

# **The Geometry of the Divine: A Formal Analysis of Present Status of Sanjhi Folk Art and Artisans of Mathura, Barsana and Vrindavan**

**MUSKAN AGRAWAL<sup>\*1</sup>, SUMAN PANT<sup>2</sup> AND MAHAK MANGAL<sup>3</sup>**

<sup>1&3</sup>Research Scholar and <sup>2</sup>Professor

Department of Home Science (Clothing and Textiles), Banasthali Vidyapith, Newai (Rajasthan) India

**\*Corresponding Author**

## **ABSTRACT**

Folk art, a style and pattern of art unique to each region in India, is a distinct cultural expression. Sanjhi is a significant cultural and artistic festival in Braj. Sanjhi, which is celebrated from the full moon day of Bhadra month, to the Pitre Amavasya in the Kwar Kartik month. During these days, different types of Sanjhi are carved every evening like flower, Color, Water and Cow-dung Sanjhi. This sequence continues for the entire fortnight. In Vaishnava temples, a very beautiful Sanjhi is made using flower, cow dung and colors in front of the deity. Various scenes of Radha-Krishna Leela are shown every day in this Sanjhi. In this study, the focus was to obtain in-depth knowledge about Sanjhi art. All the traditional artists who were involved in making Sanjhi art were interviewed in Mathura, Vrindavan and Barsana region of Uttar Pradesh. Sanjhi, a unique and valuable folk art made from flowers, colors, and cow dung, necessitates conservation to prevent its diminishing. The conservation necessitates a detailed documentation of the folk art, motifs, and types. This paper aims to ask Sanjhi artisans through interview that what changes have happened in Sanjhi art recently in Mathura, Vrindavan, and Barsana.

**Keywords:** Sanjhi, Braj, Mathura, Vrindavan, Barsana, Radha, Krishna

## **INTRODUCTION**

Sanjhi is the folk art heritage of Uttar Pradesh. Sanjhi is a revered, ephemeral folk art originating in the Braj region of North India (encompassing Mathura, Vrindavan, and Barsana) (Agarwal, 1954). Rooted in the devotional traditions of Vaishnavism, it began as a ritual performed by young girls and temple priests to invoke the divine presence of Radha-Krishna. It is said that Sanjhi is about five hundred years old art. It is important to know the current scenario with respect to this art. The focus of present work was to obtain in-depth knowledge about Sanjhi art. Survey was conducted to know about Sanjhi art, current status of Sanjhi art, problems faced by artisans (Saraf, 1985; Sharma and Sharma, 2014).

## **METHODOLOGY**

The field survey approach was considered

appropriate for the study of Sanjhi art so that detailed information about the craft can be obtained.

### **Selection of study area:**

The Braj region of Uttar Pradesh was selected for data collection for Sanjhi art based on both primary and secondary data available on the topic. The Vrindavan, Mathura and Barsana regions of Braj are home to the Sanjhi art, nurtured by many generations of artists. Field visits were undertaken to collect the information for the study.

### **Sampling and Sample size:**

In order to obtain relevant information on all aspects of the folk art, the following key stakeholders were identified for data collection: 1- Sanjhi artisans, 2- Sanjhi stencil makers, 3- Vrindavan research institute officials.

The researcher selected respondents of each area for the collection of the information on existing practice

**How to cite this Article:** Agrawal, Muskan, Pant, Suman and Mangal, Mahak (2024). The Geometry of the Divine: A Formal Analysis of Present Status of Sanjhi Folk Art and Artisans of Mathura, Barsana and Vrindavan. *Internat. J. Appl. Home Sci.*, **11** (11 & 12) : 717-722

of Sanjhi art as well as the problems faced by them, present states and the future prospects of Sanjhi art. Purposive sampling technique was used to select artisans from each area for the present study.

The total population of Sanjhi artisans in Mathura, Vrindavan, and Barsana was 150 (at the time of study), out of which the total number of respondents selected for the existing study was 58. 13 Sanjhi artists from Vrindavan. 10 from Barsana, 8 from Mathura, and 9 Sanjhi artists from Mathura, 4 from Barsana, and 3 from Vrindavan, and 15 Vrindavan Research Institute officials were taken. Willingness of respondents to participate in survey was taken.

