

---

# Goudana: An Extinct ArtTattoo an Embraced Future

Kumar Vikas<sup>1</sup>, Chhavi Singh<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Fashion Communication Department, National Institute of Fashion Technology, Patna, India

<sup>2</sup>Free Lance Editor and Entrepreneur, Patna, India

## Email address:

kumar.vikas@nift.ac.in (K. Vikas), chhavisingh09@gmail.com (C. Singh)

## To cite this article:

Kumar Vikas, Chhavi Singh. Goudana: An Extinct ArtTattoo an Embraced Future. *International Journal of Architecture, Arts and Applications*. Vol. 7, No. 4, 2021, pp. 137-142. doi: 10.11648/j.ijaaa.20210704.15

**Received:** September 19, 2020; **Accepted:** November 7, 2020; **Published:** December 11, 2021

---

**Abstract:** As ancient as the oldest of civilizations, the art of tattooing has continued to persist through the ages. A reminiscence of man's life here on earth, tattooing has been practiced in diverse cultures for varied reasons such as for commemorating the memory of a loved one, as rites for hinder less passage into after-life, as a symbol of spiritual attachment or religion or one's position in society, for identification and punishment, as well as a sexual lure. In India, tattooing is referred to with many different names but the word most commonly used is 'Goudana'. The practise of Goudana finds its genesis in Hindu religious mythology and is associated with stories of Gond God, one of the invitees to a dinner arranged by Lord Shiva. While fetching his wife, Gond God accidently put his arm around Parvati Ji, wife of Lord Shiva. The devi (goddess) did not like it and thereafter demanded that the tribal ladies wear a particular kind of mark on their skin to distinguish them from the other castes; with this started the culture of Goudana. There are also other similar stories with Yamraj in Oraon tribe amongst the Mundas, Baigas, Malhars, Singhas, Santhals, the Ho tribe and numerous many. The difference between Tattoo and Goudana is the usual story of after effects of modernization, where one art gets mechanised, evolves, becomes popular and thrives whereas the other, though safe and more therapeutic, witnesses a gradual decline and almost perishes, mainly because of the failure to commercialize it and also due to inadequate support from the government as extended to other arts for their revival. This study is based on my interactions with local Goudana artists during one of my professional excursions to Ranchi, Jharkhand, India. I interviewed the artisans who still practice Goudana and learnt about their induction into the practise, their skills, their techniques, their hardships and the reasons for the decline of Goudana as an art form. The information thus gathered has shaped this research. The script also contains an analysis of primary research data collected from 110 respondents to study the significance and effect of education and the role of gender in creating a preference for and shaping the perceptions around tattooing/Goudana.

**Keywords:** Goudana, Tattoo, Oraon, Adivasi, Ornamentation, Pitarmuni, Motifs, and Banjara

---

## 1. Introduction

Tattoos are like reminiscence of a person's play of universe. It seems that art, science or culture of tattoo making was prevalent in almost all the civilizations [1] and was done for varied reasons line commemorating the memory of a loved one, as rites for hinder less passage into after -life, of endurance, spiritual attachment, religion, ones position in society or rank, sexual lures, as punishment for outcasts, on slaves for identification and numerous such reasons.

In India, tattooing is referred to with many different names but the word most commonly used is 'Goudana'.

Goudana finds its genesis in mythology whereby Gond God who was among rest of the invitees of a dinner arranged by Lord Shiva [2] had put his arm around Parvati Ji by pure mistake while fetching his wife but it was not taken as a jest by the devi and she demanded the tribal ladies to wear a particular kind of mark on their skin to distinguish them from the other castes and with this started the culture of Goudana There are several such stories with Yamraj, In Oraon tribe amongst the Munda's, Baiga, Malhar, Singha, Santhals the Ho tribe [3] and numerous many.

