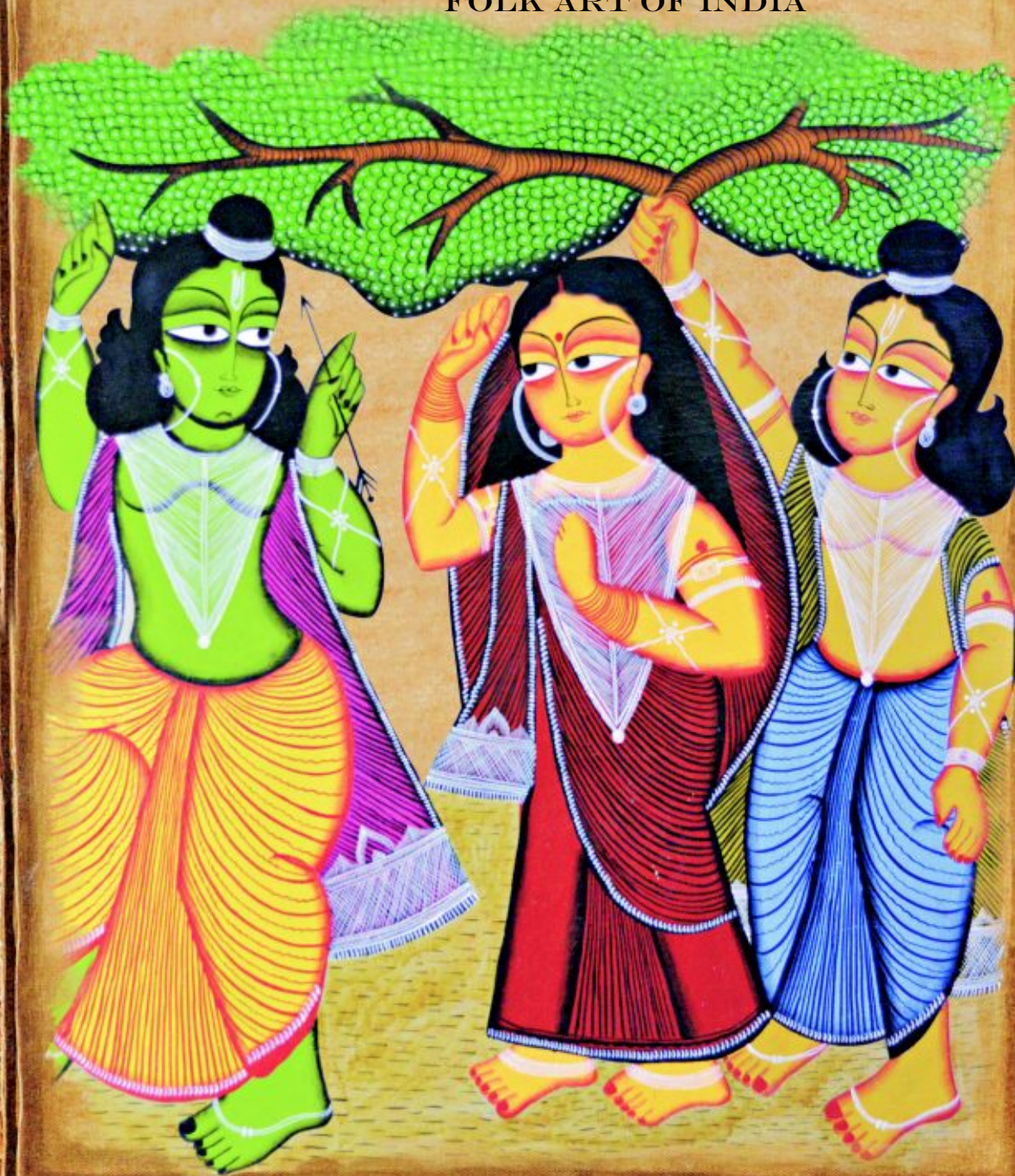
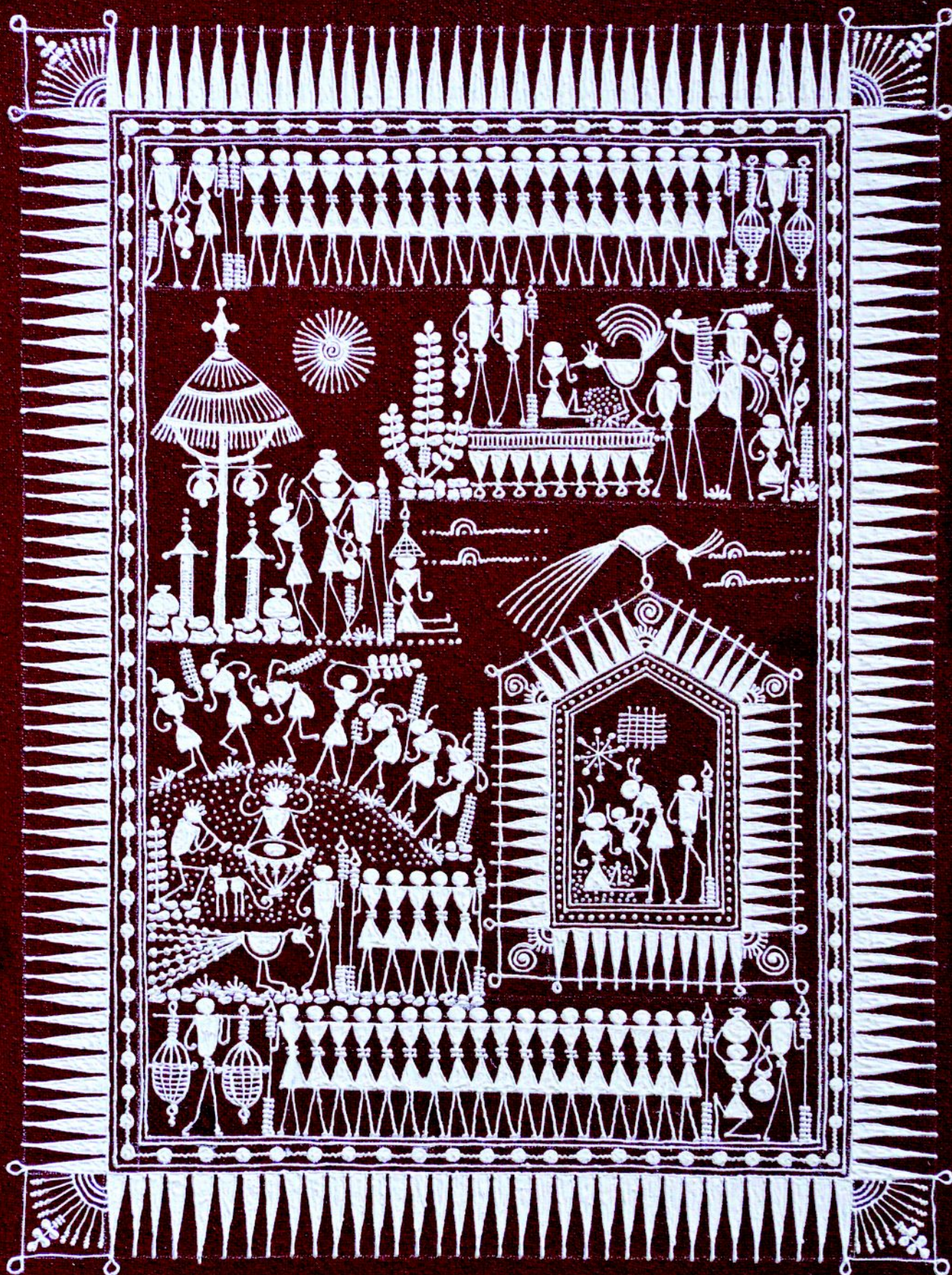


