenness’ that is situated in the peripheries of villages, towns, and cities- the fading non-demarcated non-visceral boundaries that one is sure to encounter while traversing the Indian countryside but would mostly fail to register. In that way, ‘Re-memory’- a term Gill borrows from Toni Morrison’s Pulitzer-winning novel *Beloved*- talks about simultaneously living in the present and history. In the book, Morrison uses the word “rememory” to recall the moments that have lost familiarity, moments that have been tucked away for so long, turning the reappearance of the memory into sudden manifestations that are haunted.

Explaining the photographs, Gill says, "I am interested in how we have imagined and continue to re-imagine cities, and how the human hand remains and reveals itself both in the conception and destruction of new ways of living and being, as embedded in material culture" (Curatorial Note, Experimenter, 2014). After getting a nod from Vinnie Gill and Ladhki Devi to participate, Gill credited the series for the exhibition to create a befitting collective narrative.

(Please refer to Appendix A for the entire conversation.)

Gauri Gill, 2003- ongoing, *New Delhi 2006 (b)*, from the series *Rememory*.
Image courtesy the artist and Galerie Mirchandani + Steinruecke.

Gauri Gill, 2003- ongoing, *Grand Trunk Road, Delhi 2007 (c)*, from the series *Rememory*. Image courtesy the artist and Galerie Mirchandani + Steinruecke.

Vinnie Gill

Vinnie Gill was born in 1946, a year before India gained independence. She was educated in Sacred Heart School and College- a convent set up by the Christian missionaries in 1901, in the scenic hill station of Dalhousie. There, Gill learned art from the Belgian nuns as part of her school curriculum. Once out of the school, she did not pursue learning it formally in art school but carried on her practice as a hobby. In 1965, she got married to Manohar Singh Gill who was in the Indian Civil Service. Even as she traveled and moved with her family to accompany her husband at various government postings, she continued to nurture her interest in art through various phases and seasons of her life. After consistently practicing art for 60 years, she says, “Artmaking is very much a part of my life. It has been for as long as I can remember. It is part creative, part meditative. Painting gives me a lot of pleasure, as well as solace in times of grief.” Gauri Gill recalls how in the moments of greatest sorrow, like when her maternal grandmother passed away, Gill found peace and time for contemplation in the moments she spent in her room, making drawings.

Talking about her inspirations Gill says, “... just seeing the bark of a tree or observing a fluttering butterfly or the rising moon at dusk inspires me.” Over the years, her work has emerged from things that spark interest and joy for her. She has often traveled with little notebooks or brought back photographs from her travels to make drawings. Gill’s drawings, almost like notes from her various outings, emerge from her passion and love for her more-than-human surroundings and turn into a rendition of memories, places and stories of her experiences with them. Today, Gill has a large archive, and much of it on loose sheets of papers or in a bound diaries.

Vinnie Gill, 2019, *Silk Cotton tree in Humayun’s Tomb, New Delhi*, Pastels and watercolor on rough paper. Image courtesy Gauri Gill and Galerie Mirchandani + Steinruecke.

Vinnie Gill, 2020, *Shyok River in Nubra Valley, at the foothills of the Karakoram*, Pastels and watercolor on rough paper. Image courtesy Gauri Gill and Galerie Mirchandani + Steinruecke

Vinnie Gill, 2020, *Lotus Pond in Ranthambore*, Pastels and watercolor on rough paper.
Image courtesy Gauri Gill and Galerie Mirchandani + Steinruecke.

Through decades of consistent practice, she has taught herself to paint in oil and watercolors, draw in pen and pencil, and along the way, experimented with mixed media and pastels. However, as mentioned in an interview with Shreya Ajmani, she is most inspired by Chinese and Japanese styles of painting (Ajmani, 2021). Making art without any particular deadlines, market or necessity takes an immense amount of observation, self-discipline, and passion.

For the exhibition, Gill had to be convinced by Gauri Gill since she does not enjoy working on a deadline. She says, “I also had some trepidation about how it would be received.” Before this exhibition, Gill had only shown her work to friends and family. She had always thought of an exhibition sometime in the future “but had never put energy and thought to concretizing and

manifesting the idea” (Interview with Vinnie Gill). This exhibition put that thought into action. After the exhibition, Gill is grateful to her daughter for this experience. Gauri Gill fondly remembers how Gill experienced joy and excitement when several renowned and well-regarded artists and visitors at the opening were conversing and enquiring about her exhibited work. Gill feels this exhibition has not changed her practice in any way however she is now open to showing her work with other artists. She ends the conversation with her future plans, “In future, I am inspired and more committed to having a solo show as well.”

(Please refer to Appendix B for the entire conversation.)

Ladhki Devi

Ladhki Devi’s style is “fluid” (Interview with Gauri Gill). The lines made by her vary in thickness and weight, free from the burdens of perfection and exactitude. As Gauri Gill mentions in Ginwala’s essay “The Goddess Who Created This Passing World,” “The intuitive nature of her work comes from her lived experience and years of devotional drawing” (Ginwala, 2021), the purity of her intent while making the drawings is easily legible. Ladhki Devi, a *suvasini* (a married woman) from the Warli tribe, learned to make Warli drawings by accompanying and observing her mother and other married women of the tribe while growing up and she followed this same tradition to teach her children (Gill & Vangad, 2023, p.296)— two of whom are prolific Warli artists themselves— this form of storytelling. “In the Warli community, during a marriage ceremony, two women (*suvasinis*) are invited to be present. Later these two *suvasinis*, along with other people (men, children and women) from the village, make *dev-chauks* or *chauks* on the walls of the house. For this ritual, *suvasinis* make the *kul-devta* (ancestral male deity of

the community) or *kul-devi* (ancestral female deity of the community) on the walls, which are then worshiped.” Ladhki Devi explains.

Traditionally, for the Warlis, the role of *suvasinis* and *dhavaleris* (women priestesses) has been extremely crucial in carrying out their lives. The original bearers of this tradition and knowledge, they draw and carry out rituals to mark important events such as birth, death, weddings, festivals and harvest for the community. However, it has been the men of the tribe who have represented the art form professionally in the urban areas so far.

Suvasinis making a *dev-chauk* for a marriage ceremony in Raitali Village, Dahanu, Maharashtra, India. Image courtesy of Alamy.

The word ‘*Waral’* in Warli essentially means ‘tilled land’. Predominantly an agrarian community, Warli along with other tribes like the Dhodias, Dublas, and Katkaris, inhabit the Thane district of the western Indian state of Maharashtra. Like most indigenous tribes, the Warlis closely associate themselves with nature. They firmly believe that their world- the farms, ground, trees, mountains, wind, water, and almost all the elements that surround them are a form of worship (Hoskote. 1996). Over the years, with industrial forces advancing upon the tribal land in the name of modernization and infrastructural advancement, the tribes began to lose their traditional housing and means of livelihood. The men of the tribe slowly moved on to work in the factories or at the wealthy landowners’, merchants’ or moneylenders’ in and around the village. Ladhki Devi’s father-in-law, husband— Chaitya Lakhma Vangad, and two of her three sons, worked at some of such establishments to earn their livelihoods (Gill & Vangad, 2023, p.296).

In the 1970s, the then government of India deputed a team to look for master-artists of folk tradition. Bhaskar Kulkarni, an artist and official attached to All India Handloom board, had a chance encounter with Jivya Soma Mashe, a man from the Warli tribe working in one such establishment as a laborer. Mashe had been extremely gifted since childhood and had practiced Warli painting apart from his daily job as a laborer. This meeting proved momentous for the Warlis as Mashe then went on to pioneer the participation of men in this once matriarchal ritual along with bringing portability to the art that was contained to the statis of the walls of their homes.

In 1973, Mashe showed his work in Pragati Maidan, New Delhi, for the first time. Soon after, in 1975, an exhibition at Chemould Gallery, Mumbai followed, and in 1976, his work made an international debut at Palais de Carnolès, France. Mashe's recognition brought with it immense national and international curiosity in Warli, and several other men from the tribe began to practice it as a profession. However, as the community began to carve a new identity for itself, unethical use of Warli art on consumer goods became widespread and diminished the ethos and values behind the meticulous processes of the art form. The commercialization, distorting facts surrounding Warli culture, took away their agency to convey their stories.

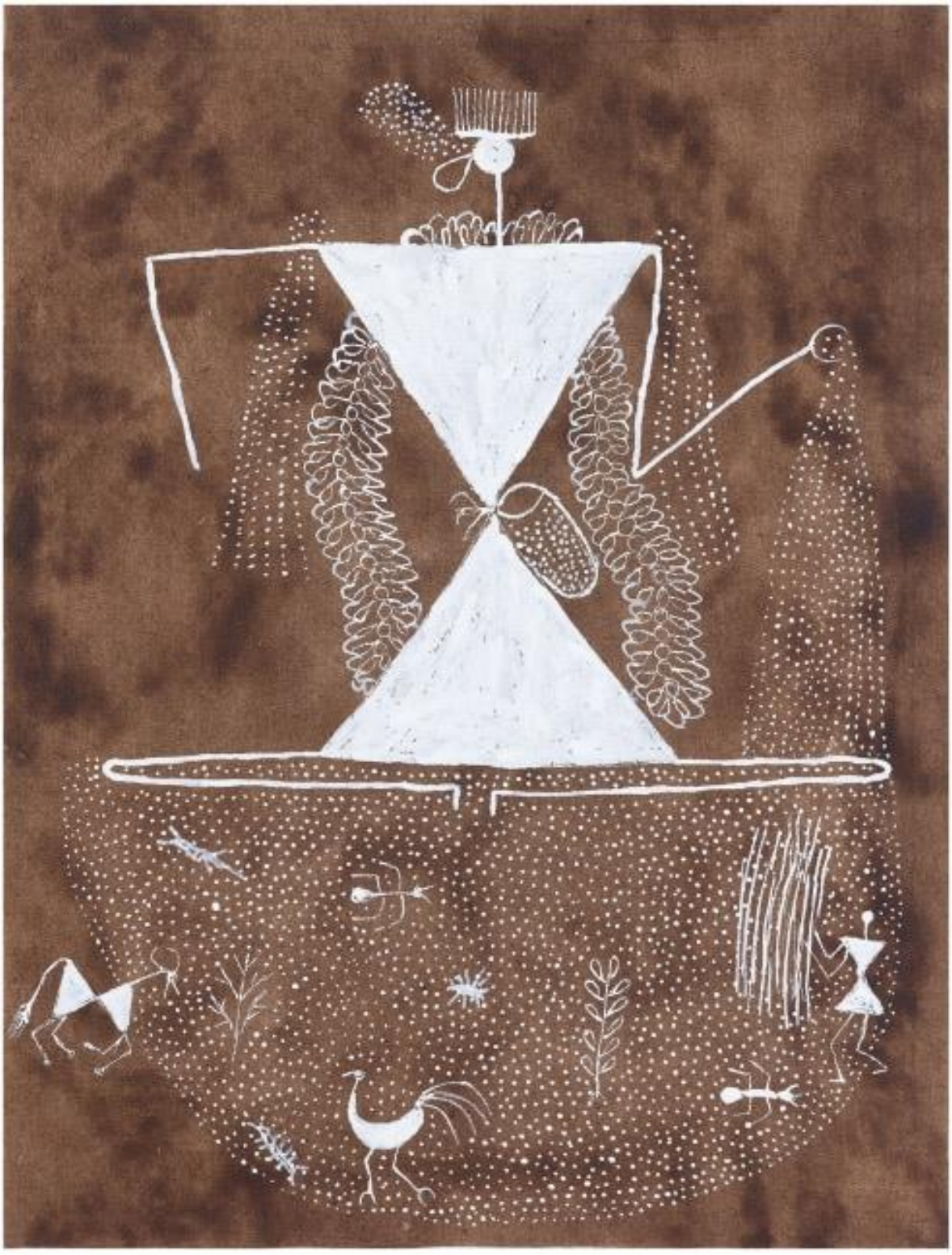
This transition in the community also transformed the very nature of the art form. In an interview in 2010, Mashe said "Earlier women would draw whatever was in the line of sight, say trees, rivers, the sun. But with the entry of men, each drawing became a story. Even themes like train journeys and a day at a workplace have found a place in the art" (Bhuyan, 2010). Additionally, Warli women's reluctance to go outside the village to pursue a career made Warli— the art form, widely represented only by the men of the tribe (Interview with Gauri Gill). Owing to this representation, Ladhki Devi, despite working as a *suvasini* all her life, had never shown her practice outside her village.