### Tools for Data Collection:

Interview schedule was considered the most appropriate tool to accumulate the information from the respondents who were found illiterate. An additional benefit of the interview schedule is that it guarantees prompt responses, facilitates flexibility, and makes it simple for the interviewer to offer more insightful interpretations of interactive questions.

Interview schedule was prepared as a systematic questionnaire. It was formed in Hindi and had both opened and closed-ended questions that were related to the following broad categories: the standard profile of respondents, types of Sanjhi, designs and motifs, difficulties faced by Sanjhi makers. Before finalizing schedule of survey, the pilot study was done, which helped in finalizing the schedule. The data was collected personally by researcher by interviewing Sanjhi artisans in Mathura, Barsana and Vrindavan region.

Another important tool used was observation. The process of making Sanjhi was observed at temples.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Sanjhi, a unique and valuable folk art made from flowers, colors, and cow dung, necessitates conservation to prevent its decline. The conservation necessitates a detailed documentation of the folk art, process, motifs, and types.

The origins, motifs, process of making of Sanjhi art, and the details of problems faced by the artists were also found out. The major findings are as follows.

### Personal Profile of Artisans:

Table 1 shows that all the respondents were natives

of Mathura, Vrindavan and Barsana areas in Uttar Pradesh. The researcher could locate 13 Sanjhi artists from Vrindavan. 10 from Barsana, 8 from Mathura, and 9 Sanjhi artists from Mathura, 4 from Barsana, and 3 from Vrindavan, and 15 Vrindavan Research Institute officials.

Six artisans were found whose grandfathers and fathers were practicing the craft and they have seen them doing Sanjhi art. It was reported by local people that Sanjhi art was started by the ancestors of these artisans. The distribution of respondents (artisans) among the above-mentioned regions is indicated in table 3, which reveals that almost 30% were from Mathura region, 40% from Barsana region and 30% from Vrindavan region in Uttar Pradesh state.

### Age:

Age-wise distribution of Sanjhi artisans indicates that 10% Sanjhi artisans were in the age group of 20 to 30 years, 28% were between 31 to 40 years, 35% were in the age group of 41-50 years and 2% were in the age group of 50 above years, whereas 8.5% Vrindavan Research Institute Curators were in the age group of 31 to 40 and 10.5% Curators in the age group 41 to 50.

In the case of Sanjhi stencil makers, responds 20% belonged to 20-30 years of age and 80% were of the age group of 40 to 50 years. The whole process of Sanjhi art making is laborious. Due to the diminishing nature of crafts in the region, young people are moving to cities after completing education.

### Gender:

The Table 1 shows the gender-wise distribution of the respondents; 25% were female respondents working as Sanjhi artisans, and 75% were male respondents working as Sanjhi artisans. Regarding the Sanjhi stencil makers, 55% respondents were male, and 45% were female, whereas Vrindavan research institute curators 45% respondents were male, and 55% were female. Sanjhi art is done by only males in Mathura and Vrindavan while in Barsana, women make Sanjhi in their houses but in Shri ji temple men make Sanjhi.

### Education:

45% of Sanjhi artisans were higher secondary pass, 35% were primary, and 20% were graduated. Regarding the Sanjhi stencil makers, 48% of Sanjhi stencil makers were higher secondary educated, 30% were primary

educated, and 22% were secondary, whereas Vrindavan research institute curators 40% respondents were graduate, 35% respondents were Ph.D. and 25% were post graduate. It is clear from Table 3 that all the Sanjhi making artisans were educated. Vrindavan research institute curators are highly educated.

#### Caste:

Most of the Sanjhi maker and Sanjhi stencil maker were Brahman and some belonged to other caste like Verma. 79% of Sanjhi artisans were Brahman, and 21% were in other caste. Whereas 70% of Sanjhi stencil makers were Brahman, and 30% were in other caste, and in Vrindavan research institute all were from were Brahman caste.

#### Family type:

40% of Sanjhi makers were from a nuclear family, and only 60% were from a joint family. 25% of Sanjhi

stencil makers were from nuclear family, while 75% were from joint family; 60% Vrindavan research institute Curators have nuclear family and 40 % have joint family.