Chitralok

FOLK ART OF INDIA







Ministry of Culture
Government of India



EZCC



Chitralok

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*Compiled & Edited by
Gouri Basu*

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Photographs by:

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Published by:

Eastern Zonal Cultural Centre

Kolkata

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Design, Layout & Printed in India by:

The Cybernetics

57 Rash Behari Avenue, Kolkata 700 026

Price: Rs.350.00



Dedicated to the Folk Artists of India



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Introduction

India is a land of great cultural and religious diversity. Indian folk art is ancient and indigenous, originating in tribes and ethnic groups, created by common people, and reflective of their culture. Every region in India has its own cultural and traditional identities and this is evident in the folk paintings of the region. These paintings are an expression of our country's rich heritage and the creativity of the people.

Environment has a direct effect on the form and style of folk paintings. Diversity in Indian topography and geography has resulted in varied styles of folk art. Reflected too, are the flora and fauna in the paintings of each region. Village communities of every state have developed their own style of art and the skill is passed down from one generation to the next within a family, or from a master artist to students.

Folk art is non-professional art, created by ordinary men and women of the community, for decorating their homes, for ritualistic purposes and for portraying gods and goddesses. In fact, Hindu deities, mythological figures, scenes from the epics and glimpses of nature are some of the commonest themes of folk paintings. Every region uses readily available materials; the colours are vibrant and natural; the paintings simple, bold and clear. Storytellers would move from village to village, carrying folk paintings and reciting the stories from epics or mythology depicted in them.

EZCC has regularly been organizing workshops on the different folk art traditions of India. With this publication, we share with you some of the most beautiful paintings from our collection.

Kumaoni Paintings

Uttarakhand



Kumaoni paintings portray episodes from Lord Krishna's life and are traditionally made during *Janmashtami*. Natural vegetable colours are used to create the paintings. A stick with cotton wrapped at one end is the brush. During the process of worship, the paintings are intentionally soiled with *ghee* and other material used in the rituals, so that the painting cannot be used again. This ensures the need to create new paintings every year and the tradition is kept alive.



Sanjhi Art
Uttar Pradesh





Sanjhi or *Devasthanakala* is a ritualistic folk art form of Vrajadham, linked to the worship of Lord Krishna, one of the most popular gods in Hinduism. This art form is characterised by its use of stencils.