She met Gill for the first time in 2013 when Gill was visiting Ganjad to attend a Warli Art Festival at a school. Ladhki Devi's eldest son Rajesh Chaitya Vangad also participated in the festival. Gill had stayed at their familial home at the time. After this visit, Gill and Vangad decided to collaborate on their series *Fields of Sight*. She vividly remembers listening to them converse about their practices and Gill's curiosity about her work as a *suvasini*. Owing to

Vangad and Gill’s continued collaboration, they have had the opportunity to meet several times since then. Hence, when Gill approached Ladhki Devi for this exhibition, she could trust her with her representation. As Gill mentions in an interview with Shreya Ajmani, they decided “to interpret the infinite forms of the Devi, or Goddess, who appears to engage in—while simultaneously transcending—a wide range of everyday activities usually performed by women, as well as the fundamental duties of various aspects of Mother Nature” (Ajmani. 2021).

For the exhibition, Ladhki Devi needed to modify her practice so that it could have the portability to be exhibited as artwork in a gallery. So instead of painting directly on the wall with the rice flour and brushes made out of bamboo sticks, for the exhibition, she prepared surfaces over various pieces of cloth that were hand-plastered with cow dung. She then painted on them with white poster and acrylic color with chiseled bamboo sticks. Apart from that, she even altered what she drew for the exhibition. She describes, “Compared to the usual details drawn on the walls, for paintings in ‘Sheher, Prakriti, Devi’ I have drawn in greater detail.” She adds, “… for the paintings in the exhibition, along with depicting rapidly changing nature, I have tried to illustrate different festivals, celebrations, dance forms, worship, the material, history, and importance associated with the worship of the Goddesses.”

However, to her these changes do not seem much in comparison to the paradigm shift it will bring for her and the Warli community. After about five decades of coming into the limelight, ‘Sheher, Prakriti, Devi’ marked the first instance where a *suvasini* from the Warli community has represented the work that she has been doing in a contemporary art gallery. Ladhki Devi was pleasantly surprised at the way her work was presented and viewed at the gallery. She says, of



Ladhki Devi, 2020-21, *Dhartari Devi*, Poster paint on mud-coated cloth.
Image courtesy Gauri Gill and Galerie Mirchandani + Steinruecke

Ladhki Devi, 2020-21, *Mata*, Poster paint on mud-coated cloth.
Image courtesy Gauri Gill and Galerie Mirchandani + Steinruecke

her experience at the opening, “… I saw many people looking at the work in the exhibition and talking about it. I was surprised that a lot of known artists and people took notice of my work and met me. I was happy as I did not know how they will receive the work.” After this exhibition, she is much more comfortable with showing her work along with other contemporary artists. However, her intentions are more than establishing her artistic career. She looks at this experience as a way to keep the Warli traditions alive. She hopes for the art’s intended intentions and representation to be seen throughout the world and for as many people to understand and study Warli.

(Please refer to Appendix C for the entire conversation.)

OBSERVATION & DISCUSSIONS

One of the foremost and obvious observations was the completely distinct ranges of motivation, effect, and significance of the three participating artists. While her positionality as a *suvasini* motivated Ladhki Devi to be the communicator of the Warli stories to the world, for Vinnie Gill, it was a culmination of an impending aspiration that always lay in the future, and for Gauri Gill, it meant reinstating agency to these women whom she has associated with closely over the years. Ladhki Devi derived joy and energy from looking at her work, interact with that of other artists, Vinnie Gill felt encouraged to pursue her art that she had earlier viewed only as a hobby, and Gauri Gill, defining her role as a catalyst, understands how these collaborations enrich her practice.

Having incorporated collaboration and dialogue into her practice for two decades, Gauri Gill adapted her work at the earlier stages of making photographs and editing the series to be exhibited. Ladhki Devi modified her practice to lend portability to the otherwise site-specific transient art form. She made changes in her medium, technique, and narrative; however, the greatest change came in terms of collaboration- the rituals entailed her indulging in this act of artmaking as a community, whereas the work in the exhibition required her to work alone in the premises of her own house.

For Gauri Gill, this collaborative experiment made her imagine new possibilities that can come out of collective action- the reception of viewpoints and reinstatement of authority in the often-excluded narratives. After all these years, it made her converse with her mother as a fellow artist through their practice. For Vinnie Gill, this exhibition was a culmination of a long-fostered

aspiration that always lay in the future. It instilled confidence in her abilities and motivated her to expand the boundaries of her practice; however, for Ladhki Devi, this exhibition meant breaking the generational barriers to become the first-ever *suvasini* to represent their role, significance, and culture to the world outside of her community.

This exhibition managed to bestow the two self-taught exhibiting artists with a new identity and renewed confidence in themselves and their abilities. It placed storytelling and relationship building— virtues central to the indigenous and self-taught methods of learning— at its center. It managed to create a conceptual ‘third space’ within the physical premises of a commercial contemporary art gallery.

While the economic gains from this collaboration will lead them to the stability they require in the face of constantly diminishing land and livelihoods for the tribes and instill confidence in self-taught artists, their greater interest must be paramount.

Their relationship with the curator, built through attentive and intentional listening, lay at the core of this exhibition. This exhibition was possible because of the trust instilled in each other through their long connections and familiarity. This differs greatly from the curator-artist relationship defined in the institutional structure and sometimes comes together for a single curated event or exhibition. Gill, in her pursuit of acting as a catalyst, managed to give a new direction to the two artists who have practiced the art without any ‘expectation’ or ‘outcome’. Gill proceeded with the exhibition like an extension of her integrative practice which meant forming deeper connections and exchange of energy with the participating artists through their

work. For Vinnie Gill it instilled confidence in her abilities and gave voice to communicate the stories of her ancestors to Ladhki Devi.

CONCLUSION

In recent times, there has been an influx of exhibitions in the form of biennales and specially curated shows that exhibit juxtapositions of contemporary and tribal art. However, there are few avenues where informally trained artists are represented equally as institutionally trained artists. There is an urgent need to get voices, from the margins and margins of the margins, to the center. Their integration into the existing representational system will ensure sustainable regeneration of their tradition and knowledge, and legitimize their creative expression and valuation. At the same time, this shift will enrich the landscape of Indian contemporary art with distinct viewpoints and become genuinely representative of the diverse demographic of the nation. However, this exchange is complicated and needs to be handled with sensitivity to authentic intentions. Expecting indigenous and self-taught practices to fit into the present-day institutional structures of commercial representation, might have adverse effects of commercialization eroding the true nature of their art, craftsmanship and culture. Concurrently, an immensely competitive space that merely hopes to exhibit, promote, and trade art could diminish the confidence that such collaborations are intended to harbor. Their participation requires a relationship-centric approach built on trust, faith, and humility, based on attentive and intentional listening, that is difficult to come out of conventional artist-curator/artist-gallery relationships.

In her book ‘Radical Museology’ Claire Bishop concludes recommendation of a ‘dialectical contemporaneity’ by elaborating on how the cultural valuation systems in the present neoliberal times are primarily based on the economic value that often denigrates not only the institutions representing art but art schools and humanities in general. She further argues how such an emphasis can incapacitate our ability to look for alternative value creation systems, which

sometimes even exist in other cultural settings. Pressing upon the urgent need to devise an alternative valuation system that is centered around culture and humanities, Bishop (2013, p. 62) writes,

> … authentic culture operates within a slower time frame than the accelerated abstractions of finance capital and the annual cycles of accounting. But it is precisely this lack of synchronicity that points to an alternative world of values in which (museums- but also) culture, education and democracy— are not subject to the banalities …but enables us to access a rich and diverse history, to question the present, and to realize a different future.

In the context of this research, I find Bishop’s conclusion extremely relevant and translate it to a negotiated transient ‘third space’ that mediates the space and knowledge-building methodologies. This space not only represents and exhibits but finds ways for the intersectionalities of class, culture, gender, and region to interact with the intersectionalities of generation and pedagogy, giving rise to an ‘intersectional third space’. I define it as a concept that builds new structures for knowledge-making and sharing along with the motive to hand the authority to tell their stories back to them; a space that dismantles the existing institutional structures of representation and display to accommodate multiple notions of art; one that does not entirely reject dominant knowledge but acknowledges and centers the different concerns and worldviews that come from a diverse and complex history of the country; one that culminates through mutual respect for various knowledge-building and sharing techniques and creative processes, one that is constructed with collective forces that come together to serve purposes other than those already defined. It becomes a way to put into practice Agamben’s idea of

contemporaneity— “a singular relationship with one’s time, which adheres to it and, at the same time, keeps a distance from it” (Agamben, 2009, p. 40).

NEXT STEPS

Andrea Fraser in her essay “From The Critique Of Institutions To An Institution Of Critique” writes about the role an institution plays in the generation of value in art and how the artists, curators and cultural workers who question and critique the institution, are still a part of it despite not identifying with the values. She reminds how it was institutional critique and concurrent action that led to pushing the boundaries of institutional spaces and has shaped the notion of contemporary art we know today. Urging cultural workers to take the responsibility for change, she writes:

> Every time we speak of the “institution” as other than “us,” we disavow our role in the creation and perpetuation of its conditions. We avoid responsibility for, or action against, the everyday complicities, compromises, and censorship— above all, self- censorship— which are driven by our own interests in the field and the benefits we derive from it. It’s not a question of inside or outside, or the number and scale of various organized sites for the production, presentation, and distribution of art. It’s not a question of being against the institution: We are the institution. It’s a question of what kind of institution we are, what kind of values we institutionalize, what forms of practice we reward, and what kinds of rewards we aspire to. Because the institution of art is internalized, embodied, and performed by individuals, these are the questions that institutional critique demands we ask, above all, of ourselves. (Fraser, 2005, p. 281)

This research has catapulted this project into a much larger realm of study to discover and formulate an approach that thoughtfully combines the non-formal and formal methods of

learning. While for decades some art institutes have integrated lessons and workshops from the indigenous masters— artists and craftsmen— into their curriculum, there is an absence of such effort from the institution’s end to encourage the indigenous ideology and arts. Creating an ‘intersectional third space’ requires a deeper connection and participation. There are efforts from a handful of artists and grassroots organizations but they remain far and few. With more research and directed efforts, a unique integrated pedagogical approach will ensure percolation of non-formally taught artists and an alternate value system into various levels and aspects of art-making and institutional structures, that will in turn, change the representation and culture of these very spaces. I make an attempt at collating some of my thoughts and ideas to take this research forward. Thinking about viable solutions extends beyond the methods listed below. In fact, there are several collaborative efforts undertaken by the indigenous communities worldwide, that can provide strong inferences and references. However, it is extremely important to look at what is lost and gained in this process. It is time for us to think— How do we thoughtfully integrate lived knowledge from the indigenous communities without epistemologically extracting from them? How do we create collaboration that benefits the marginalized communities and enriches our lives with their knowledge? How do we give them the agency to tell their stories?

Non-commodifying Education

In “Schools, Marxism, and Liberation,” Sarah Knopp establishes an understanding of the word ‘education’ in the neo-liberal capitalist world we inhabit. She comments on how we are expected to perceive and receive knowledge in today’s educational system, which is becoming increasingly reflective of our values as a society. Elaborating how “knowledge” is broken into smaller chunks and categories, making it tough for students to make connections, Knopp writes,

> This is reflected in schools. Here we begin to learn how *not* to see the whole picture of the way the world works— the interplay among politics, economics, science, technology, language, and so on— because in school everything is divided into discrete “subjects.” Each of these topics is in turn broken down into tinier and tinier subcategories or “units.” (Knopp, 2012, p. 15)

This technique of commodifying knowledge into “subjects” and “topics” and viewing it in isolation is contradictory to how things exist in the world. It is not surprising then, that compartmentalizing becomes our innate nature that translates into aspects of our profession. Can we direct learning towards knowledge that “educates the heart, the mind and the spirit?” (Tuhiwai Smith, 2012 p.146). This requires a regenerated perspective on education and translating complex thoughts into digestible curriculum. However, it can bestow the learners with the overarching connectedness of indigenous knowledge systems that seems so overwhelming to our minds and help in demystifying the notion that indigenous knowledge systems conflict with our ‘scientific’ learning system.

Protection against ‘packaging’ knowledge

Tebtebba (Indigenous Peoples’ International Centre for Policy Research and Education) is an indigenous peoples’ organization born out of the need for heightened advocacy to have the rights of indigenous peoples respected, protected and fulfilled worldwide, based out of Northern Philippines. *Tebtebba* in indigenous Kankana-ey Igorot of Northern Philippines refers to a process of collectively discussing issues and presenting diverse views with the aim of reaching

agreements, common positions, and concerted actions. As an organization, Tebtebba is actively engaged in the processes which led to the adoption of international human rights law and other international instruments, policies and agreements. These include the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) and the establishment of spaces within the United Nations, such as the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, among others.