#### Marital status:

The data reveals that 48% Sanjhi makers were married, 27% were unmarried, 16% were divorced and 10% were widows. 60% of Sanjhi stencil makers were married, while 20% were unmarried and 20% were widows. In the case of Vrindavan research institute Curators all were married.

#### Family occupation:

It is indicated in Table 1 that the maximum number of Sanjhi makers and Sanjhi stencil makers were from middle-income families. Sanjhi art is a form of worship of the God, it is not source of earning so artisans also engage in other occupation to generate income.

The data reveals that 58% Sanjhi makers were

**Table 1: Personal profile of Sanjhi artists, and Sanjhi stencil makers of Barsana, Mathura and Vrindavan**

| Sr. No. | Personal Profile      | Sanjhi artists (f) | Sanjhi stencil makers (f) | Vrindavan Research Institute officials (f) |
|---------|-----------------------|--------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------------------------|
| 1.      | <b>Age (years)</b>    |                    |                           |                                            |
|         | 20-30                 | 5                  | 4                         | -                                          |
|         | 31-40                 | 10                 | -                         | 6                                          |
|         | 41-50                 | 13                 | 8                         | 9                                          |
|         | Above 50              | 3                  | -                         | -                                          |
| 2.      | <b>Gender</b>         |                    |                           |                                            |
|         | Male                  | 21                 | 7                         | 7                                          |
|         | Female                | 10                 | 5                         | 8                                          |
| 3.      | <b>Education</b>      |                    |                           |                                            |
|         | Primary School        | 9                  | 4                         | -                                          |
|         | Higher Secondary      | 14                 | 5                         | -                                          |
|         | Graduate              | 8                  | 3                         | 6                                          |
|         | Post Graduate         | -                  | -                         | 4                                          |
|         | Ph.D.                 | -                  | -                         | 5                                          |
| 4.      | <b>Caste</b>          |                    |                           |                                            |
|         | Brahman               | 25                 | 7                         | 15                                         |
|         | Other                 | 6                  | 5                         | -                                          |
| 5.      | <b>Type of family</b> |                    |                           |                                            |
|         | Nuclear               | 10                 | 4                         | 9                                          |
|         | Joint                 | 21                 | 8                         | 6                                          |
| 6.      | <b>Marital Status</b> |                    |                           |                                            |
|         | Married               | 16                 | 6                         | 15                                         |
|         | Unmarried             | 10                 | 3                         | -                                          |
|         | Divorced              | 2                  | -                         | -                                          |
|         | Widow                 | 3                  | 3                         | -                                          |
| 7.      | <b>Occupation</b>     |                    |                           |                                            |
|         | Agriculture           | 4                  | -                         | -                                          |
|         | Business              | 15                 | 8                         | -                                          |
|         | Service               | 12                 | 4                         | 10                                         |
|         | Other                 | -                  | -                         | 5                                          |

engaged in business, 34% were doing jobs and 8% were engaged in agriculture. 78% Sanjhi stencil makers were engaged in business, and 22% were doing jobs. In the case of Vrindavan research institute Curators 70% were doing jobs and 30% of the respondents were working on their own, not being part of any cooperative or other group.

### Occupation of artists:

The artists were asked about their occupation other than making Sanjhi art. All Sanjhi artists had different occupations. 49% were business, 25% were teachers, 10% were housewives and 16% were priests.

### Specific Information Related to the folk art:

#### *Working hours and working place (Sanjhi artisans and Sanjhi stencil makers):*

Table 2, 3, 4 and 5 indicates that 90% of artisans spend 2-4 hours, while 10% of workers work 4-5 hours according to the detailing of Sanjhi's design. The results also shows that 35% of artisans make Sanjhi at their houses, 50% artisans make Sanjhi in the temple, and 15% artisans make Sanjhi in exhibition.