Goudana despite being an old practise with obsolete

techniques has yet not been reported as infectious [4] or carcinogenic unlike the present day tattoos. Gouana alleviates joint pains and rheumatism it is a proven remedy for Hepatic artery resistive index (HARI) [5] and, Hydroceles, goitre, arthritis, non-alcoholic fatty liver disease (NFLD) and human hookworm infection in abdomen. The tribal community still practices Goudana for all these therapeutic reasons. Even the tattoos of Otzi, the glarier mummy, are of the rapetic kind; of skin puncturing. Yet this art is completely on the verge of extinction.

## 2. Interview of the Goudana Artisans

On one of my research trips to Jagannath Malhar Colony in Ranchi District [6] in May, 2018. I found it difficult to find even 6 artisans who were still in Goudana practise and to meet their survival they have been forced into rag-picking, repairing boxes, buckets, pipes. It is difficult for them to arrange three square meals for their families and some of them have made a change of trade and have mastered at making metal casted products (viz. ghunghru, paila and dhokra) bamboo weaving, sujini embroidery, stitching wall painting, terracotta tribal art, singing folk songs all have opted for some other option to make both ends meet because no rehabilitation work has been initiated for them by the Government.

*\*To maintain the veracity of the report the Unique Identification Codes (Adhaar Number) of the artisans is also mentioned. The interview reveals a lot about their technique, their plight and future of this art in abyss.*

*Name of the artisan – Urmila Toppo Malharin (1)*

Aadhar number – 493002060525

Age – 64 years

Date of birth – 01/01/1953

Gender – Female

Address – W/O, Digambar Malhar, Malar Kocha, Mousibadi, Jagannathpur, Dhurwa, Ranchi-834004

About her – A resident of Jagannathpur Malhar colony for the past 22 years, Urmila took up goudana at the young age of 12. She inherited this art form from her maternal family members belonging to the Oraon tribe of the Adivasi community. Several members in her family have engraved the word 'Godna' on their body as per their rituals and beliefs. Urmila's clients can be broadly classified into two categories - those who come to her for the treatment of goitre and those who approach her for the ornamentation of their bodies.

The treatment of goitre involves engraving 'Godna' by using a paste of natural ingredients such as the plant sap of gheukuwer, turmeric, root of sohar plant, mustard oil and huqqa water. All these together act like a traditional ayurvedic remedy suitable for curing the disease. Urmila earns about Rs. 5000 - 6000/- for the whole process. For the purpose of body ornamentation, she charges about Rs. 25-50/-.

*Name of the artisan – JaleshriFoto Malharin (2)*

Aadhar number – 539612579905

Age – 67 years

Date of birth – 01/01/1950

Gender – Female

Address – W/O, Late Ajgar Malhar, Mousibadi, Jagannathpur, Malar Kocha, Ranchi, Jharkhand –834004

About her – Jaleshri learnt the art form of 'Godna' at a very young age even before she got married. A skilled artisan, Urmila specializes in 'Godna' for body embellishment. She uses lampblack and mother's milk, which she mixes together in a small wooden or bamboo bowl and then engraves the designs with the help of "pitar-muni" needles. Goudana usually involves the use of a set of odd-numbered such as 3, 7, 9 or 11. Urmila prefers to use 7 needles at a time. She ties them together in a bundle with the help of a cotton thread to ensure that their points stay together at the same level.

Some of her popular designs include motifs of mahadevjat, kasauli flower, pothi, haar, payal made with chawalkadhar, poudhakagach (of kadam tree) and geometrical motifs. In 2019, Urmila had been recruited by an organization and had travelled to Goa to sketch designs of 'Godna' for tattooing purpose. She finds it unfortunate that the use of modern tattooing techniques has led to the decline of the practice and influence.

*Name of the artisan – Phulmani Malharin (3)*

Aadhar number – 554189856353

Age – 34 years

Year of birth – 1983

Gender – Female

Address – W/O, Manu Malhar, Mousibadi, Jagannathpur, Jhopri, Dhurwa, Ranchi- 834004, Jharkhand

About her – For Phulmani, 'Godna' has been a family tradition. She learnt the art from her mother. Her initiation involved engraving 'Godna' on her own body at the age of 10. Today, her 6 children and about 7 other members of her family are involved in this art form. They procure their tools from the local vendors.