Their newsletter from May 2014 covered main talking points from their workshop about protection and promotion of traditional or indigenous knowledge held in Quezon City in October 2013. The newsletter begins with a compelling story from an Aeta (community indigenous to the main island of Luzon in the Philippines) elder:

> For some time, American soldiers, who were then based at their military bases in Clark and Subic Bay in central Luzon had tapped some indigenous Aeta to teach them about how to survive in a jungle. Former nomadic hunters and gatherers, the Aeta taught American soldiers how to trap wild game and identify edible plants and medicinal herbs and how to apply these for injuries.
>
> After the American soldiers and other non-indigenous Filipinos mastered the art and science of jungle survival, they parted ways with the Aeta. From what they learned, they developed a training course about jungle survival and have been teaching this to other soldiers. Other Filipinos who learned from the Aeta also have been teaching the course to interested enrollees on jungle survival. The sad part, according to Aeta elder Salvador “Ka Badong” Dimain, is that this training course has been patented or copyrighted. He said the

> course is now taught by so-called “jungle survival experts,” thus depriving the Aeta of a livelihood as trainers or teachers in jungle survival.

This story might be a story of many indigenous communities from around the world. Our ideas of creating value by packaging knowledge into marketable courses and instating expertise and copyrights, is emblematic of the epistemological imperialism that comes as a part and parcel of the educational structures we have been trained in. The combination of pedagogy that I aim for acknowledges the epistemological extraction that the indigenous communities have long endured and hopes to conduct this exchange in a responsible and respectful manner that keeps the agency to share, teach and propagate the knowledge with the communities. It seeks to collaborate on policy level to guard the agency of the communities.

Educating of the conscious

In the 1960s, the Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) as part of the Freedom Summer— a campaign of voter registration and political registration among African Americans across Mississippi, with an aim to achieve social, political and economic equality in the United States, set up Freedom Schools. These non-conventional learning programs soon gathered momentum and became a part of the nationwide struggle during the Civil Rights Movement in 1964. Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, in her essay *The Freedom Schools* mentions that “Pedagogically, the cultivators of the Freedom Schools did not want to replicate what they believed to be a hierarchical approach to public education, but rather to encourage questioning, intellectual curiosity and a sense of collaboration between students and teachers” (Taylor, 2012, p. 213).

Though predominantly a school set up to equip the enrolled students with knowledge of their civil rights and laws, the curriculum used language, art, music, drama, poetry and other relevant lessons to introduce them to African American history and the oppression they have endured as a community. The lessons and discussion at the school were embedded in student’s lived experiences and hence, these activities became a way of self-expression. These schools soon turned into spaces for “radical questioning” designed to counter generations of miseducation in Mississippi. It encouraged them to envision how they could be a part of the change.

This model of education that managed to use the existing tools and structures of knowledge-building to create curriculums and lessons with a purpose to combat generations of oppression and marginalization of community can be reimagined to suit the purpose of another community. I believe Freedom Schools are a great case study to see how the transmission of principles and ideologies can become part of the mainstream educational structure and be used to raise collective voice against the systemic injustice endured by a community.

Working towards collective futures

Dialogue Interactive Artists Association (DIAA) is an artists’ run organization situated in the Kopaweda Para in the village of Kondagaon in Bastar District, Chhattisgarh, India. This association was founded by *adivasi* (tribal) artists Rajkumar Korram, Shantibai, Gessuram Viswakarma from Bastar and contemporary artist Navjot Altaf from Mumbai in 1997 with the vision to encourage interaction between local as well as visiting artists from any part of the world.

While continuing within the realms of parallel art practices, the artists along with art historians Dr Shivaji Paninkar and Bhanu Padamsee engaged themselves with the "questions concerning art /craft binaries, parallel, interactive, cooperative and collaborative art practices in the context of contemporary art in India or elsewhere" (DIAA website). In 2000, they strategized to look at collaboration as an experiment which over the period of time resulted in site specific projects such as '*Nalpar*' (hand pump sites) and '*Pilla Gudis*' (Temples for children). These ongoing inclusive and participative projects try to engage with the members from surrounding communities, municipal officials and the local schools. Other than that the DIAA website informs:

> Apart from *Dialogues*' *Nalpar* project and *Pilla Gudi* activities , the artists have organized three seminars '*Samvad*' 1- '*Perception of Collaboration*' (2007) '*Samvad 2*'- '*What is Contemporary in Contemporary Art*' (2011) and '*Samvad 3*'- '*Value [of] Nature*' (2015) at the *DIAA* Centre for which along with practicing artists, cultural theorists, art historians, art critics, PHD students and artists from India and abroad, school teachers, local artists, writers, theatre groups, cultural and political activists and technocrats from local NGOs and other cities were also invited. In 2017 Dialogue had an art workshop in which students from Kondagaon and Bastar and students from J J School of Art Mumbai were invited.

I emphasize this example as a way of collective action, where, as an outsider trained and educated within the constructs of conventional education, collaborates with a tribal/ indigenous community to work with them and helps them configure and amplify their voices. This endeavor has also given the tribal artist the agency to re-imagine their craft in the 'contemporary' and given them a choice of if and how they wish to collaborate on it.

In the book *Rehearsals for Living*, Robyn Maynard and Leanne Simpson remark, “If our histories are intimately intertwined with one another’s, so too are our futures.” (Maynard & Simpson, 2022, p. 26). They further add, “The future feels daunting. Maybe writing together, walking together, witnessing these times together in this way will help us forge ahead differently” (Maynard & Simpson, 2022, p. 27). It again points us towards taking steps to bring the value of our individual voices in the collective future to the fore. However, the question is, do we see respectable collective action with marginalized communities, that does not require us to speak up for them but merely requires us to encourage them, to administer their agency and voice?

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APPENDIX- A

This is a transcript of the conversation I had with Gauri Gill on Monday, 28 November 2022 over a Zoom meeting.

Archa Desai (AD): So… I wanted to begin with the initial years. I want to understand what shaped your ideas on art and what directed you towards your present approach and practice.

Gauri Gill (GG): Oh! Archa, I think we should maybe keep the (focus on the exhibition) ... because if the interview with me is about my practice and all that, it will be a long interview. I was just going to speak about the exhibition.

AD: Yeah. So, I have divided my questions into three parts. I wanted to understand how you formed your own values. Then, of course, then how in this exhibition, what are the kind of challenges or how this exhibition came about.

GG: Uh, you know my own practice, there's a lot out there. And I think…

AD: So the question was directed because...

GG: It's a very broad question, what formed you etc… I can go on… I think more specific questions would be more… you know… easier for...

AD: So the reason I'm asking this question is because I'm trying to understand, what sort of pedagogy did you receive in order for you to form your ideas? That's all I want to know. Was it while you were working, or...?

GG: So, this recent talk at Kiran Nadar, will be very instructive in that regard. It's recorded. It's on YouTube. I spoke in a lot of detail about my own experiences as a student and as a teacher.

AD: Ok. I already reached out to the Asia Society people and they said that they'll put it on YouTube in a couple of days. So, I'm going to see that as soon as it is up.

GG: Oh yeah. There I go into detail... because it's also not something I want to summarize in two sentences, which I can just reel off like my biodata. And anyway, my biodata is all out there. I think more specific questions would be useful.

AD: So, for this particular exhibition I wanted to ask you- this collaboration, this idea- how did it all come about- did you speak to the gallerist and how did it all take place?

GG: It came about in 2020 when I was putting together (the exhibition of) *Rememory*. I've been working on (the series) *Rememory* since 2003, and I've never shown it as a solo exhibition. (Galerie) Mirchandani + Steinruecke wanted to show that body of work. And then all through COVID, we (I live above my parents…we live in the same building) were all locked down together and I was editing this exhibition. It was supposed to take place that year but it kept getting postponed. And I was up here (in my flat) looking at all the material—almost 20 years of

city pictures and of very dystopian city pictures, because *Rememory* is these sort of psychological pictures of the city, the spaces between the village and the city, the kind of borders or places which are not quite this, not quite that. They're these very dark and moody pictures of not just Delhi but many cities across India and also smaller towns. And the spaces in between. But anyway, I was sitting up here trying to get a grip on, how am I going to edit all this work for this exhibition? And I would go downstairs and I would see my mother in her study making her drawings. And her drawings are all from love, it's always from things that she appreciates. And there's a lot of nature. But there could also be the mountains or they could be old tombs. So she has her own and very old language now, because we've grown up with these pictures and she's been making them for so many years now. She's 76 so about 60 years. I started to think of her work and my work, and I thought, it's so interesting that in this same house there are two people working in very different ways. Mine is this dark black and white look at the city and the built environment, what we are making (as a society). I'm interested in what is emerging from our imagination here in India, what are our aspirations, so very specific pictures about the city, and as I said, dystopian, and then my mother's very distinctive language, looking at the world (with pastels, with watercolor) just going around and just being. They are all things that she's seen or known. So, it's always something that strikes her when she’s gone somewhere. It's also drawn from observation at home, something she sees. She'll either try and make a drawing over there (where she is) or she'll take a picture and then try and recreate it later. So suddenly I—and because it was that time, I guess we had also a lot of time to think, it was in some ways a very fertile time, that COVID time—also started to think, it's so odd that one of us is exhibiting work as a so-called artist, the other is not. We are both in this house engaging in very different art practices and I also started thinking of her version—how she is looking at the world and how I

am looking at the world, right? I just thought we had such distinct ways of looking at the world. And I thought, we are inhabiting many of the same spaces—like say I'm walking around Nizamuddin, it's such a different take from what she might pick up on. And so, at some point I started thinking, suppose her work were also to be in this exhibition, because these are two very subjective takes on the Indian landscape. I thought, it's a very rich practice in its own way, and entering my pictures, it would be magical. Because at that point there was one set of pictures I was editing, which was a lot of buildings—mostly from Bombay, also Ahmedabad, but also in many other places, lots of new buildings—and then I went down and I was looking at her trees, and suddenly I thought suppose, because my own mental landscape was so dark, and then there’s her work and I thought we are both in the same house and look at how we are looking and what we are looking at in the world. So, I thought, suppose I just somehow slip in her work, her language, or her interpretation, into my own vocabulary. But then I had to sit down and I had to think it out before I could say this to Ranjana (Steinruecke), because she had no clue and she was thinking we are doing (an exhibition of) *Rememory*, which we were. We had already made many edits and I now had to think it through further. Then I started to think seriously about how would we do this—what is her practice about, what can we show. I really thought a lot. And we decided to focus on the aspects of her practice which are to do with nature and the city-—there were mountains, there was a city, there were old tombs. And we brought it into conversation with my work, which is looking at many different aspects of the city—of the nascent city, the city as it's being formed, as it's dissolved, because even the city is not a fixed entity. So, these kinds of processes—visible processes, but as seen through material culture. There are no people in my pictures, so this built landscape, which is reflecting the human imagination—or who we are through what we are building. And her images of nature alongside. I had to really sit down and

think what would work, where and how, because it's a completely different practice and I also knew I had to do it justice, even though this was not a solo show for her work. And frankly, she deserves a solo show, which would be a whole different thing because then that would really be embedded in her distinct practice. This was like interweaving strands, and the core that we began with was *Rememory*. And looking at her rich practice, I started thinking what could be the points of intersection and at the same time of course we had to represent and do justice to her practice. But there wasn't space for her to have more than 20 pictures, I think we showed about 20 as you can see in the pdf, and they had to have those connecting points because the works are in conversation. I just thought it would light up my work. And then, as I was thinking—because I usually reflect for quite long and I keep planning (internally) before discussing it—one of the first people I discussed it with was Rajeshji (Vangad) because he was visiting me—we were making work—and I said, I'm thinking of this. He's always been very interested in what my mother is making as another artist, and they talk. So, then I said, I'm thinking of doing this exhibition and then I said, Rajeshji (Vangad) even Ladhki Devi—his mother whom I always love meeting and talking to in the village because she's a very beautiful, just a very inspirational figure—she's a farmer, but she's also someone who's done Warli painting since her childhood and she's someone whom Rajeshji (Vangad) learnt from. Because Warli was matriarchal traditionally, but then because the women can't travel, at some point the men took over and they became the professionals. He also acknowledges that he learned from her. And I'm always curious to see what she is doing. Her work is much more instinctive and has this kind of raw and very beautiful feeling- this kind of *bhavna* which is very sincere and very, you know … there's just something. I think it comes from her practice and then maybe never actually doing it for any sort of market as she only does it in the village at weddings and as a *suvasini*. It's a traditional

practice in Warli life to go to the homes and decorate them before the wedding and ritual ceremonies. So, then I suddenly thought, suppose I also invite her. And I thought very specifically of her because so much of that iconography is sacred. Because in a sense, Adivasis very much feel that everything around us is also sacred, that there are gods and goddesses all around us, and it's your perception (that determines) how you're looking at everything. In fact, Rajeshji (Vangad) and I have made a work called *“The Gods are Everywhere.”* I started thinking, and I asked, “Would she be open?” He said, “You can ask her.” And then I spoke to her and I asked, “Would you be open? Would you make a set of the *Devis* or the *Devi* figure?” But (in the form of) ordinary women as *Devis*. Ordinary women in their different manifestations as the *Devi*. She was kind enough to say yes. And then I started piecing it together. I started to think, this (exhibition) is about the city and it's about nature and it's about the Goddess, and so that's how ‘Sheher, Prakriti, Devi’ (came about). And then at that point I spoke to Ranjana and I said, “I'm thinking of doing this and what do you think?” And initially she said, “Can I see some things?” But she was also open to it and generous. And because in 2016, in the last exhibition which was all different aspects of my own practice, we had shown *Fields of Sight* with *The Mark on the Wall* and *Traces*, and it was a very layered exhibition and a lot of things came out of that exhibition. I didn't realize it at the time, but it was a very rich exhibition because there were many ideas in it. I was trying, at that point, to not just show *Fields of Sight*, but the antecedents alongside, and since the first time I started to think of rural artists was in *The Mark on the Wall*, I thought, can I connect the dots between that (series) and *Fields of Sight*? And then can we also bring it to human presence and remains as in *Traces*. And so, there too it was three bodies of work in conversation.