| Table 2 : Working hours and working place for Sanjhi art |                       |                      |                      |                      |
|----------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| Sr. No.                                                  | Particulars           | Mathura              | Barsana              | Vrindavan            |
|                                                          |                       | Working Hours (Days) | Working Hours (Days) | Working Hours (Days) |
| 1.                                                       | Sanjhi artisans       | 2-6                  | 2-4                  | 2-5                  |
| 2.                                                       | Sanjhi stencil makers | 2-5                  | 1-2                  | 2-5                  |

| Table 3 : Hours spent in a day (N=58) |                  |
|---------------------------------------|------------------|
| Types of Sanjhi                       | Hours (in a day) |
| Flower and Cow dung Sanjhi            | 2-4 hours        |
| Color and Water Sanjhi                | 3-5 hours        |
| Complex designs                       | 5-6 hours        |

| Table 4 : Days spent in a month (N=58) |                  |
|----------------------------------------|------------------|
| Category                               | Days (in a year) |
| Artists                                | 15-16 days       |
| Exhibition and festival                | 14-20 days       |

| Table 5 : Working place (N=58) |          |
|--------------------------------|----------|
| Working place                  | Per cent |
| Temple                         | 50%      |
| their house                    | 35%      |
| Exhibition                     | 15%      |

### How old is the tradition of Sanjhi art:

The respondents were asked about the tradition of Sanjhi art. The result indicates that Sanjhi, a traditional folk art, has been made in Braj since the 16th century.

### How long you have been doing this work:

The study reveals that 15% of people in Mathura, Vrindavan, and Barsana have been making Sanjhi for 5-10 years, 25% for 10-20 years, and 45% for 20-30 years. For 150 years, there were 10% of people whose family members, like their father, grandfather, and great-grandfather, used to make Sanjhi, and now they also make it.

### When did you begin making Sanjhi:

It was found that 25% of the people in the age group of 20-40 years and 40% of the people in the age group of 40-60 years are making Sanjhi in Vrindavan and Mathura. In Barsana, 23% of the unmarried girls in the age group of 12-18 years and 12% of the people in the age group of 30-50 years are making Sanjhi.

### Types of Sanjhi made by the artists:

In Braj, Sanjhi is celebrated on Pitra Paksh, it is a 15 day festival of Sanjhi. In the temples of Radha-Vallabh, Radha-Raman, Banke Bihari, Shahjahanpur Temple, Yashoda Nandan and Radha Damodar in Vrindavan, Sanjhi is made of color, water or flowers. Flower and color Sanjhi is made in Barsane's Shri ji temple, in addition all the girls and ladies make Sanjhi of cow dung in their homes. Sanjhi is made of color, water or flowers in the temple of Dwarkadhish in Mathura. Due to its unique attraction, this tradition of Braj established its dominance in far-flung areas, over time, wherever the influence of Braj culture reached, this art also got ample encouragement.

The artists were asked about the types of Sanjhi made by them. The majority of the artists (40%) make flower, color Sanjhi and 30% artists make water Sanjhi in Mathura, Barsana and Vrindavan. It was found from survey that 30% of the artists make cow dung Sanjhi in Barsana.

### Family members are involved in making Sanjhi:

The result shows that 55% of the Sanjhi artists had their father, brother, and children involved in the making of Sanjhi art, while 45% of the artists had their father or brother involved in Mathura and Vrindavan. 68% of the

Sanjhi artists had their mother, brother, sister and father involved in the making of Sanjhi art, while 32% of the artists had their fathers or brothers involved in Barsana.

#### **Where did you learn Sanjhi art:**

Results indicated that 60% artists have acquired their skills from their families and 40% of Sanjhi art artists acquired their skills from relatives and friends.

#### **What is the source of the pictures and stories of Leelas created in Sanjhi:**

The artists were asked about the source of the pictures and stories of Leelas created in Sanjhi. The results show that the Sanjhi stencil maker makes the stencil based on Radha-Krishna Leelas in the books and creates the design in his own unique way.

#### **Which Leelas are most frequently utilized to make Sanjhi:**

On the basis of the answer to the previous question, the artists were asked about the most commonly used Leelas for making Sanjhi. The results are shown below-

In color, water, flower Sanjhi, the Leelas of Radha-Krishna are made, including the Makhan chori leela, Kaliya daman leela, Maharaas leela, Vastra chori leela, Venu Vadan and Holi leela. Swastika, chakra, trident, palm tree, moon, sun, etc. are made in cow dung Sanjhi.

From centuries, same leelas are being made in Sanjhi, no significant change has come.