Earlier, her family was well-off and could live comfortably as 'Godna' practice brought in good money but lately, with the decline in its popularity, their income has also gone down drastically; they no longer attend the local fairs as they hardly ever find customers interested in their art.

*Name of the artisan – Sattan Khudain Malharin (4)*

Aadhar number – 704291128979

Age – 71 years

Date of birth – 01/ 01/ 1946

Gender – Female

Address – W/O, Kanandan Malhar, 160, Mousibadi, Dhurwa, Ranchi – 834004, Jharkhand

About her – Sattan reminisces that earlier, it was customary for the 'Godna' artists in their tribal community to at least engrave a single small dot on their foreheads. She learnt the art of engraving 'Godna' from her mother-in-law. However, at present, she is the only member in her family who does 'Godna'; her daughters-in-law have not shown any interest in learning this art form.

Depending on the design to be engraved, 'Godna' can take about thirty minutes or more. A single alphabet or letter

incurs a charge of Rs.10/-. Different alphabets are rated differently, such as the Hindi letter “Om”, for which she charges Rs.25/-. Unfortunately, her income is meagre and not enough to feed her family.

*Name of the artisan – Sumit Devi (5)*

Date of birth – 01/01/1958

Gender – Female

Address – Jagannathpur Jhopri, Malhar Colony, Dhurwa, Ranci – 834004, Jharkhand

About her – Sumit Devi, daughter of a proficient 'Godna' artist, began engraving 'Godna' before she got married, when she was a teenage girl of 17-18 years. Now her son has followed in her footsteps.

Sumit Devi uses “kaathkakiya” (the small wooden bowl used for mixing lampblack and mother’s milk for engraving 'Godna') made by the local carpenter. After engraving 'Godna', she uses a powdered mixture of salt, rice and chillies to ward off the evil impact that might have caught on to the customer during the 'Godna' process. As a precaution, she advises her customers against consuming brinjal, black pulses and rice starch for three consecutive days after getting engraved.

*Name of the artisan – Ruddan Malharin (6)*

Aadhar number – 386782101291

Age – 67 years

Year of birth – 1950

Gender – Female

Address – W/O, Pyari Malhar, Mousibadi, Jagannathpur colony, Dhurwa, Ranchi – 834004, Jharkhand

About her – Ruddan has been practicing the art of 'Godna' from a very young age. Despite it being a painful process, Ruddan loves it because of the traditional and spiritual values and religious significance associated with it. She believes that education and modernization is to be blamed for lessening the charm of 'Godna' among the present generation, her 3 children included.

Only two members of her family still practice it, wandering like 'banjarans' in local markets and fairs on special occasions or during festive seasons. Ruddan wants to see the art form revived and expects the government to take an initiative for the same. She is open to working in a design company and hopes to be paid Rs.500/- as her daily wage.

### **2.1. Why Are Tattoos Made**

History of Gouana and its transformation into Tattoos is just the normal story of modernization else all tattoos in historic evidence without the application of modern machines and procedures are nothing but Goudana.

Permanent Makeup: Tattoos are used in permanent makeup as moles, enhanced eyebrows, lips (lipstick liners, eye liners) designs that resemble makeup and relieve a person from the daily ordeal of makeup also done to cover vitiligo or skin pigmentation [7].

Tattoos over Surgical scars is a personal way of dealing with post cancer body-esteem anxiety and depression. There is a huge market for post mastectomy tattooing of nipples over surgically reconstructed breasts.

Functional tattoos are artistically done, address/detail specific or identity carrying tattoos done for Alzheimer [8] patients or by owners on their livestock or pets like cats and dogs (on inner thigh or ears).