AD: Yeah

GG: You know, I'm not sure. I mean, anyway, with these things, you can't be sure. It's not so neat and tidy as to say it worked or it didn't work, but I think there was a decision there. So, I think Ranjana took from that experience also… I said, look it will be interesting because we will have three… very strong perspectives, interweaving in and out of each other. And I think that will only enhance each one… will make you think a little further hopefully and open it out, instead of having everything so fixed. So, like that, it'll open up new trains of thought. And you can think of each thing from the two things in relation. Basically, thinking of inter-relationality between the three of us. I had written something then, a short thing, which in the end, we didn't use but I had just written a little intro from my point of view. And I had written:

“‘Sheher, Prakriti, Devi’ brings together personal documents of experiential reality as observed by three artists, two of whom have thus far been unseen within the art world context. The exhibition has been constructed around the nucleus of the long-term diary of the contemporary built landscape of Indian urban India that I have traversed and inhabited since 2003. Titled *Rememory* after Toni Morrison, these photographic fragments and typologies encompass both public and private worlds from the dystopian to the dynamic. (Because there's also a lot of dynamism, you know, in how the city is being constructed, and without a blueprint, like you see a kind of mishmash of all these different influences and aspirations and desires.) The exhibition shifts register from my own psychological portraits of the city to idealized life forms, from observed nature assiduously expressed as a kind of visual diary by my mother, Vinnie Gill, for roughly 60 years now. Here is a vocabulary of trees, flowers, animals and mountains, a warm

embrace of the natural world. We must then further broaden our view to take in the infinite forms of the *Devi* or the goddess who appears to engage in, while simultaneously transcending, a wide variety of everyday activities, usually performed by women, as well as the fundamental duties of various aspects of Mother Nature, as expressed by Ladhki Devi, an indigenous artist and lifelong practitioner of the Warli School of Painting. She's the mother of Rajesh Chaitya Vangad, with whom I have collaborated for close to a decade. Indeed, collaboration has been a cornerstone of my photographic practice. And by bringing together three diverse women artists here, I hope to raise questions about who is included within the narrow confinements of the contemporary art world. Both Vinnie Gill and Ladhki Devi have practiced their art mainly on their own, sharing their work only within their families and local communities, completely outside the circuits and networks of professional artists, contemporary art discourse, galleries and markets. Their labor and solitude has continually provided them with spaces of refuge and solace. As lifelong homemakers, they have contributed in other capacities, unrecognized as “work”, and so are familiar with forms of exclusion. The exhibition hopes to consider the dualities of the depleted and regenerative, manmade and natural, colonial and indigenous, English and non-English, mundane and magical, absent and present, and finally through addressing current categories of inclusion and exclusion to attempt to enlarge the circle in terms of who “we” might define as an “artist”, what constitutes art practice, and perhaps reflect upon the underlying structures that enable or undermine such practices.”

So, these were, at that point, some of the thoughts going on in my head. Of course, the first impetus would be the work itself. First it arose from just very organically my going down and

seeing my mother’s work and us being in the same space. And suddenly it struck me. I mean, I've always seen my mother's work. All these years of, you know, but…

AD: That was going to be my follow up question. But yeah, because of the time and the confinement or because of that constant looking at the work. Probably because of the time it was, and you were building your exhibition and you kind of put it all in the same place…

GG: And also, because what I was building, right? Because if I was building *Acts of Appearance*, I wouldn't even have had the idea. There would be no correlation. But because I was looking at these very dark city pictures and then somehow going down and looking at her pictures of nature and suddenly, I'm seeing the Chameli tree, the Bougainvillea, that just got me thinking that this is the same city and yet look at how different.

AD: Because that time itself was so dark and grey. And so, it just feels that it, would have probably put it in context, it would have given you a very hopeful or a sense that you couldn’t probably have or see directly outside, but you could see and feel it in, through her work.

GG: Yes. And I think suddenly I could just think and visualize. Like I just suddenly saw her work landing in my exhibition. I could see it.

AD: What you wrote was amazing because it kind of puts everything in perspective. Also, the kind of thoughts that are running in my mind off late, since the last six months, that how do we expand or maybe in a different context like India—how should we not be following the, the

definitions of contemporary art that we know of. It has to be redefined because of our own histories. We cannot just have our own… like we have in a lot of other aspects…We have resituated our views in so many other ways. But why are we so fixated in what is shown in these spaces of art?

GG: I think you must also get the installation pictures. I don't know if they are up on the website… otherwise…

AD: Yeah, there are. I think there are. Otherwise, I can reach out and even ask.

GG: Yeah. The interweaving you will see in the exhibition installation pictures because really, it was beautiful, you know, even if I say so myself. The people who came, senior artists like Atul and Anju Dodiya or Sudhir Patwardhan …really wonderful artists were appreciating it. And, it was interesting, for instance, to see the juxtapositions… You see this photograph of a mud mountain on a construction site in Calcutta, which you even have on the front page of the PDF, and then you see the mountains in my mother's work, and then you see *Dhartari Devi*… so you see *Nubra Valley* from my mother’s work and then you see *Dhartari Devi*—the Goddess of the Earth—in Ladhki Devi's work. So, finding these little points of intersection. Quite physically, even in the pictures, right? And then again, I go off this way, they go off that way. And then again, we come together for a little, sort of touching each other. Or you see, this image of ‘Mumbai 2012 G’, where you see on a billboard there's a door opening and through that you see a forest. This is one of my works from Mumbai, of a billboard. And then you see that in relation to those pictures of Vinnie Gill’s pine trees, very expressionistic and with lots of feeling, as my

mother's work does have, and as people often point out. My work is fairly heady (conceptual). So, there were all these interweaving which for me makes it very exciting because otherwise my own work is what it is, right? And I'm very much in my own head. But as soon as the work itself, or I, begin to converse with someone else, it starts to open things up, even for myself. And, you know, you start to see the same thing in a completely different way. And then just to think about how we can put it together, a bit like a puzzle…

AD: Yeah. For me, this exhibition seemed like an extension of your work. And it came at a time where I have begun to question… (I've never studied art history and so I begin to question) … “What all is included in the studies of art history back in India.” And I'm trying to figure out if there is inclusion of indigenous art or how does the ‘contemporary’ collaborate with the ‘indigenous.’ Like right now at KHOJ, there is this exhibition ‘Threading the Horizon’ which looks at the socially engaged art practices. So, we have exhibitions that exclusively looks at a certain type of practice. We have found a way to put all the practices into different categories. Even the spaces are categorized, the tribal art is shown in a different museum or a gallery that represents only that. So, what happens when these ‘walls’ we have built collapse and we try to show them together (in the same space, or the same exhibition as you have done)?

GG: This is on at KHOJ right now?

AD: KHOJ. Yeah. This exhibition ‘Threading the Horizons’ is going on. It is about a lot of other practices. I think it has some of the past projects (Peripheries and Crossovers: Art as Social Practice 2019) that they (KHOJ) had have supported. I think it's like an exhibition of those

practices from the last few years, I think. Especially in the absence of a strong museum presence, I think the galleries have to try and navigate or, maybe make up for that absence.

GG: Absolutely. I think in India, we often have to keep trying to create our own possibilities. Which is also a little bit touched upon in the Kiran Nadar talk at the museum that day.

AD: I was hoping that I get to hear it so that I can then take off my questions from there. I really wanted to ask you if you think there are possibilities in formal training in institutes where this sort of pedagogy or thinking can be pressed upon (where the ‘contemporary’ includes pure indigenous practices) because eventually it's these collaborations that can help bring the other (indigenous) into sight.

GG: Yes. We couldn't speak enough. We couldn't actually speak about collaboration. But I did say that I felt it very missing, that we never actually had people from Indian traditions teaching us in art school, that is rural artists or Indigenous artists. On the one hand we didn't have enough of the global or our global was not completely current, what we were studying was still quite outdated; and on the other we didn't have our own context properly brought into the classroom either. So, it was a bit like falling between two stools. And we were talking how even now, not much has changed, like many things we would like to see, we will have to create. I think Roobina (Karode) brought up, say my going out to do workshops, the Balika Mela workshops or you know even in pedagogy, how between institutions and artists right now, there's quite a gap in educational institutions. Many practicing artists are not actually involved in pedagogy, so how do we bridge those gaps? And some of it we may have to do ourselves or we may have to create our

own spaces, because it might be that if we wait for the government or the institutions we simply don't know if they will.

AD: Also having enough scholarship around indigenous art, to have it involved within the research realms of art history. Because through collaboration there will be more scholarship generated. Because how else can there be any research going on?

GG: Yes. Hopefully if we combine energies and forces… Then it's also about inclusion, right? And then more viewpoints get seen and acknowledged and hopefully studied and celebrated in their own right. Ultimately of course, my mother, Ladhki Devi, they should both have their own exhibitions… I think, it is important, politically and in all the ways that we are discussing. And why is it important? I think it's important because it completely expands our worldview.

AD: Yeah.

GG: And that makes it all so much richer and more…

AD: Yeah. Because they need to be represented -like a bunch of people cannot represent what art is coming out of India.

GG: I become more and more conscious of this, that it is only the people who can articulate who are able to inhabit these discourses, and who've had access like me and you to art school—to art schools in the West, or even to art schools in India. People who don't have that access like my

mother who learned from the nuns are excluded—she went to a convent where the nuns taught them, they taught drawing as one of the subjects, it was at a college called Sacred Heart, Dalhousie. But it was not an art school. Not at all. It was nothing like our kind of training. But that is how she began. And then she loved it. And then it became her private passion. But they are not able to enter these networks or to speak in this language that we know. They even get nervous. Like even to hear that questions that have come from you, she was a little bit nervous. So, I said, don't worry, it's completely fine. You can even speak into the phone to answer. But I know she's nervous. She's like, I have to sit down. I have to think, because for them, it's a big deal. It’s the same with Ladhki Devi. I also found the exhibition opening very moving because they couldn't believe it...my mother was sort of shyly coming to me and saying, "That man is asking about my work!" She couldn't believe that some stranger was asking about her work. Because they've spent a lifetime without any of that recognition. Or it’s been only the family who was appreciating her work. And then some artists started coming up like Ranbir and Rashmi (Kaleka) who saw her work some years ago in my sister's house, they are friends and they said, Oh, her work is so beautiful! Why doesn't she exhibit? But I think they, that is untrained artists, simply don't have that confidence. The art world is very exclusionary.

AD: Yeah, I know it. Because I have felt it- what you are saying. I've exactly felt it. Though I'm not an artist, but I've felt that exclusion.

GG: So, this exclusion is really at the core of all this. And I think now, at least to some extent—though that has taken and will take a lot of work, on the part of many people— there's some attempt to look at Indigenous practices or practices outside of our city based and very

mainstream, English-speaking world. But I think that right around us, in our own homes, this kind of exclusion can exist. It made me think, how do you fight against that? How do you make an argument for inclusion? Because, see my mother has not faced any kind of historical oppression in terms of caste or class or she doesn't belong to those particular categories, which, of course, we have to and must protest. But it made me also think that gender really can operate across class. And then categories of homemakers versus professionals and people who don't have the official language. Of course, in feminism, that is what it's about in a way. I don't know if I'm officially a feminist or not, or if that matters, I just feel it's about that same thing—all the power accrues to some people and so many people are just not able to participate in the dialogue. What happens to the mothers? The mothers and the homemakers, I don't even know if homemaker is the right word, but people who enable other people's lives.

AD: Yeah.