#### **Current status of Sanjhi art and artists:**

The artists were asked about the current status of Sanjhi art. It is found that Sanjhi art is currently diminishing. They said that from centuries Sanjhi art is passed down through generations, but children are now days hesitant to pursue it as they are busy in studies, jobs, and business ventures. It is not income generating craft. Besides, especially young ones are busy in internet (social media) and do not want to engage in sanjhi making. The number of Sanjhi artisans is currently decreasing.

#### **What is the importance of singing in Sanjhi:**

The study indicates that when Sanjhi is made, followed by a worship where Shri Surdas ji, Shri Madanmohan Das ji, Shri Krishna Vallabh ji, Shri Nagri Das ji, Shri Hit Vrindavan Das ji etc's verses are sung in the temple, singing these verses holds special significance.

गोप दुलारिनु को जु अब, आयौ प्रिय त्यौहार ।  
सांझी सब चीतन लगीं, तात भवँन दरबार ॥१॥  
तिन में राधा मुकट मणि, सब भई ताकें लार ।  
सांझी कौ दिन जानि कै, आई साजि सिंगार ॥२॥

*-Shri Hit Vrindavan Das ji*

#### **After making Sanjhi, what is done with the Sanjhi the next day:**

The artists were asked about what is done with the Sanjhi the next day. The result indicates that after making Sanjhi, it is immersed in water the following day. That means every day, new Sanjhi is made.

#### **Problems faced by Artists**

On the basis of the answer to the previous question, the artists were asked about the problems faced by them. The results are shown below:

The reason for diminishing Sanjhi art is moderation, migration and urbanization, education, and the time-taking process. 38% of the respondents said that time-taking becomes the most common problem because it takes 2-5 hours to make one design of Sanjhi. It depends on the complexity of the design's pattern as to how much time it would take to make the Sanjhi. This is the reason why nowadays no one wants to make a Sanjhi due to its laborious nature and long sitting time required for the process.

Migration and urbanization become the second highest problem in regards to making Sanjhi. 34% of the respondents said that migration and urbanization becomes the most common problem because people are shifting to educate their children and secure good jobs. 17% of artists said that modernity and 11% said that education is also a common problem because everyone after studying desires to pursue a job or business.

#### **Promotion of Sanjhi art:**

The artists were asked about the how they promote Sanjhi art publicly. It was revealed that exhibitions and workshops are organized in Vrindavan to promote Sanjhi art, Sanjhi making is taught in the workshop, and also books on Sanjhi art are published.

#### **Suggestions to make Sanjhi art more popular:**

Artists suggest modernizing innovation should be done with the Sanjhi designs, using flowers, leaves, trees, cows, elephants, birds, etc., without compromising

religious beliefs of peoples. 65% people said that Sanjhi can be used in apparel sector, home furnishing articles, accessories viz. hand bags, shoulder bags etc. We worship and revere images of God, so it is important not to use them in any type of articles, while 35% artists said that to elevate Sanjhi art to new heights, it is imperative to implement measures that can boost the income of the artists.

### Conclusion:

Sanjhi is a celebration of Lord Radha-Krishna. The subject has always been Radha-Krishna Leela like Raas leela, Makhan chori leela, Kaliya-Dahan, and Goverdhan leela, among others. The motifs and designs seen in traditional Sanjhi paper cutting depict scenes from Vrindavan, including peacocks, cows, elephant, trees, vines, temples, cowherd boys, mansions, the child form of Radha-Krishna, peacocks, butterflies, Radha-Krishna under the kadamb tree etc. which are made in Braj's

temples. Paper is used in Pushtimarga of Vallabhkul sect, so paper is used in making stencils of Sanjhi. Plastic is not used in making Sanjhi in the temple. Mohan Verma says that the folk art has been converted to other forms by Sanjhi stencil makers and others (new generation of designers/entrepreneurs) to fulfill their quest for new fashion or to meet the current market demand. Now Sanjhi art motifs are used in interior design, lamp shades, and wall frames.

### REFERENCES

- Agarwal, V.S. (1954). *Poddar Abhinandan Granth*, Prime Minister All India Braj Literature Board.
- Saraf, D.N. (1985). *Indian crafts: development and potential*. 2nd Edition, New Delhi: Vikas.
- Sharma, M. and Sharma, R. (2014). *Braj Ki Sanjhi*, 1st edition, Vrindavan Shodh Sansthan.

\*\*\*\*\*