Stencilling is an art which is believed to have begun with the Chinese and the Egyptians sometime between 2000 and 3000 BC. As trade between China and the Middle East grew, the craft travelled to Western Europe and America, and between the 12th and 19th centuries became very popular in Western Europe. People began decorating their homes and places of worship with stencilling. The primary reasons behind its popularity were that it was inexpensive and comparatively simple to execute. Eventually, stencilling became a professional art.

There is no historical evidence about when this craft arrived in India. It is widely assumed that travellers from China introduced it to India before the advent of Muslim rule, but that it was popularised by Muslim rulers. Artists from Iran and other Middle Eastern countries were commissioned to decorate the walls and doors of palaces, forts, mosques and tombs. They created colourful geometric designs, some bold and others intricate, using stencils.

Over time, the art of stencilling became closely linked to Vrajabhoomi; and along the river Yamuna, the two contiguous towns of Mathura and Vrindavan, popular as the homeland of Lord Krishna, became the home of *Sanjhi* art. In the 15th and 16th centuries, it was regarded as a highly refined art form practised by Brahmin priests. Today, it continues as a living tradition in the temples of Vrindavan, but only a select few artists practise it. This art can be seen in the temples of Radha-Madanamohana, Radha-Ramana and Radha-Vallabha in Vrindavan, and the Nathwada temple in Rajasthan.



Mathura Art

Uttar Pradesh

Mathura Art, as the name implies, comes from Mathura, the heartland of Vrajabhoomi, the *Janmbhoomi* or birthplace of Lord Krishna. Mathura and its adjoining areas have also been Lord Krishna's *Karmbhoomi* or place of influence. It was here that that Krishna set the people free from the cruel, despotic ruler, Kansh. In the temples of Mathura, several paintings depicting the well-known episodes of Krishna's life – *Vraj Ki Holi*, *Raas*, *Maharaas*, Radha with her *gopinis*, Krishna with his *gopa* friends, *Bal Leela* escapades with his friends and Mother Yashoda -- are seen in full splendor. Mathura Art flourished during the rule of the Kushan kings from the 1st to 3rd centuries AD. Though it developed simultaneously with the Gandhara School of Art, the form is totally indigenous and does not have the Greco-Roman influence of the Gandhara School.