GG: Firstly, their work is not even acknowledged. And then what about their practices of expression? If they've maintained or somehow found ways to sustain some sort of practice. Sometimes I feel my mother's practice is so pure, because she has not gained anything from doing it except just sitting and doing it for the sheer love of it. So even that category of the amateur, the word I think amateur also comes from passion. But just from being compelled to do it, feeling she has to do it, like it's a survival skill. In moments of greatest sorrow, like when her mother died as she tells us, that is when my grandmother died … And sometimes she says, the only time I have some peace of mind is when I go into my room and I can draw, because everyone, I guess even husband, children, everyone wants something…

AD: Yeah. It kind of draws my attention to what's the function of art. Like it's not only meant… it also is capable of doing something else… other than just showing and displaying. For example, the indigenous people or the tribes make art as part of their life. It is not different from their lives. And in this case, it gave her refuge or something that gave her solace or some time to think for herself. So, quite unlike the kind of thought process where art is made to be put up on the walls or shown to people.

GG: Yes. Very true. I think very close to life, and that's why I've also mentioned that word ‘diary.’ I saw all our practices, in a way, and certainly hers and mine as diary-istic. My mother keeps many diaries. In fact, I didn't know how to even physically show that work… But she's often just drawing in notebooks. Similarly, my city pictures are very diary-istic.

AD: Also, the fact that you keep collecting your images and then you use it to convey or build a story, but the process is very much like a form of documentation or like collection, much like how a diary is.

GG: And also, time acts on all of us, right? And then as we go over the years, we change, the work changes, everything changes. So, I think even that time factor is a part of the work, and I guess it's about how we are just collecting our experiences, or it's like embodied experience. With my mother now her diaries are also a kind of historical record.

AD: Yeah.

GG: You can argue again even about how is history defined. And I think even in the case of Rajeshji and me, I constantly keep thinking who of us is the bigger documentarian.

AD: Yeah.

GG: Because he's always drawing what he knows. He's very much able to produce it through his fingertips, magically—from his brain to his fingertips. I do it through a camera and I'm taking from the world and then constantly editing. But even I'm altering the reality. Because how can I capture every single thing in this room right? What I mean is, I'll have to have a particular point of view or particular lens, a particular film. I make all these aesthetic choices which will determine or which will subjectively construct the image that I claim is the truth or reality.

AD: Yeah.

GG: So, I feel like even these forms of knowledge involve meaning making and world making, I saw the three of us as actually world making and bringing our very particular subjectivities, our experience, whatever knowledge we have, to these acts of world making. So, the intersectionalities, I find very interesting, or the interdisciplinarity, the inter-relationality. I think the installation—I really wish you could have seen it, but I think the installation views will give you a sense, if you can please ask Ranjana or otherwise ask Sanjana, ask her for whatever we have. And then you can see how the three things were also interweaving and going their own ways.

AD: You know. Yeah, sure, I'll do, I'll get in touch with the gallery first and then if I think that if I think I will ask Sanjana would have all the photos that gallery has. Right.

GG: Yeah we would have them, I think.

AD: But I would probably ask the gallery first.

GG: Yeah, I think because they had it very well documented. In fact, Sanjana's coming over today in an hour. We can look. Because I want to make sure that you get the right pictures —all the different rooms and the precise configurations. And then you can transcribe whatever you intend to use from this interview. And you can transcribe whatever my mother and Ladhki Devi say too. I've sent the questions for Ladhki Devi to Rajeshji and I explained the whole thing to him and I've told him to pass them on and that it's important we do this. So, I think hopefully they will get back by the end of the week.

AD: Yeah. Thank you so much for doing that and passing on the questions.

GG: I feel it's important work. There's always so much going on and maybe that's life now, whatever it is, things will keep happening and I feel it's important and useful to do this work.

AD: I wanted to ask for suggestions for any book or anything that you think might be important for this research (because, as I said, I've never studied art history.) So, anything that you think might be useful or related for these conversations, please do let me know.

GG: Okay. I will.

AD: Because I'm also trying to find the relevant scholarship from India to support this research.

GG: Yeah. I think to some degree we'll have to create this scholarship, Archa.

AD: Yeah.

GG: You'll have to. And that's why your work is important, because I feel like now in this work and even in (the essays for, say) *Acts of Appearance*, I feel it's primary research.

AD: Yeah.

GG. Yuvraj (Kadu), he's written a fantastic essay. But it involved a lot of back and forth and prompting. Because he was writing his experience, but then there were many things which the publisher and I thought would be interesting, for instance, he has now explained all the 52 deities of the *Bohada*.

AD: Oh, wow.

GG: What each of them symbolizes—the particular histories, etymologies, everything which even he as a young person had not known. It is something only the elders know in the village, and its vanishing with them. And so, he sat down and gathered all this information and then with a lot of fact checking and back and forth emails wrote it out. I tried looking so hard on the web, that there must be some information. We couldn't find anything. In Switzerland they said, we want all these details—that is, the publishers. But I couldn't find anything. And so finally we sat down to do it. Primary research takes a lot of time, but it's also worth it, and whatever you are gathering here is also great primary research. You will be speaking to my mother, to Ladhki Devi. So, if you just transcribe and then you send to us that's also useful because then maybe we will have things to add later. Sometimes I'm scattered with so much going on like today and I may not be so coherent. But if I can see what you transcribe then maybe I'll be able to add to it or maybe if I missed something I can fill it out, and same for my mother and Ladhki Devi in case they feel that way too.

AD: Yeah sure.

GG: And so that would be great. And of course, if you think of anything which you feel after you're done is missing.

AD: I actually thought of something that I wanted to ask- for your survey exhibition at Schirn, that opened in October, did you have this vision already of collaborating and including work from your mother, father and other important people in your life or did a lot of visibility and ideas come after you did this (*Sheher, Prakriti, Devi*) exhibition?

GG: What do you mean?

AD: So well… When you were planning for the survey exhibition, had you always envisioned it, to include all the work from everyone or did the vision come up or become clearer after you made and saw this exhibition (in Mumbai) come to life? Or was it something going on simultaneously or maybe separately?

GG: It was going on when we were talking with the curators (at the Schirn), I just see very clearly now that all through my practice, collaboration is very key. Sometimes it's explicit and sometimes very implicit. Like in Balika Mela, it's more implicit.

AD: Yeah.

GG: Okay, I have the camera, but again, it is very collaborative because I couldn't have predicted what the girls were going to do in the studio which they sort of took over and made their own space in some ways. So those collaborations are more implicit. And then of course, as with Rajeshji, it's very very explicit because we are literally sharing the same sheet of paper. Like I'm saying, it's almost like a part of the practice because… I get a lot of energy… from actually conversing in this way. Because it's one thing to have a verbal conversation with someone, but when you are speaking as two artists, one to one, like even with my mother, when we have a conversation through our work, it’s different from us being mother and daughter.

AD: Yeah

GG: And that becomes interesting, because suddenly it all changes… Even the trip we made to Bombay for the exhibition, I felt it was a very different experience because for the first time she was seeing herself also not just as a mother but as an individual and as an artist, and me as another artist, and then we were suddenly talking to each other in a different way. And I feel with Ladhki Devi coming to the opening it was so lovely for me. She came, she agreed to attend. Again, she was there in her own right, not as Rajeshji's mother. He was with her, of course and they had other family members and friends, but suddenly she was the person whose work was there… She just entered and looked at the wall and her face sort of lit up. There was a big smile, you know. So even these multiple identities that we all have and being able to kind of relate across them. To be able to relate through the work with someone is very exciting because for me it opens up headspace. I don't know what it does for them (VG and LD), but for me it opens up headspace, thinking and ideas, and it makes the whole thing much more interesting. So I think we can end there for now. Just because we could go on…

AD: I know… Yeah. Thank you so much for bearing with these multiple cuts in the conversations.

Following are the follow-up questions sent to Gauri Gill over an email on March 25, 2023. Responses to these questions were received in an email from Gauri Gill dated April 24, 2023.

AD: In her responses, Ladhki Devi mentioned that you helped a lot with her work. ("But Gauriji helped me a lot with these works too. I tested them on paper before finalizing them.") Can you please elaborate on how you supported her through the process- of introducing her to the ideas

about the exhibition, experimentation with a new medium for her practice and then discussion and conversations you had with her during the process?

GG: My main endeavor was to draw out Ladhki Devi's own voice. Initially when I shared the exhibition idea with her, and we discussed what she might contribute, I asked her if she would like to consider interpreting the Devi in her various forms, and to highlight or isolate or emphasize this Devi figure. The Devi is very prominent in drawings made by the Suvasini and in Warli life, as a matter of course. But I also suggested that she be seen through the prism of ordinary women in the world, so as in some way make her relatable to our own experience. We also discussed that she would need to make the works on mud coated cloth with paint, instead of painting directly on mud walls as she normally does, the possible sizes and so on. She was able to draw on some of Rajeshji's experience with drawing on cloth with paint here.

AD: You had mentioned that Ladhki Devi does not speak Hindi. How did you communicate with her? Was it through Rajesh ji? Did it entails making several visits to see her?

GG: I have met her many times over the last decade and also stayed in the house with the family so there was a certain comfort level. I could not visit in 2021 because of the concerns around Covid, and so the conversations were all through Rajeshji and on the phone, as well as over email.

AD: In her response, Vinnie Gill ji mentions she had to "tailor works to the theme of the exhibitions." Did you guide her through this process? Could you please talk more about how you discussed making new work corresponding to your work with her?

GG: I was trying to maintain the integrity of each artist's work, but also needed to find points of intersection between the different bodies of work. So, we went through all of my mother's work and had many discussions about what the central ideas in her work were, and how we could relate them to my own. All of her work in the exhibition was very much drawn from things she had already made, or was in the process of making, but the selection was critical. I also revisited my photographs to respond to her work, as well as to Ladhki Devi. The three bodies of work are completely independent of each other, but I also wished them to occasionally touch each other gently, or to provoke new understandings of each work through the varied juxtapositions.

AD: Were there any disagreements or resistance to each other's ideas and/or processes- between the artists or the gallery and the artists- through the course of the exhibition, or did you reach a consensus easily?

GG: There was no resistance as such, as there was also no insistence on any particular way. It involved trying to listen closely, on my part, as well as broad suggestions to the two artists, but finally it was their call. There was some adjustment required in terms of ways of working, for instance my mother normally only draws when she feels compelled to, often leaves things mid-way only to complete them much later, and is generally used to

working in a very loose way as she has not been part of professional art spaces but has had a very private practice. So, deadlines are a challenge for her. For Ladhki Devi, I think the effort was in figuring out how to work in these new formats, but Rajeshji helped there too, and she made some initial works which we looked at together and then refined based on practical and formal considerations.

APPENDIX- B

Below is a letter and questions for Vinnie Gill shared with Gauri Gill in an email on November 24, 2022. Responses to the questions were received in an email from Gauri Gill on December 20, 2022.

Thursday

24 Nov 2022

Dear Mrs Gill,

Hope you are keeping well!

My name is Archa. I am from Gujarat, but I have worked in Delhi for a few years and that is how I know Gauri. I remember you and Mr Gill visiting Nature Morte one late morning while Gauri’s significant exhibition ‘Acts of Appearance’ was first shown there, but we never got to meeting.

I was very happy to see your work in the exhibition ‘Seher, Prakriti, Devi’ at Gallerie Mirchandani + Steinrucke. Especially the direct conversation your colourful trees had with Gauri’s monochromatic buildings in one of the installs. Though I never saw the exhibition in person, the coming together of all your practices inspired me immensely and put a lot of questions that I always had regarding art that is shown in contemporary art galleries in India, at rest. As your work again becomes an integral part of Gauri’s survey exhibition at Schirn, I can feel a new journey for you begin.

In the last few years, I have had the opportunity to observe Gauri’s practice from close quarters, in some capacity or the other. Now as I pursue Masters of Art in Art Education at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, I am interested in understanding how her distinct methodologies of collaboration, in this case through the exhibition ‘Seher, Prakriti, Devi’ at Gallerie Mirchandani + Steinrucke, gives rise to an inclusive and intersectional genre of art that refuses to fit into any preconceived notions of contemporary art.

For that purpose, I would request you to please spare some time at your convenience, to answer a few questions I have jotted down for you. My aim with the questions is to understand your motivations, inspirations and if and how this exhibition changed something for you. Please answer as many questions as you feel comfortable doing. Additionally, you are welcome to talk about anything striking about your experience or apprehensions about showing your work in this exhibition that I have not addressed in the questions. Please also feel free to answer the question in the medium you feel most comfortable in (a handwritten or voice recording). I am able to transcribe word by word and share it back to you for verification.

Thank you so much for the generosity of your time and help for my project! I hope to meet you in person on my visit to Delhi next.

Warm regards,

Archa

Questions for Vinnie Gill

1) What motivates you to continue your practice of artmaking?

   Artmaking is very much a part of my life. It has been for as long as I can remember. It is part creative, part meditative. Painting gives me a lot of pleasure, as well as solace in times of grief. It’s just about my mind-space, moods, the play of light and shade, the importance of distance and what I need to express. My studio is my haven and my chalks, pens and note-books beckon me.