Amalgam Tattoos Nowadays amalgam is rooted in the gums, during dental removal or filling placement but similar tattoos were prevalent/ popular in the Mayan Civilization

Medical Tattoos: Of the several tattoos (precisely 65 tattoos found on the glacier mummy) on Otzi some of them were not ornamental in function the blue ones on the pelvis were an customary treatment of some chronic pelvis condition. This establishes the existence of tattoos done for therapeutic reasons.

Decorative tattoos: The ones done extensively over body by performance artists or for some kind of club members viz. London Tattoo Convention participants.

Identification Tattoos: History is pelted with stories of tattoos that were done forcibly by officials or authorities rather than as a personal choice viz. the captives of Auschwitz concentration camp to identify the body of the registered prisoner with codes of camp number and other details. Chinese authorities during the Zhou era practised facial tattoos as certain punishment or on slaves. In Roman Empire the Gladiators and Slaves were marked with facial tattoos which was abolished by Emperor Constantine in late 330 AD. Moko tattoos by Maori were done as a symbolism of their lineage, status and as a permit for passage into the after-life. In prisons various motifs with universal meaning are tattooed like the symbol of 'five' as in a dice means the person has been convicted, three dots means 'death to the police', web on head means into drug mafia and so on has been revealed by an expert at tattoo iconography.

Criminal Tattoos: are the ones practised by Criminal Gangs which hold a perceptible meaning for its members or ones in similar trade and are not recognized by the outside world because of the complexity of what they encode. They carry all the details of the wearer like his allegiance, skills, accomplishments, specialities viz., a rose on the chest is an initiation tattoo for a Russian Mafia symbolizes meant that the an initiation tattoo. Current Ykuza gangsters have tattoo all over their body like second skin. [9]

Permit Tattoos: Some tattoos were worn by black sailors to certify their non-slave status to the law enforcers or these tattoos were etched to manage the slaves assigned for transportation.

SKINvertisement Tattoos: These are tattoos are got done by people who volunteer to be walking advertisements of some brands in exchange of some life time benefits and have recorded as good as 170% growth ratio for few companies because of their visibility and positioning. HBO, Sailability's jerry rum, Red Bull and many such companies have tried these marketing gimmicks.

### **2.2. Different Kinds of Tattoos on the Basis of Technology Used**

There are innumerable kinds of tattoos classified on the basis of their motifs like traditional, watercolour, realism,

tribal, 3d, abstract, ambigrams, anatomical, blastover, celtic, blackwood, illustrative etc. but there are a variety of new tattoos [10] diversified on the basis of their technology and purpose like:

**Memorial Tattoos:** where the cremated remains of the departed are mixed with the tattoo ink so that one can retain a part of the loved one forever [11].

**Black light Tattoo:** Unlike as the name suggests ‘glow in the dark’ these tattoos glow only in black light as food and drug administration have proved of only zinc sulphide for neon pigment rest substitutes end up being carcinogenic. [12]

**Soundwave Tattoo:** Where an audio clip of an individual can be played by scanning the wavelength of the tattoo under a specific app.

**Biomonitoring Tattoos:** These are types of tattoos where ultra thin array of transistors are applied on the skin as tattoos and are used for bio monitoring purposes or tagged onto the skin as RFID for potential security purposes.

### 3. Research on Empirically Associated Factors and Tattooing Behaviour

#### 3.1. Hypothesis: Is There a Significant Impact of Gender on the Image of the Person Who Has Got His/Her Tattoo Digitally Removed

Many researchers have been done to get the psychological perspectives of tattooing behaviour but what equally important is *the kind of emotional response it attracts from the viewers*. The present study was designed to investigate the relationship between Gender and perception of people who get their tattoos digitally removed. To this end, the Chi-squared test was used to test if the two variables Gender and Perception are statistically associated with each other significantly. [13]

One hundred and ten respondents under-grads, graduates and post graduates of top design institutes both males and females ranging from the age group of 18 years to 35 years from various cities of India.