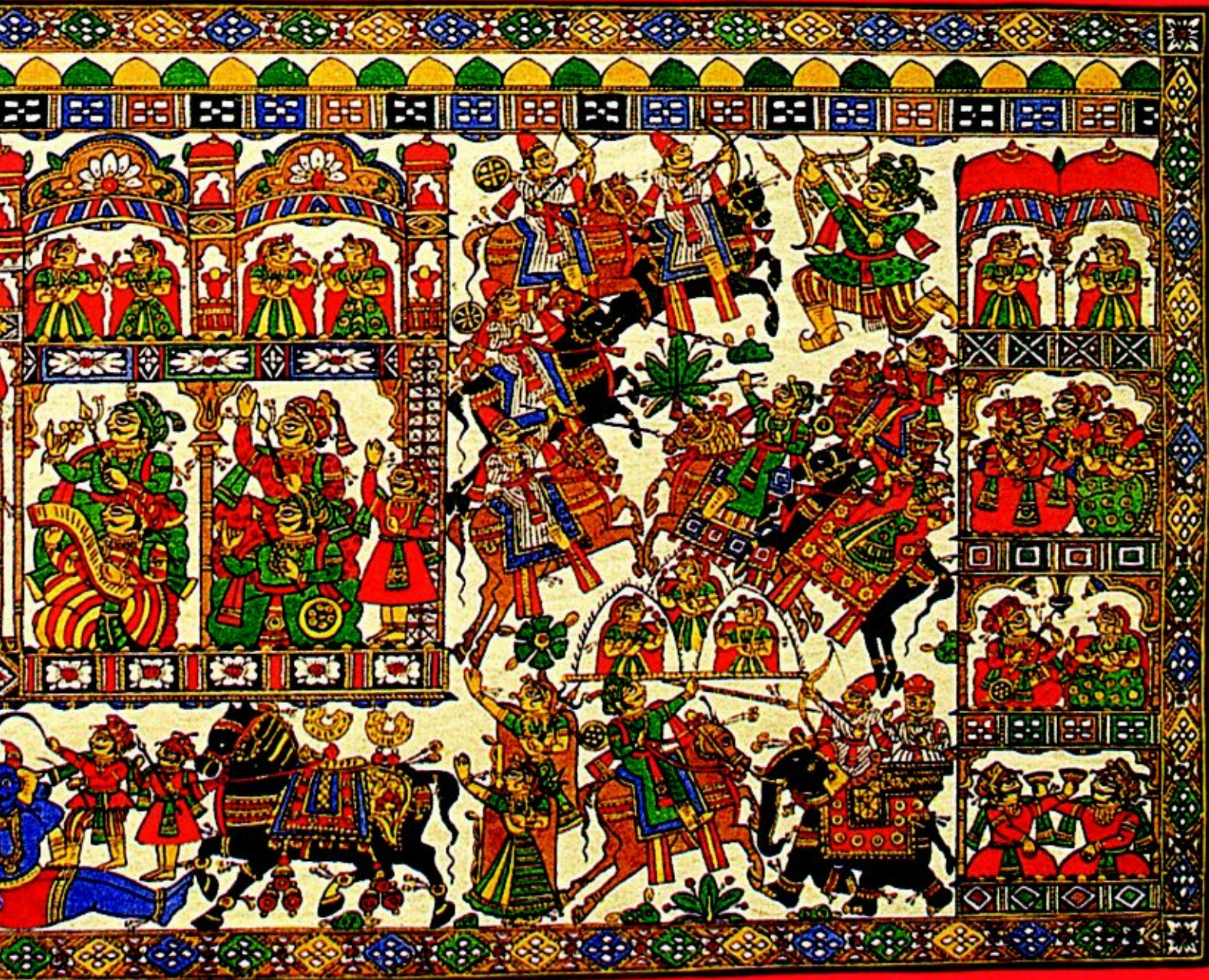




Phad Paintings

Rajasthan

Phad paintings, a blend of Rajput and Mughal classical styles, are indigenous to Rajasthan. The genre originated in Shahpura, near Bhilwara. The 700-year-old legacy of *Phad* paintings has been passed down through generations in a single family—the Joshis, belonging to the *Chipa* caste. Being a family tradition, the art of *Phad* paintings



was not taught to daughters, who would leave the family, but to daughters-in-law, who became a part of the family.

Phad paintings depict stories of local deities like Devnarayanji (an incarnation of Vishnu) and Pabuji (a local hero). The priest singers of the *Rabari* tribe, known as *Bhopas* and *Bhopis*, would use the paintings to create a mobile or travelling temple, by singing and performing the stories of local deities. A painting would be unfolded and the performance would begin after sunset, and often go on into the night. The *Bhopa* would sing and narrate the story of the *Phad* painting while his wife, the *Bhopi*, would accompany him by singing and dancing. She also helped to highlight relevant parts of the painting during the narration by holding up a lamp in front of it.

Phad paintings are made on coarse, hand-woven cotton cloth, which is soaked in water overnight to thicken the threads. The cloth is then starched to stiffen it and dried in the



sun. The surface is smoothened using a stone. Natural colours from stones, plants and flowers are mixed with water and gum before applying them to the cloth.

A *Phad* painting uses only certain specific colours—yellow, orange, green, brown, red, blue and black. Yellow is used for drawing the initial outline and for the clothing and ornaments of the figures; green is for trees and vegetation; orange for the human skin; brown for architectural structures; red for the clothes of royalty and to mark the borders; blue signifies water and curtains; and finally, black is used for outlines. A unique feature of *Phad* paintings is that the figures always face each other, not the viewer.

To widen the appeal of *Phad* paintings, stories and characters from the *Ramayana*, *Mahabharata*, *Hanuman Chalisa* and *Panchatantra* were introduced as subjects. The value of these paintings lies not only in their aesthetic quality, but also in the major role that they play in preserving the folklores of the state.



Pichwai Paintings

Rajasthan



Pichwais are large devotional Hindu paintings that portray Lord Krishna and his *leelas*. *Pichwai* paintings can be found hanging in the temples of the *Pushtimarg* devotional tradition, founded by Shri Vallabhcharya in the 16th century - particularly in the Srinathji temple in the holy town of Nathwada (Rajasthan district, north of Udaipur), Rajasthan. Located in the Aravalli Hills on the banks of the river Banas, Nathwada is a major pilgrimage destination. The lives of the people who live here and their occupations revolve around the temple. The cultural significance of the town may remind one of Mathura in Uttar Pradesh. For the people of Nathwada, Srinathji is not only Lord Krishna, but their king. Executed in miniature style, the paintings form the backdrop to the idol in the temple.



Pichwais were used to narrate tales about Lord Krishna to devotees who could not read. A temple always has several paintings of Krishna *leelas* in its collection, and these are displayed according to the calendar of festivals, like *Sharad Poornima*, *Raas Leela*, *Govardhan Pooja*, *Janmashtami*, *Gopashtami*, *Nand Mahotsav*, *Diwali*, *Holi* and so on. The paintings have distinct features for different occasions and seasons. A radiant pink colour—pink lotuses in particular—depicts summer; paintings of peacocks depict the rainy season. A night scene with a full bright moon represents *Sharad Poornima*. The paintings are sometimes embellished with rich embroidery and appliqué work. The use of pure gold adds to the value of the painting. It takes three or four days to prepare the colour from pure gold.

The *Pichwai* artists of Nathwada are a small community who live in the Chitron Ki Gali (Street of Paintings) or Chitrakaron Ka Mohalla (Colony of Painters). Each of the large *Pichwai* paintings is a group effort, made by several artists working under a master. The name *Pichwai* comes from the words *pich*, meaning back, and *wai*, meaning a textile hanging. Srinathji is a deity who is depicted as a seven-year-old boy—the child avatar of Lord Krishna, who held the Govardhan mountain on his little finger to save the people of Gokul from incessant rain. Srinathji is always represented with broad eyes, a fat nose and heavy body. *Pichwai* paintings also feature Radha, the *gopinis*, cows and lotuses.