2) How did it make you feel to show and see your work- that you have previously opened up only for an intimate circle of family and friends, in a gallery space? Did seeing your work with other artists from the show change the way you looked at your own work?

   I felt much gratitude to Gauri for convincing me to show my work in a gallery space. Previously, I had viewed artmaking as a very private hobby, and at best, shared my paintings only with family. I have felt encouraged by great artists like Atul Dodiya, Anju Dodiya, Biraj Dodiya and Sudhir Patwardhan appreciating my work. Seeing my art in a gallery, alongside that of other artists, has not really changed my practice per se because I have my own style, which has evolved over the last many decades. At the same time, as *Sheher, Prakriti, Devi* is my first show, alongside Gauri and Ladki Devi, I felt much joy and it showed me the possibility of exhibiting my work again in the future.

3) Your work is a result of your consistent practice of 60 years. I am sure you have a huge archive. Do you revisit your old work as a memory or do you look at it critically? How has your relationship with material and what you choose to represent through your art evolved over time?

   Yes, I do have a large archive. Much of it on loose sheets of papers or in a bound diary, especially where I painted a series or captured impressions from a journey. I revisit my work as a memory, it makes me nostalgic sometimes thinking of the past and rich experiences. I also look at it critically, at times wishing to revisit and retouch up works that are now framed and up on a wall. Previously, I have painted using the medium of oil and water colours, as well as pen and pencil. As I went along, I experimented with mixed media and since the last few years, I am doing a lot of pastels. Painting for me is an on-going and ever-present process that is deeply interwoven into my everyday life. For instance, just seeing the bark of a tree or observing a fluttering butterfly or the rising moon at dusk inspires me.

4) How has this process changed after showing your work in two exhibitions with Gauri?

   I think nothing has changed, really. My process remains the same.

5) Has this exhibition changed the way you will make art in the future? (I ask this question to understand, if there is a difference in art that you made for yourself or your diary and the art that you make aware of the fact that it will be shown in a gallery).

No, not really, I continue as before. My work represents my everyday lived reality and experiences, that are continually evolving. Just a walk in nature inspires me very often. Trees, birds, animals and mountains are subjects that are very dear to me. These days, I am enjoying painting some Buddhist art, though I am a complete novice at it. Of course, if I am showing my work alongside that of others, I have selected the artworks to display according to the theme of the show.

6) Did it take some convincing on Gauri’s part for you to agree to participate in the show?

Yes, a lot of convincing, because I do not enjoy working to deadlines and I also had some trepidation about how it would be received. I work in series, and here, I had to tailor works to the theme of the exhibitions. At the same time, I was and am really grateful that Gauri pushed me to do this, as on my own, I had at various points conceived of the idea of showing my work but had never put energy and thought to concretising and manifesting the idea, until I had a few bodies of work ready, which I always envisioned as being sometime in the future. This bought it all into being. Once again, I thank Gauri for knitting it all together.

7) Are you open to showing your work with other contemporary artists now?

After these experiences, I am more open to showing my work with other artists. In future, I am inspired and more committed to having a solo show as well.

APPENDIX- C

Below is a letter and questions for Ladhki Devi shared with Gauri Gill in an email on November 24, 2022. Responses to the questions were received in an email from Gauri Gill on December 20, 2022. The letter and questions were shared in Hindi and the responses too were received in Hindi. The questions and responses shown below are in English however, the original responses are shared below for reference.

प्रिय लाड़की देवी जी,

नमस्ते!

मेरा नाम अर्चा है। मैं गुजरात से हूँ और अभी मैं अमेरिका मैं आगे पढ़ने आई हूँ। मैंने कुछ साल दिल्ली मैं काम किया था तब मेरा परिचय गौरी जी से हुआ और उनके द्वारा राजेश जी के काम से हुआ। और फिर कई साले बाद, आपके काम से

हो रहा है। मैं कलाकार नहीं हूँ केवल कला का अभ्यास करती हूँ। मैंने पहली बार आपका काम गौरी जी के घर में देखा था। तब मुझे पता नहीं था कि वह आपका काम है। लेकिन मैंने जब आपके मुंबई में लगे काम के फोटो देखें तब मैं तुरंत वह काम के बारे में सोचने लगी। आपके काम के हस्ताक्षर को समझना मुश्किल नहीं। आपकी कला में इतनी बुद्धिमत्ता और सुंदरता है। मैं आपके काम के अभ्यास के बारे में और आपके दिनचर्या के बारे में जानना चाहती हूँ। मैं प्रयास करूँगी की आपसे कभी मिलने आपके गाँव आ सकूँ, आपको जान सकूँ और आपकी कला को बेहतर समझ सकूँ। तब तक गौरी जी और राजेश जी के द्वारा आपको

प्रणाम। मैंने आपके लिये कुछ सवाल भेजे हैं। आप जितने चाहे उतने सवाल के जवाब, जैसे देना चाहे दे सकती हैं।

आपके समय और सहयोग के लिये तहे दिल से धन्यवाद।

प्रणाम,

अर्चा

Questions for Ladhki Devi

1) वार्ली के अपने अभ्यास को जारी रखने के लिए आपको क्या प्रेरित करता है?

(What motivates you to continue your practice of Warli?)

For thousands of years, the *suvasinis* in the Warli community have been making Warli paintings on walls of their houses. The walls are first hand plastered with cow dung, water and red mud, and the paintings are the patterns of *dev-chauks* and *chauks* created with brushes made out of bamboo sticks dipped in rice flour paste. Apart from the *chauks* the paintings depict dance forms, stories of several gods and goddesses and various festivals. Our paintings also illustrate the ever-changing form of village life which is very closely tied to nature, such as birds, animals, trees, farming, all of which are worshiped. This is our tradition and we are going to continue it so that more and more people from all over the world can learn about our customs and traditions and understand the role played by Warli women in this practice. *Suvasinis* play a very important role when it

comes to festivals, celebrations, dances and '*Dev-Puja*' and that is what inspires them to make these paintings.

2) अपने काम को, जो आम तौर पर समुदाय और पूजा का माध्यम हैं, उसे आपको गैलरी में दिखाने और देखने में कैसा महसूस हुआ?

(How did it make you feel to show and see your work- that you usually make for the community and associate with worship, in a gallery space?)

In the Warli community, during a marriage ceremony two women (*suvasinis*) are invited to be present. Later these two *suvasinis* along with other people (men, children and women) from the village make *dev-chauks* or *chauks* on the walls of the house. For this ritual, *suvasinis* make the *kul-devta* (ancestral male deity of the community) or *kul-devi* (ancestral female deity of the community) on the walls, which are then worshipped. However, when I was drawing for the exhibition, I initially drew on paper and later drew on cloth that was hand-plastered with cow dung. Once dried, I painted on it with white poster and acrylic colour. I liked working with these new materials for the exhibition. I made drawings that represent Goddesses such as *Kansari, Dhartari, Gavtari, Mahalaxmi, Dhanlakshmi*. I tried to capture the importance, work, energy, power, devotion, love, mercy and kindness of these goddesses in the changing nature and times. I have drawn on each piece of paper and cloth with a chiseled bamboo stick and added everyday objects such as broom sticks, vessels, earthen pots, baskets that we use daily alongside the Goddesses. The work of all three artists (Gauri Gill, Vinnie Gill and myself) was very different from each other and that is one reason I enjoyed exhibiting my work in the

gallery space. I met several other artists and also interacted with them. I got to see our (Gauri Gill, Vinnie Gill and myself) work together and I saw a lot of people looking at our work. That gave me a very special energy and I really liked it.

3) आपने वह काम विशेष रूप से इस एक्सहिबिशन के लिये बनाये थे।वह काम आपके सामान्य तौर पे बनाये जाने वाले अभ्यास से कितने समान या विभिन्न थे? अगर विभिन्न थे, तो कैसे?

(The works shown in the exhibition were specially made for the exhibition. Was it different (stylistically and aesthetically) than what you usually make or did you try to keep it similar?)

Usually, we—the *suvasinis*—make these *chauks* on the walls of the houses together. But I specifically made the paintings exhibited in the gallery for this exhibition. It is very distinct from our usual practice. For instance, we paint directly on the wall with the rice flour and bamboo sticks. The patterns made by this technique are slightly rough and become unevenly dark and light after drying. The drawings made here demonstrate the power, devotion, mercy, spirit and themes that exemplify the Goddesses in great detail. Compared to the usual details drawn on the walls, for paintings in ‘Sheher, Prakriti, Devi’ I have drawn in greater detail. In the usual ritualistic drawings drawn on wall, we don’t often draw the Goddess herself, but for the paintings in the exhibition, along with depicting rapidly changing nature, I have tried to illustrate different festivals, celebrations, dance forms, worship, the material, history and importance associated with the worship of the Goddesses. One may ask why do we (the Warli tribe) consider the (natural) elements around us as Goddesses? It is because we use these very elements time

and again in our everyday lives and we must be aware of their existence and therefore give due importance to these elements. Hence, we consider these very (natural) elements around us as Gods and Goddesses. Also, because these elements are what generate our work. I hope that in coming times, the significance and understanding of these elements, literature and practice reaches far off places. I hope that society can learn from this understanding of the Warli art and that this in turn will keep our art alive.

4) इस एक्सहिबिशन के बाद आपके वार्ली के अभ्यास में या प्रक्रिया में क्या बदलाव आया? क्या आप फिर से ऐसे एक्सहिबिशन में अपना काम दिखाना पसंद करेंगी?

(Has this exhibition changed the way you will make art in the future? Are you open to showing more of your work to the larger audience and different setting?)

There has been a lot of change in my practice of Warli after this exhibition. To begin with, this exhibition marks the first time a *suvasini* from the Warli community has shown her work in a gallery. As I have mentioned earlier, these drawings are often done on the walls of the houses, by a group of *suvasinis*. Until now never has the work traditionally done by the *suvasinis* been shown and represented by a *suvasini* in a gallery. For this exhibition, for the first time, I tried to portray the power, devotion, mercy and energy of the Goddess through Warli on paper and cloth. I am happy I could show the work in such a good gallery, with a well thought out exhibition and writing to support it. I really liked that despite each of our works being very different, they were exhibited together in the exhibition. It was personally very gratifying for me as a *suvasini*, to be able to show and

see my work alongside such an eminent artist. At the opening, I saw many people looking at the work in the exhibition and talking about it. I was surprised that a lot of known artists and people took notice of my work and met me. I was happy as I did not know how they will receive the work. But Gauriji helped me a lot with these works too. I tested them on paper before finalizing them. And that's how an ordinary *suvasini* from the Warli community got an opportunity to show her work in a gallery. I would like to continue doing such work and to keep showing my work in the future.

5) गौरी जी के साथ आपके रिश्ते के बारे में कुछ कहना चाहेंगे??

(Please talk a bit about the relationship you share with Gauri.)