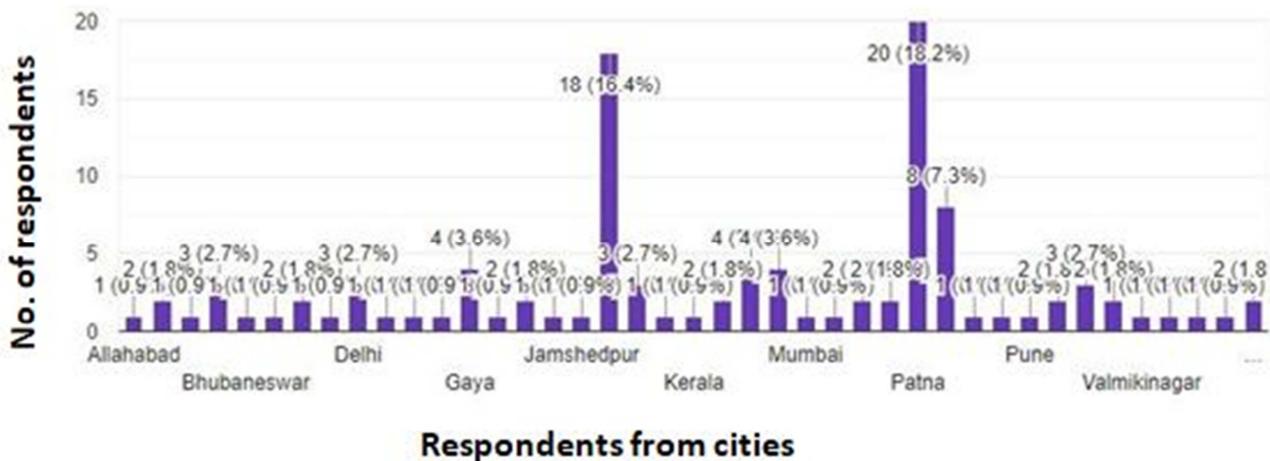


Figure 1. Respondents from Various cities.

This is the P value. Its value should be less than 5% (0.05) in order for the Hypothesis to be rejected. Thus there is no significant difference shown between the five options based on gender. The underlined statement is the Null hypothesis of the problem under consideration. [14]

Table 1. Chi-Square test.

Chi-Square Tests	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	4.150 <sup>a</sup>	4	.386
Likelihood Ratio	4.149	4	.386
Linear-by-Linear Association	1.238	1	.266
N of Valid Cases	110		

a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 5.38.

In simpler terms there is no preference or biasness shown based on gender on digitally removing a tattoo by their life partner. Thus, neither male nor females have reservation on tattoo removal by their life partner.

What impression do you have of a person who has got his/ her tattoo digitally removed; if you were to consider them as life partner .

110 responses

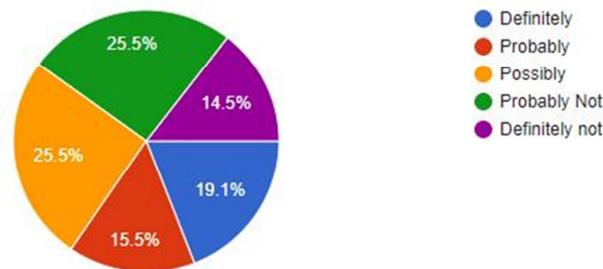


Figure 2. Responses to impression people have if they get their tattoo digitally removed.

### 3.2. Hypothesis: Is There a Significant Impact of Education on Not Preferring a Goudana

Table 2. Anova Analysis on Education and Not getting a Tattoo.

ANOVA ANALYSIS on EDUCATION and NOT GETTING A TATTOO					
	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	.819	4	.205	.440	.779
Within Groups	48.853	105	.465		
Total	49.673	109			

The significance value should be less than 5% (0.05) in order for the Hypothesis to be rejected. Thus there is no significant difference shown between the five options based on education. The underlined statement is also the Null hypothesis of the problem under consideration. [15]

Would you consider a Goudana over a tattoo ?