This 400-year-old art form is taught in the age-old *guru-shishya* tradition. Originally, *Pichwai* was painted only on hand-spun starched cotton fabric and painted with organic colours obtained from indigo, gold, silver, saffron, zinc and other natural sources. The delicate hair of horses, goats or squirrels is most preferred for making the brushes. Bright colours like red, black, yellow and green dominate *Pichwai* paintings. Nowadays, paintings are made for art connoisseurs - smaller and on paper.

Bhil Paintings

Madhya Pradesh

The *Bhils* are a major tribal community in Madhya Pradesh; they are also found in Gujarat, Maharashtra, Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh. The *Bhils* trace their ancestry to Ekalavya (the famous archer from *Mahabharata* whom Dronacharya, Arjun's teacher, refused to accept as a student), and also to Valmiki, the author of *Ramayana*. The paintings are traditionally done on the clay walls of *Bhil* huts, and their main inspiration is nature. *Bhil* art is tribal art and consists of large shapes filled with bright colours and an overlying layer of uniform dots in different patterns. The dots, which are inspired by maize kernels, the chief crop and food of these people, are the distinct feature of *Bhil* paintings. *Khari* (gypsum-chalk) and *geru* (red ochre) are the two main colours used. The colours are natural - made from leaves, vegetables, turmeric and flour mixed with oil. Neem sticks and other twigs are used as brushes.





Anything connected with *Bhil* lives may be painted—the sun, the moon, animals, trees, rivers, mythological figures or the deities they worship (for instance, Vaghdev, Khandova and Sitalmata). The *Bhils* live in the lap of nature, surrounded by animals, birds and plants; they live in peace and harmony with all creatures of the jungle. The relationship

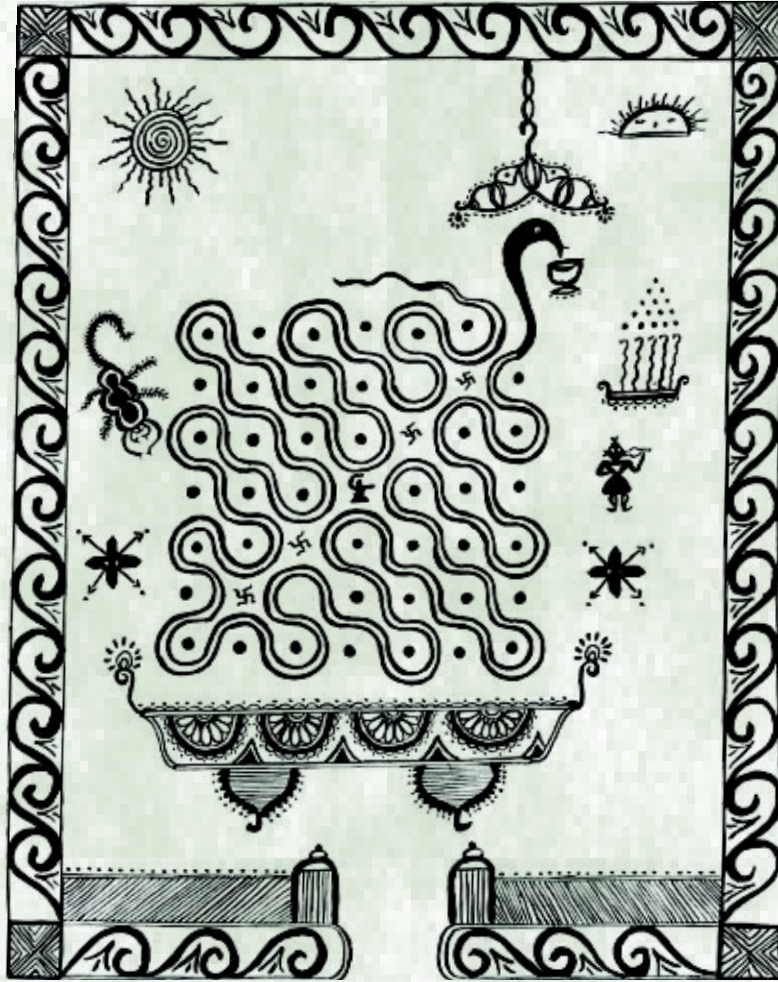
between human beings and nature, and scenes from everyday village life are the main themes of the paintings. A large variety of local rituals and beliefs of the subgroups translate into a wide range of subjects. Weddings, ritualistic ceremonies and festivals call for special paintings. The paintings

are believed to promote fertility, ward off diseases and help in appeasing the gods. However, not every painting depicts a traditional belief; the *Bhils* also paint simply to express happiness. The painted walls of their homes have an uplifting effect on the viewer.