Gauriji came to our village- Ganjad in 2013 to attend a Warli Art Festival in a school. My son Rajeshji (Vangad) was present there too. Gauri ji had stayed with us in our house then. It is then that Gauriji and Rajeshji began conversing about the village—what the known or famous sites in the village were, the temples, the river, mountains, factory, riots, schools, livelihoods of people in the village, farming, and old stories and ancient folklore. She wanted to visit these places in the village and to make photographs. She had made photographs of all these places and shared them with us after the festival where she exhibited her portraits of the schoolchildren. Later on, after a lot of thought they (Gauri Gill and Rajesh Vangad) decided to draw on these photographs. They tested the drawings on a lot of paper and wrote about the different places. When Rajeshji was drawing, I

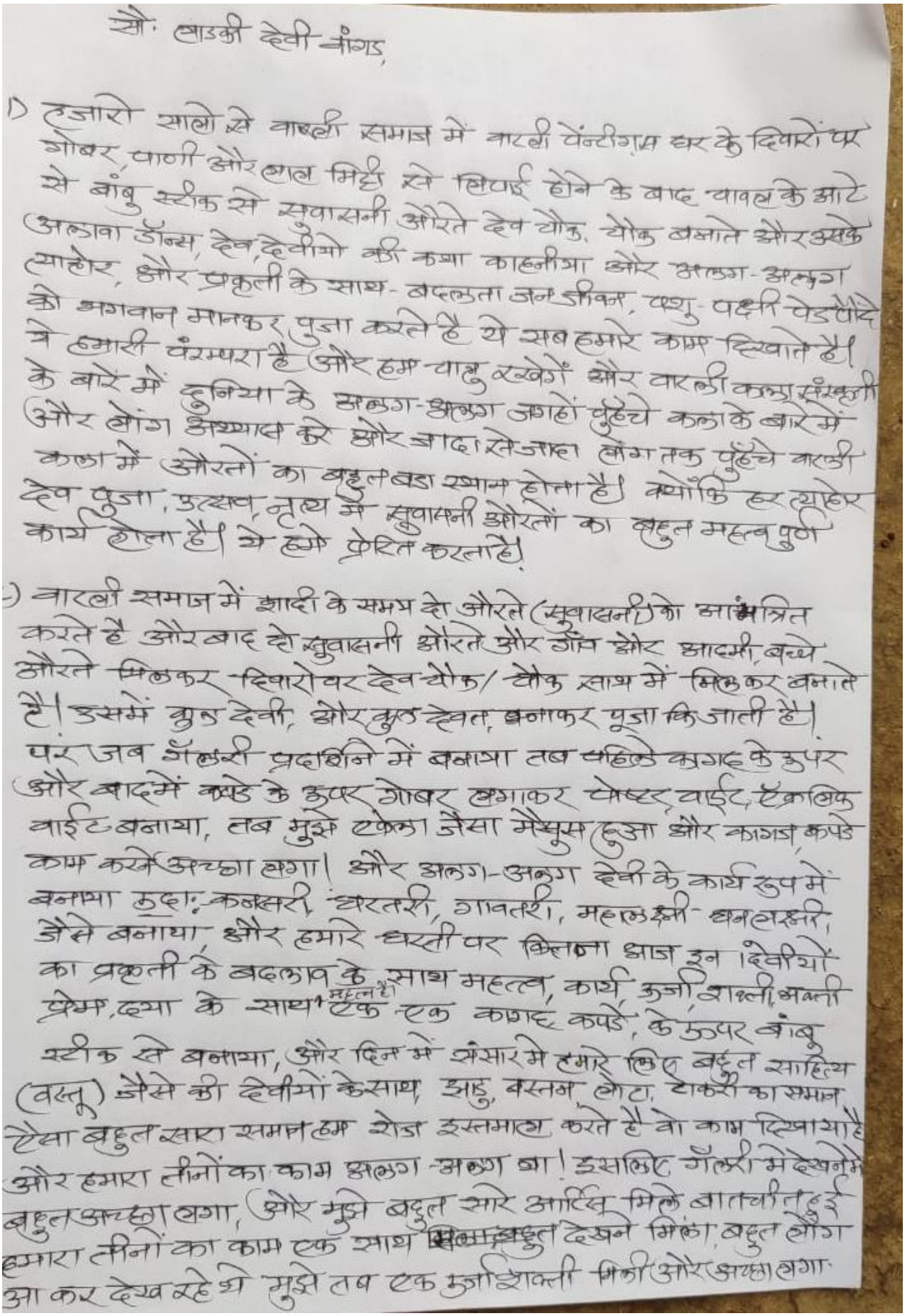
listened to them and watched the work they were doing. I had spoken to her then and that's where she got to know about my work as a *suvasini.* Since then, she has collaborated with my son for ten years now and has been visiting our house ever since. I know Gauriji since then.

6) भविष्य में आप गैलरी में प्रदर्शित होने वाले दूसरे कलाकारों के साथ अपना काम प्रदर्शित करना पसंद करेंगी?

(Are you open to showing your work with other contemporary artists now?)

I would be happy to be able to show my work along with other such artists in a gallery. I would be happy and wish that such work (Warli) reaches each corner of the world and our traditions stay alive. I hope in the future, as many people as possible, understand and study it (Warli.)

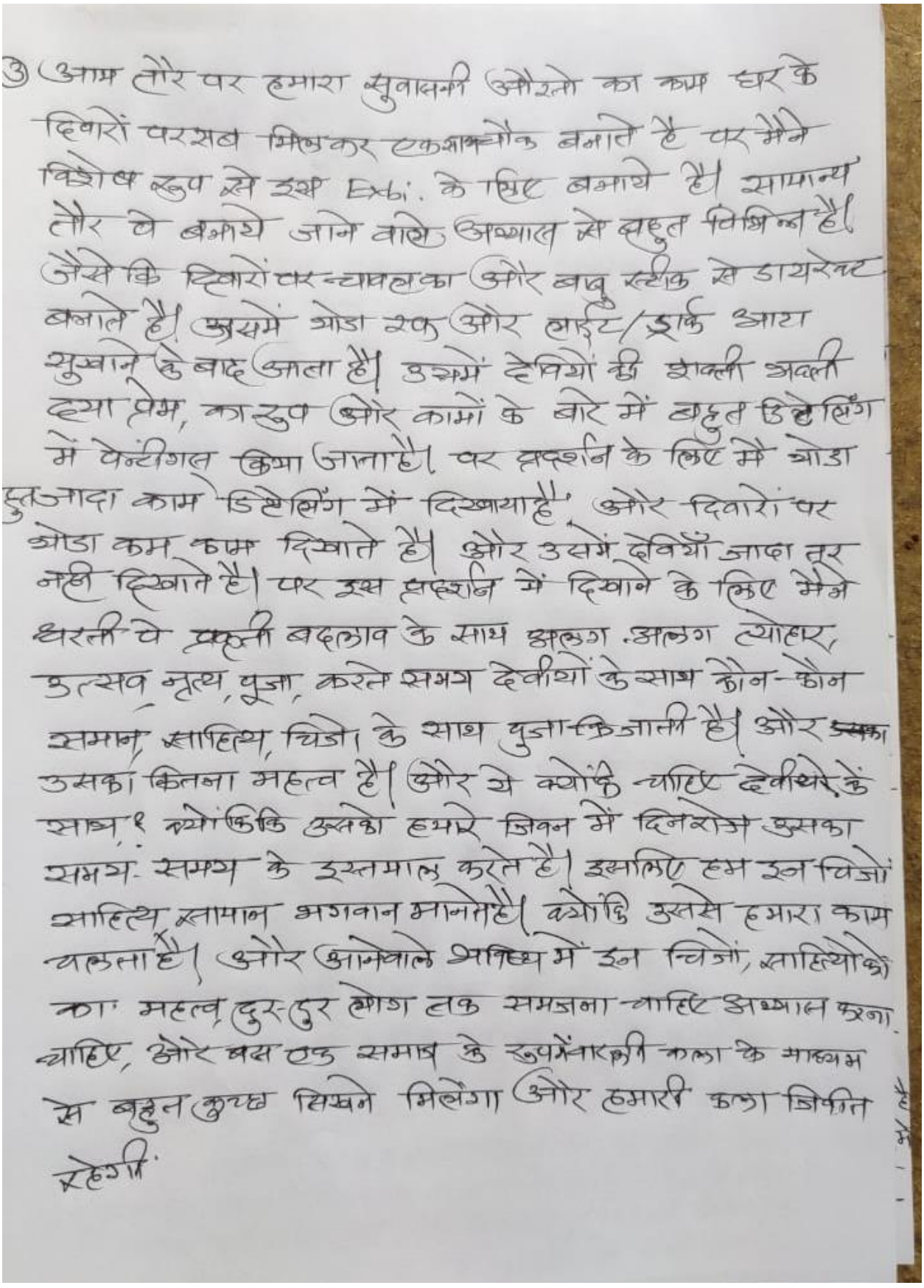
In the next few pages, I share the originally shared hand-written responses I received from Ladhki Devi.



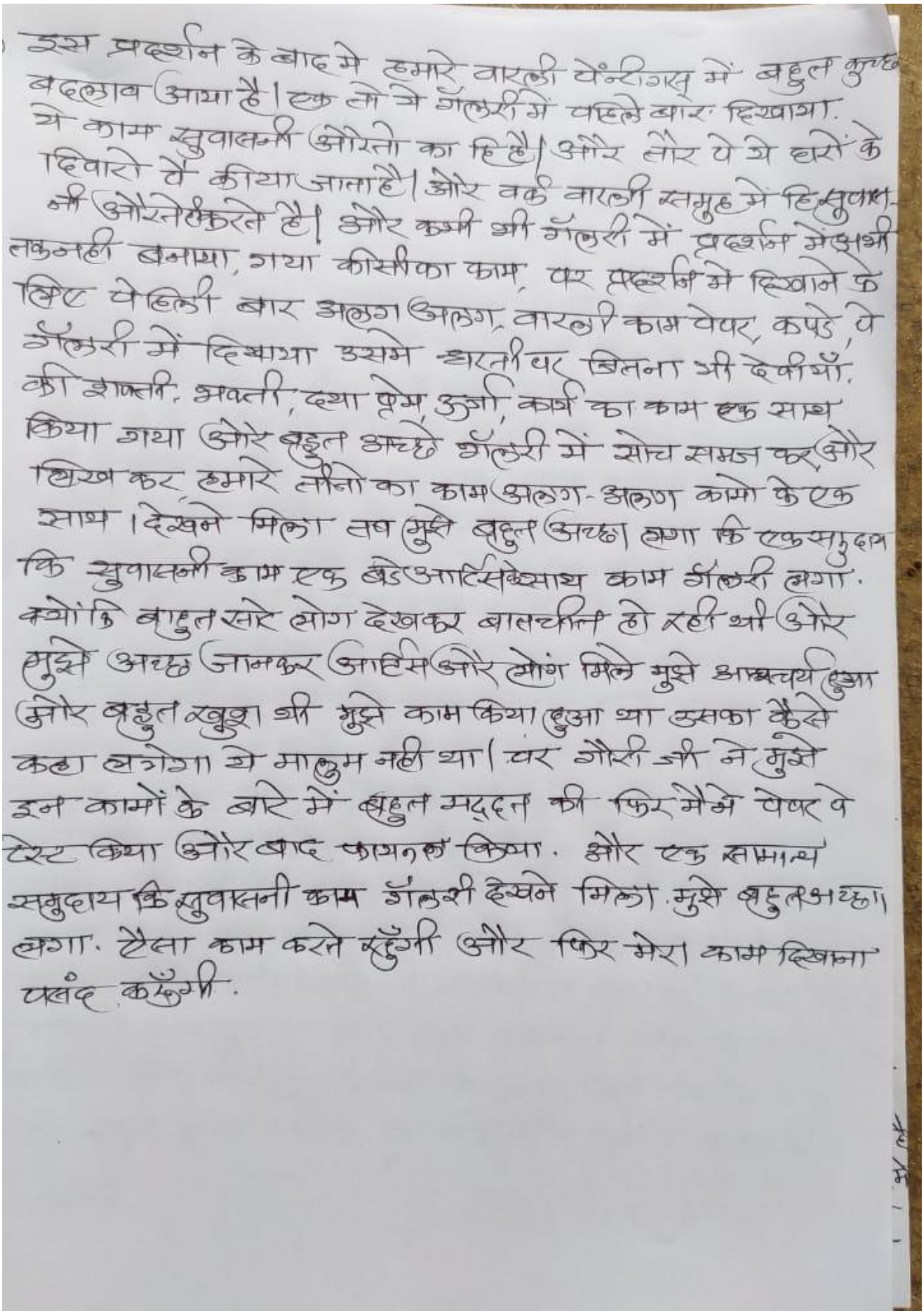
सौ. लाडकी देवी वांगड,

1) हजारो सालो से वारली समाज में वारली पेंन्टीगस घर के दिवारो पर गोबर, पाणी और लाल मिट्टी से लिपाई होने के बाद चावल के आटे से बांबु स्टीक से सुवासनी औरते देव चौक, चौक बनाते और उसके अलावा डॉन्स, देव, देवीयो की कथा कहानीया और अलग-अलग त्याहोर, और प्रकृती के साथ- बदलता जन जीवन, पशु- पक्षी पेड पौधे को भगवान मानकर पुजा करते है ये सब हमारे काम दिखाते है। ये हमारी परम्परा है और हम चालु रखेगें और वारली कला संस्कृती के बारे में दुनिया के अलग-अलग जगहो पुहचे कला के बारे में और लोग डिस्कस करे और बाद से जाहा लोग तक पुहचे वारली कला में औरतों का बहुत बडा स्थान होता है। क्योंकि हर त्याहोर देव पुजा, उत्सव, नृत्य में सुवासनी औरतों का बहुत महत्व पुर्ण कार्य होता है। ये हमे प्रेरित करता है।