110 responses

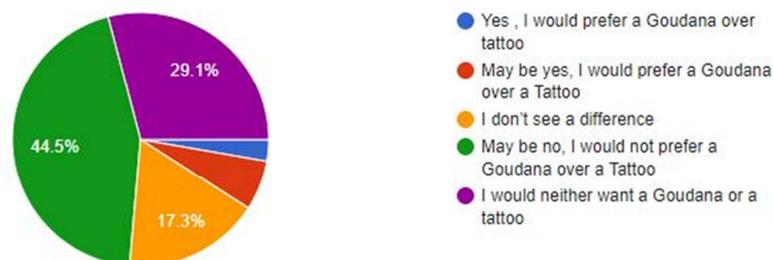


Figure 3. Responses to choice of Goudana over a tattoo.

As the null hypothesis is accepted in this case, it is evident that the level of education is not proving to be a discrimination point between Tattoo and Goudana. This means that there is no difference in the other five choices made by people from different education backgrounds. Since there is no difference in choice of the respondent in choosing Goudana over Tattoo or otherwise. It means that people are not aware of what Goudana is and the people need to be educated about Goudana to revive this medicinal marvel ?or dying art ? The state governments should help the Goudana Artists in keeping their heritage alive and like automation steals jobs in every sector of art but later on the pure form of art persists and its connoisseur reclaim the market for that art similarly Goudana will also survive if sheltered now at the right time.

#### Limitation: Lack of casual Inference in Cross Tabulation

It must be mentioned here that any two variables can be cross – tabulated. Even if cross tabulation shows a significant association between the two variables, it does not necessarily mean that one of them (the independent) causes the other (the dependent). Causality or direct effect is more of an assumption made by the researcher based on the expectation or experience. The mere existence of a statistically significant association does not necessarily imply a cause-and-effect relationship between the (presumed) independent and the (presumed) dependent variable.

Data collected over internet surveys may have the same disadvantage as one collected telephonically. It is difficult to ensure that all the respondents have an opportunity of selection in the sample. Also, a non-response bias may be

high. Non-response bias means that some people who are inclined not to participate in such surveys do not get represented in the sample, leading to errors.

## 4. Conclusion

Based on Hypothesis 1: There is no preference or biasness shown based on gender on digitally removing a tattoo by their life partner. Thus, neither male nor females have reservation on tattoo removal by their life partner.

Based on Hypothesis 2: there is no difference in choice of the respondent in choosing Goudana over Tattoo or otherwise. It means that people are not aware of what Goudana is and the people need to be educated about Goudana to revive this medicinal marvel, a dying art.