Like most folk art forms of India, the art of *Bhil* painting is handed down from parents to children. Besides painting, the *Bhils* also practise carving and clay relief decorative arts. This community has been able to preserve its traditions across the centuries. The *Bhils* have been great warriors; they have fought against the Mughals, the Marathas and the British. The paintings made by these people have similarities with those made by the *Gond* community in the same state, as well as the *Rathwa* tribe of Gujarat. This is because the culture and customs of these three tribes are quite similar.

Bhil artists have now begun working on canvas in order to reach a wider market.





Nimadi Paintings *Madhya Pradesh*

Nimadi paintings come from Nimad in Madhya Pradesh. The region, which developed on the banks of the river Narmada, was the site of an ancient civilization. *Jains*, *Yaduvanshis*, *Siddhanthis*, *Nagapanthis* and several other communities have left a mark of their culture on Nimad at different periods of history. *Nimadi* paintings are line drawings with which the local people decorate the walls of their mud huts. Creating a *Nimadi* painting on the walls of a house is not simply an artistic expression—it is accompanied by certain rituals and the singing of folk songs specific to the occasion. The paintings are not meant to be permanent—they are changed frequently; every festival, like *Diwali*, *Dusserah*, *Ganapati Puja*, *Navaratri*, *Nag Panchami* and *Bhai Duj*, calls for a particular design.



Gond Paintings

Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh



Gond paintings are the art of one of the largest tribal communities of India. The *Gonds* are found mainly in Madhya Pradesh, but they also occupy pockets of Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, Chhattisgarh and Odisha. The name *Gond* comes from the Dravidian term *Kond*, meaning green mountains—more specifically, the Vindya and Satpura mountain ranges, where most of these people reside. Agriculture is the main means of livelihood for the *Gond* people.

Gond paintings, vivid and imaginative, are rooted in folk tales and folk culture, with nature as the main inspiration. Myths and legends,

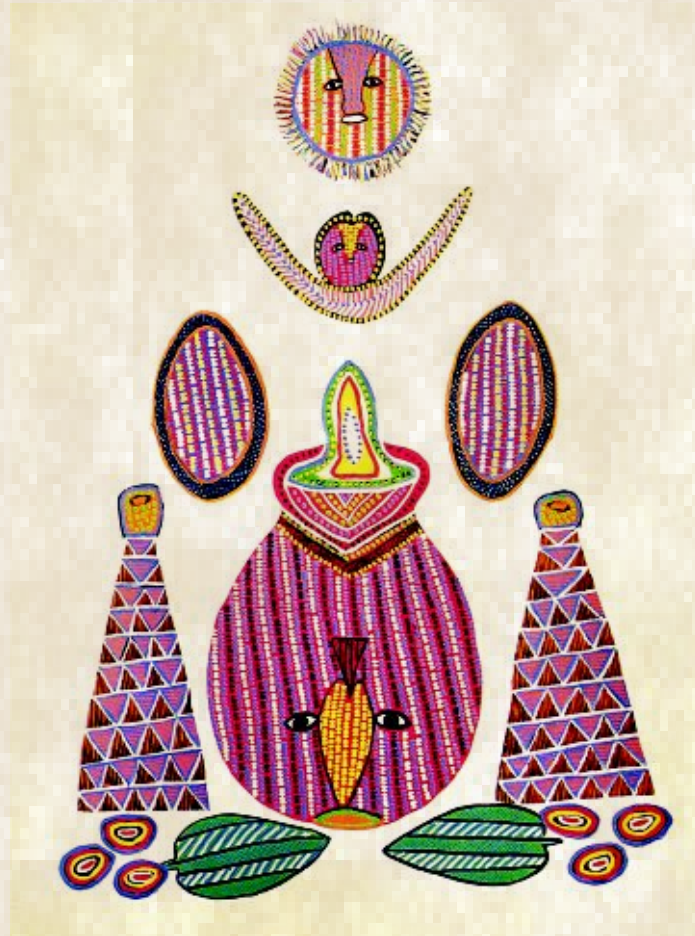
celebrations, rituals, local flora and fauna, scenes from daily life and supernatural entities and deities are some other subjects of these paintings. Among the *Gond* community, the *Pradhan Gonds* are accomplished singers; many of their paintings depict their songs. The paintings provide an aesthetic and traditional view of tribal village life. Since the *Gond* people respect the *Mahua* tree for its usefulness, it is a common motif in many *Gond* paintings. These people use their art to pass on stories and beliefs to future generations.

As with most tribal people, the *Gonds* believe that looking at a good image brings good luck. Hence, they decorate the walls and floors of their homes with motifs, especially



during festivals and weddings. The bright colours—white, orange, red, blue and yellow—are obtained from natural sources like coloured soil, plant sap, charcoal, leaves and cow dung.

Gond art has now reinvented itself. Modern *Gond* paintings are done on paper or canvas; due to a dearth of natural pigments, poster colours are used. They are mainly created during the festive season. The paintings can last up to twenty years without any damage to the colours. *Gond* art can now be seen on wooden trays, boxes, lamps, mats, coasters and a variety of household objects.