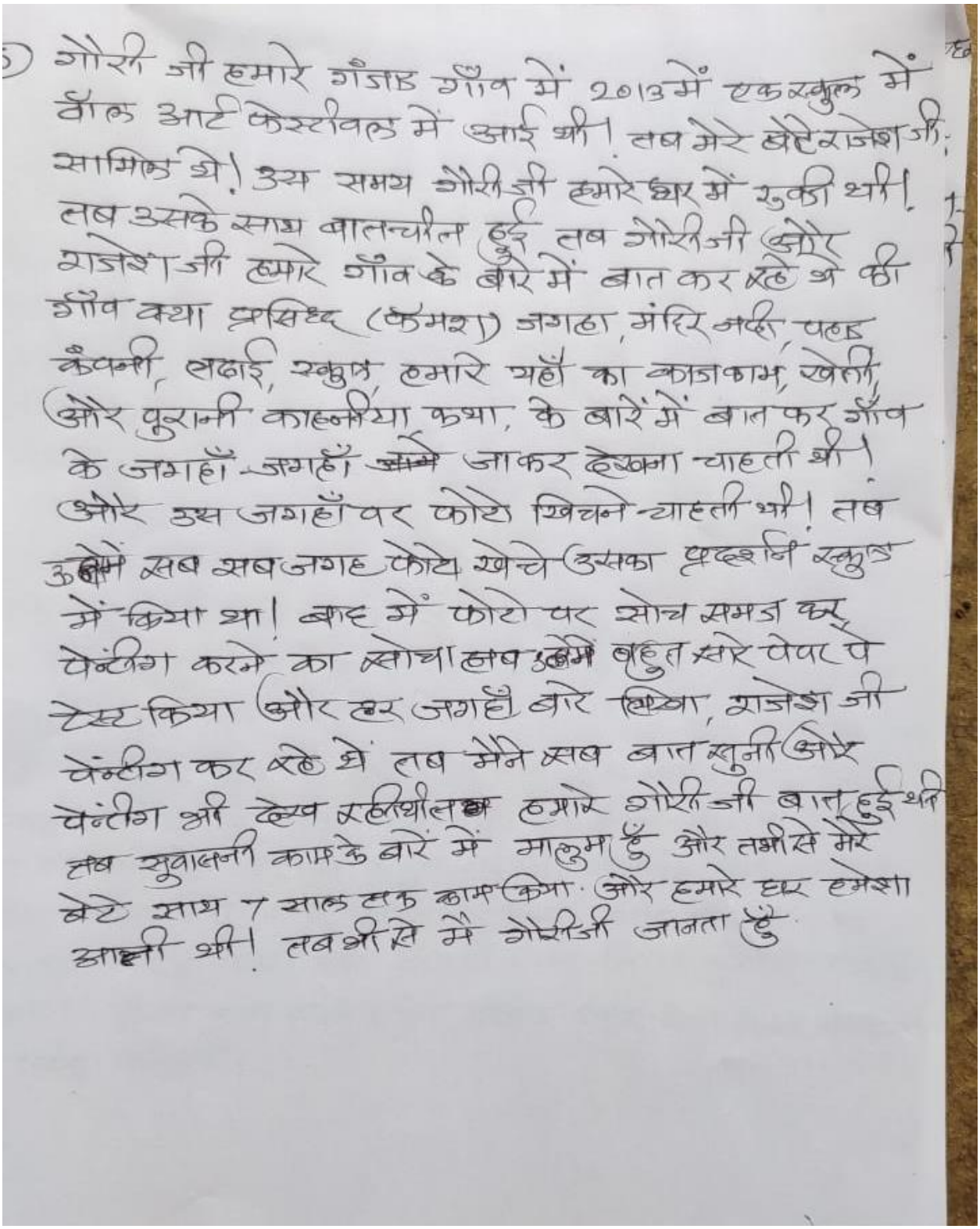
2) वारली समाज में शादी के समय दो औरते (सुवासनी) को आमंत्रित करते है और बाद दो सुवासनी औरते और गाँव और आदमी, बच्चे औरते मिलकर दिवारो पर देव चौक/ चौक साथ में मिलकर बनाते है। उसमें बुध देवी, और बुध देवत, बनाकर पुजा कि जाती है। पर जब गॅलरी प्रदर्शिनि में बनाया तब पहिले कागद के ऊपर और बादमें कपडे के ऊपर गोबर लगाकर पोस्टर वाईट, ऐक्रलिक वाईट बनाया, तब मुझे एकेला जैसा मैसुस हुआ और कागज, कपडे काम करने अच्छा लगा। और अलग-अलग देवी के कार्य रुप में बनाया कुदा: कनसरी, धरतरी, गावतरी, महलक्ष्मी- वनलक्ष्मी, जैसे बनाया, और हमारे धरती पर कितना आज इन देवीयों का प्रकृती के बदलाव के साथ महत्व, कार्य, ऊर्जा, शक्ती, भक्ती प्रेम, दया के साथ महत्व एक एक कागद, कपडे, के ऊपर बांबु स्टीक से बनाया, और दिन में संसार मे हमारे लिए बहुत साहित्य (वस्तू) जैसे की देवीयों के साथ, झाडु, बरतन, लोटा, टोकरी का समान ऐसा बहुत सारा समान हम रोज इस्तमाल करते है वो काम दिखाया है और हमारा तीनों का काम अलग अलग था। इसलिए गॅलरी मे देखने में बहुत अच्छा लगा, और मुझे बहुत सारे आर्टिस्ट मिले बातचीत हुई हमारा तीनों का काम एक साथ बहुत देखने मिला, बहुत लोग आ कर देख रहे थे मुझे तब एक मुर्ती शक्ती मिली और अच्छा लगा.



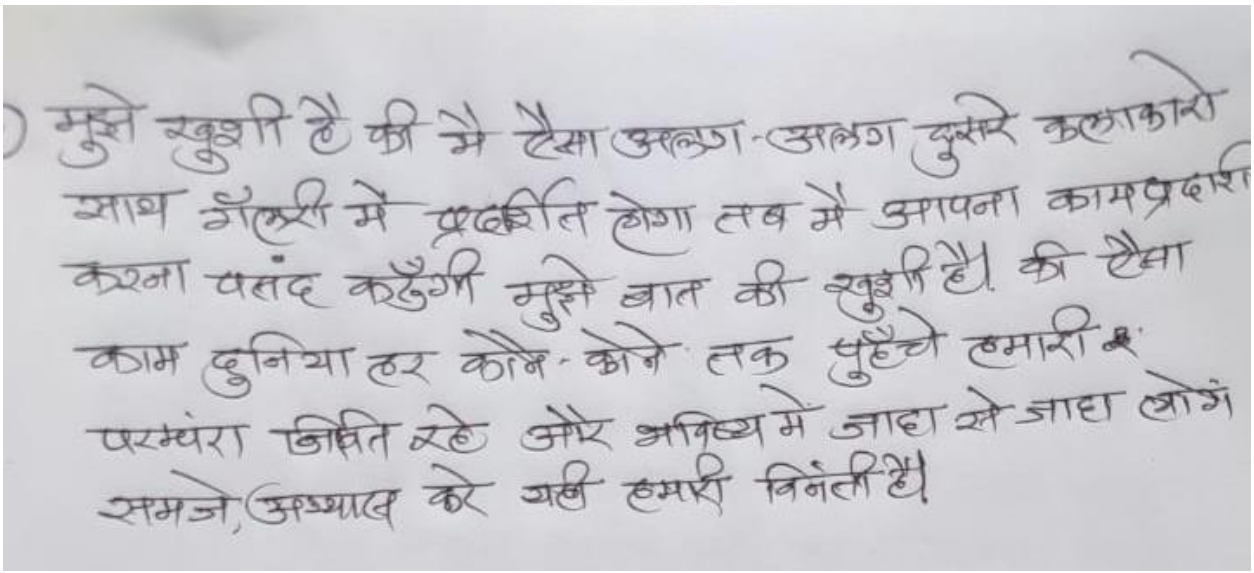
③ आम तौर पर हमारा सुवासनी औरतो का काम घर के दिवारों पर सब मिलकर एक आंगन बनाते है पर मैंने विशेष रूप से इस Exhi. के लिए बनाये है। सामान्य तौर पे बनाये जाने वाले अल्पना से बहुत भिन्न है। जैसे कि दिवारों पर न्यायल का और बाकु स्टीक से डायरेक्ट बनाते है। जिसमें थोडा रंग और लाईट/डार्क आटा सुखाने के बाद जाता है। उसमें देवियों की शक्ती अलग दया प्रेम, का रुप और कामों के बारे में बहुत डिटेलिंग में पेन्टींगस किया जाता है। पर प्रदर्शनि के लिए मैं थोडा ज्यादा काम डिटेलिंग में दिखाया है। और दिवारों पर थोडा कम काम दिखाते है। और उसमें देवियाँ ज्यादा तर नही दिखाते है। पर इस प्रदर्शनि में दिखाने के लिए मैंने धरती के प्रकृती बदलाव के साथ अलग अलग त्योहार, उत्सव नृत्य, पुजा, करते समय देवीयों के साथ कौन-कौन समान, साहित्य, चिजो के साथ पुजा किजाती है। और ~~उसका~~ उसका कितना महत्व है। और ये क्योंकि चाहिए देवीयो के साथ। क्योंकि उसको हमारे जिवन में दिनरोज उसका समय-समय के इस्तमाल करते है। इसलिए हम इन चिजों साहित्य, सामान भगवान मानते है। क्योंकि उससे हमारा काम चलता है। और आनेवाले भविष्य में इन चिजों, साहित्यो का महत्व दुर-दुर लोग तक समजना चाहिए अभ्यास करना चाहिए, और बस एक समाज के रुपमें वारली कला के माध्यम से बहुत कुछ सिखने मिलेगा और हमारी कला जिवित रहेगी।



इस प्रदर्शन के बाद मे हमारे वारली पेंटिंगस् में बहुत कुछ बदलाव आया है। एक तो ये गॅलरी में पहले बार दिखाया. ये काम सुवासनी औरतो का हि है। और तौर ये ये घरों के दिवारो पे किया जाता है। और वर्क वारली समुह में हि सुवासनी औरतेंकरते है। और कभी भी गॅलरी में प्रदर्शन मेंइसी तकनही बनाया, गया कीसीका काम, पर प्रदर्शन मे दिखाने के लिए पेहली बार अलग अलग, वारली काम पेपर, कपडे, पे गॅलरी में दिखाया उसमे धरती पर बिलना भी देवीयाँ, की शक्ती, भक्ती, दया प्रेम, ऊर्जा, कार्य का काम एक साथ किया गया और बहुत अच्छे गॅलरी में सोच समज कर और लिख कर, हमारे तीनो का काम अलग-अलग कामो के एक साथ। देखने मिला तब मुझे बहुत अच्छा लगा कि एक समुदाय कि सुवासनी काम एक बडे आर्टिसके साथ काम गॅलरी लगा. क्योंकि बहुत सारे लोग देखकर बातचीत हो रही थी और मुझे अच्छा जानकर आर्टिस और लोग मिले मुझे आश्चर्य हुआ और बहुत खुशी भी मुझे काम किया हुआ था उसका कैसे कहा लगेगा ये मालुम नही था। पर गौरी जी ने मुझे इन कामों के बारे में बहुत मदद की फिर मैंने पेपर पे टेस्ट किया और बाद फायनल किया. और एक समान्य समुदाय कि सुवासनी काम गॅलरी देखने मिला मुझे बहुत अच्छा लगा. ऐसा काम करते रहुँगी और फिर मेरा काम दिखाना पसंद करुँगी.



गौरी जी हमारे गंजाड गाँव में 2013 में एक स्कुल में वॉल आर्ट फेस्टीवल में आई थी। तब मेरे बेटे राजेश जी सामिल थे। उस समय गौरी जी हमारे घर में रुकी थी। तब उसके साथ बातचीत हुई तब गौरीजी और राजेश जी हमारे गाँव के बारे में बात कर रहे थे की गाँव क्या प्रसिध्द (फेमश) जगहा, मंदिर नदी, पहाड कंपनी, लढाई, स्कुल, हमारे यहाँ का काजाकाम, खेती, और पुरानी काहनीया, कथा, के बारें में बात कर गाँव के जगहाँ जगहाँ ~~जाने~~ जाकर देखना चाहती थी। और उस जगहाँ पर फोटो खिचने चाहती थी। तब उन्होंने सब सब जगह फोटो खेचे उसका प्रदर्शन स्कुल में किया था। बाद में फोटो पर सोच समज कर, पेन्टिंग करने का सोचा तब उन्होंने बहुत सारे पेपर पे स्केच किया और हर जगहाँ बारे लिखा, राजेश जी पेन्टिंग कर रहे थे तब मैंने सब बात सुनी और पेन्टिंग भी देख रहीथी तब हमारे गौरी जी बात हुई थी तब सुवालनी काम के बारें में मालुम हुँ और तभीसे मेरे बेटे साथ 7 साल तक काम किया और हमारे घर हमेशा आती थी। तबसे मैं गौरीजी जानता हुँ


मुझे खुशी है की मै ऐसा अलग-अलग दुसरे कलाकारो
साथ गैलरी मे प्रदर्शित होगा तब मैं आपना काम प्रदर्शि
करना पसंद करुँगी मुझे बात की खुशी है की ऐसा
काम दुनिया हर कोने-कोने तक पुहँचे हमारी
परम्परा जिवित रहे और भविष्य मे जादा से जादा लोगं
समजे, अभ्यास करे यही हमारी विनंती है।