---

## References

- [1] Tattooing - Oriental and Gypsy Author(s): A. T. Sinclair Source: *American Anthropologist*, (Jul. - Sep., 1908), New Series, Vol. 10, No. 3 (Jul. - Sep., 1908), pp. 361-386 Published by: Wiley on behalf of the American Anthropological Association.
- [2] A relook at the observatory at Varanasi Author(s): B. S. Shylaja Source: *Current Science*, Vol. 100, No. 8 (25 April 2011), pp. 1246-1249 Published by: Current Science Association.
- [3] Chapter Title: SITES AND MONUMENTS Book Title: *Indian Islamic Architecture* Book Subtitle: *Forms and Typologies, Sites and Monuments* Book Author(s): John Burton-Page Book Editor(s): George Michell Published by: Brill.
- [4] *Homeric Beginnings in the 'Tattoo Elegy'* Author(s): Richard Rawles Source: *The Classical Quarterly*, (Dec., 2006), New Series, Vol. 56, No. 2 (Dec., 2006), pp. 486-495 Published by: Cambridge University Press on behalf of The Classical Association.
- [5] *Tattoos, Incarceration and Hepatitis B and C among Street-Recruited Injection Drug Users in New Mexico, USA: Update* Author(s): Michael C. Samuel, Marc Bulterys, Steve Jenison and Patti Doherty Source: *Epidemiology and Infection*, Vol. 133, No. 6 (Dec., 2005), pp. 1146-1148 Published by: Cambridge University Press.
- [6] Chapter Title: *Statecraft at the Edge of Empire: Bilaspur, 1795-1835* Book Title: *Kingship and Polity on the Himalayan Borderland* Book Subtitle: *Rajput Identity during the Early Colonial Encounter* Book Author(s): Arik Moran Published by: Amsterdam University Press.
- [7] Chapter Title: *Pragmatics of Pīr Kathā: Emplotment and Extra-Discursive Effects* Book Title: *Witness to Marvels* Book Subtitle: *Sufism and Literary Imagination* Book Author(s): Tony K. Stewart Published by: University of California Press.
- [8] *Infection Control among Professional Tattooists in Minneapolis and St. Paul, MN* Author(s): Monica J. Raymond, Phyllis L. Pirie and Linda L. Halcon Source: *Public Health Reports* (1974-), Vol. 116, No. 3 (May - Jun., 2001), pp. 249-256 Published by: Sage Publications, Inc.
- [9] *Crime and Tattooing* Source: *Journal of the American Institute of Criminal Law and Criminology*, (Nov., 1910), Vol. 1, No. 4 (Nov., 1910), pp. 619-620 Published by: Northwestern University Pritzker School of Law.
- [10] *THE PERILS OF BODY ART: FDA REGULATION OF TATTOO AND MICROPIGMENTATION PIGMENTS* Author(s): Jessica C. Dixon Source: *Administrative Law Review*, Summer 2006, Vol. 58, No. 3 (Summer 2006), pp. 667-687 Published by: American Bar Association.
- [11] Chapter Title: *Perfor/m/ative Writing: Tattoo, Mark, Signature* Chapter Author(s): Sonja Neef Book Title: *Sign Here!* Book Subtitle: *Handwriting in the Age of New Media* Book Editor(s): Sonja Neef, José van Dijck and Eric Ketelaar Published by: Amsterdam University Press.
- [12] Chapter Title: *Odysseus's Tattoo: On Daniel Ganzfried's The Sender and Benjamin Wilkomirski's Fragments* Chapter Author(s): RAFAËL NEWMAN and CAROLINE WIEDMER Book Title: *Literary Paternity, Literary Friendship* Book Subtitle: *Essays in Honor of Stanley Corngold* Book Editor(s).
- [13] *Tattooing and Body Piercing as Lifestyle Indicator of Risk Behaviors in Brazilian Adolescents* Author(s): Michele Dias da S. Oliveira, Marcos A. Matos, Regina M. B. Martins and Sheila Araujo Teles Source: *European Journal of Epidemiology*, 2006, Vol. 21, No. 7 (2006), pp. 559-560 Published by: Springer.
- [14] *Market Distribution* Author(s): L. D. H. Weld Source: *The American Economic Review*, (Mar., 1915, Vol. 5), No. 1, Supplement, *Papers and Proceedings of the Twenty-seventh Annual Meeting of the American Economic Association* (Mar., 1915), pp. 125-139 Published by: American Economic Association.
- [15] *Integration in Marketing* Author(s): Lewis H. Haney Source: *The American Economic Review*, (Sep., 1920, Vol. 10, No. 3 (Sep., 1920), pp. 528- 545 Published by: American Economic Association.

## Biography

**Kumar Vikas**, Associate Professor in Fashion Communication Department at National Institute of Fashion Technology, for more than a decade and has been a Centre Co-ordinator at Shillong and Patna Centre for Fashion Communication and Fashion Design Departments.

**Chhavi Singh**, former Assistant. Manager in Andhra Bank, Work ex of many reputed Media Houses like Network 18, The times of India, Red FM, Dainik Jagran presently a Free Lance Editor and Entrepreneur.