Pithora Paintings

Gujarat







Pithora is a form of wall painting practised by the *Rathwa* tribe, who live in the Panchmahal and Chhota Udepur districts of Gujarat. Baba Pithora is the chief god of the *Rathwas* and his picture adorns the walls of all their homes. The main protagonists of *Pithora* paintings are horses—the horses of the gods and goddesses and the ancestors of the community. The paintings are made colourful and attractive with motifs from nature, daily activities, animals, celebrated members of the community and so on. Important deities like Baba Ganesh, Baba Ind, Baba Pithora and Pithori Rani appear frequently.

Baba Ganesh is like a father figure to the *Rathwas*. He is depicted with a hookah in his hand. The *Rathwas* always begin a festival or an occasion by worshipping him. Baba Ind is the lord of rain and the protector of animals. He is portrayed as young, strong and brave; he is depicted with a parrot in his hand. Baba Pithora, the son of Rani Kali Koyal and Kandhu Raja, is the chief god of the *Rathwas*, believed to be a combination of different gods, animals, nature and all creations of the universe. Pithora Rani, his wife, is a celestial being and a devoted wife. In the paintings she is shown with a fan in her hand. Rani Kajal is Baba Ind's sister. She rescued Baba Pithora from the sea when he was a child and brought him up. She carries a comb in her hand, symbolic of her ability to cleanse the world. Baar Matha No Dhani is the Enlightened One with twelve heads, who protects nature and all living organisms. Raja Bhoj or Raja Bavaji was a rich, generous and benevolent king. He is always portrayed riding an elephant. He looks after

agriculture, livestock and rain. Abho Kunbi and Mathari are the creators of farming; they are believed to have taught this art to the human race. Nakti Bhuten, portrayed on a white horse, is the protector of the household. Lakhari and Jokhari are the authors of the future, and visit a home on the fifth or sixth day after the birth of a child, to write his future. Purvaj Na Panch Ghoda symbolically represents the ancestors of the community.



There are two kinds of *Pithora* paintings: *Ardho Pithora* and *Akho Pithora*. In the former, there are five to nine horses, and none of the horses have riders, except one, whose rider is Baba Ganesh himself. In *Akho Pithora* there are eighteen horses, all with their heavenly riders. The paintings are done on three inner walls of *Rathwa* houses. They are believed to bring peace, happiness and prosperity. *Pithora* paintings are more a part of the *Rathwa* community rituals than a mere art form. If a family faces a difficult situation, they request the *Bhadwa* or head priest to help them. The *Bhadwa* chants prayers and asks the *Ghardhani* (house owner) to vow that he will get a *Pithora* painting done in his house when his difficulties are over. The prayers are for the health and wellbeing of the family and the livestock, for a good harvest and to be blessed with a child. When the situation improves, the *Bhadwa* and the *Ghardhani* invite the *Lakhara*, a specialist *Pithora* painter, to create the painting. The completion of the painting signifies the end of the ritual and the fulfilment of the wish.

Pithora art has now been shifted to canvas, cloth and paper to ensure its survival.

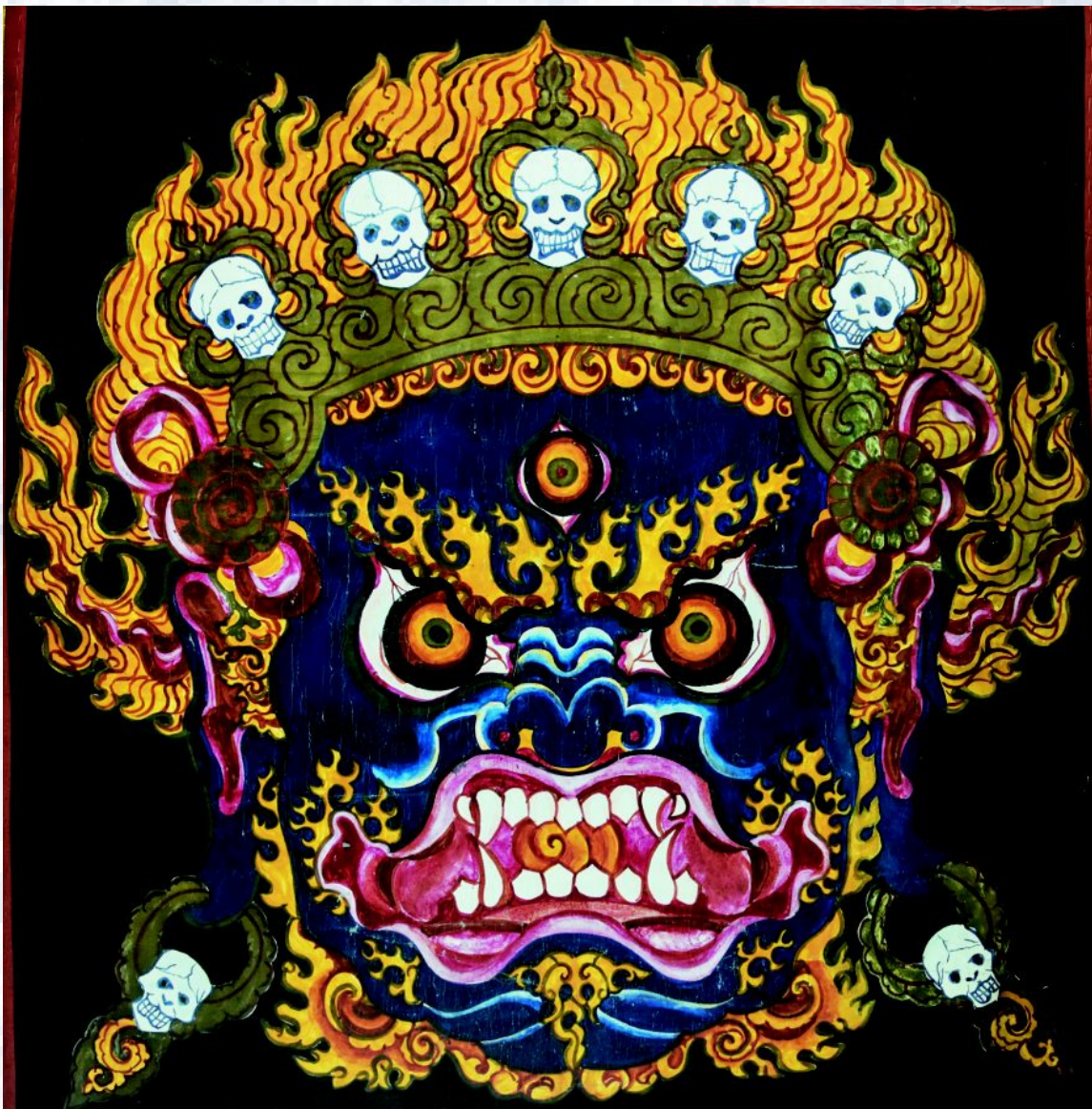


Thangka Paintings

Sikkim



Thangka is a Buddhist art form dating back to the 7th century. It is a sacred painting done on a flat, handmade cotton or silk canvas (which can be rolled up), depicting a Buddhist deity, scene or *mandala*. Apart from their aesthetic value, *Thangkas* have other uses: for meditation and teaching. They are placed in household shrines and used in rituals to help in visualisation. Visualising a particular deity helps to strengthen concentration and create a link with the deity. A Lama or teacher would travel with a collection of *Thangkas* to illustrate his stories on dharma, the lives of various masters and so on. A *Thangka* is not a product of artistic imagination, but a true depiction of a vision that a spiritual master had. Thus, these sacred paintings are treated as actual representations of spiritual realisation and have to be executed precisely. The artist's responsibility is to convey the master's original insight to other practitioners of Buddhism.





Thangkas were commissioned for various reasons: to help in meditation, to pray for long life, to offer thanksgiving or even just to accumulate merit. *Thangkas* have to be carefully preserved since they fade when exposed to light. They are made using ground mineral pigments. Usually, the materials to prepare a *Thangka* were supplied by the person commissioning the painting. Depending on how much he was spending, this could ensure a painting with good-quality pigments, adequate gold embellishment and a rich brocade mount.

Every Tibetan Buddhist sect has its favourite gods. Paintings associated with the *Nyingma* order feature a blue image of the Buddha Samantabhadra situated at the top centre; paintings related to the *Gelug* order include a figure of Tsong Khapa. In old Tibetan tradition, a *Thangka* painter is a sincere practitioner of Buddhism who has studied and practised Buddhism, and is familiar with the deities, their implements, symbolism and benefits. A *Thangka* is created as an expression of the artist's spirituality and to benefit the patron, who makes an offering of money to the artist in gratitude.

Most *Thangkas* are relatively small in size, designed as they are for personal meditation or instruction to monastic students. During religious festivals, however, very large *Thagkas* are displayed on the walls of a monastery for a short time. This art form developed along with the tradition of Tibetan Buddhist wall paintings, which were seen mostly in monasteries. These wall paintings can also be seen in the Ajanta Caves. The earliest paintings on cloth were possibly the ones found in the Mogao Caves at Dunhuang on the Silk Road, in Gansu province, China. The library cave had a collection of old and worn out manuscripts, paintings, prints and textiles, which had been sealed off in the 11th century. *Thangkas* were very rarely signed; yet, some painters are well-known. However, that is more likely because they were important monastic leaders. The ability to paint was considered an important accomplishment for a monk.

Bhitti Chitra

Bihar



Bhitti Chitra is a tradition of elaborate wall paintings. It is a home-grown art form developed by villagers in Bihar to beautify the mud walls of their huts and the surroundings. Gods and goddesses, birds and animals in ornamental forms, human figures and geometric designs comprise these wall paintings. *Bhitti Chitras* are painted on auspicious occasions—religious festivals, weddings, birth of a child and other social occasions—to bring good luck and prosperity to the homes. As in most folk cultures, there is a strong belief that painting something divine would help in wish fulfilment. The colours are extracted from the barks of trees, flowers, leaves and other natural sources. Bold hues like red, yellow, blue and black are preferred. The artists may not be professional painters, but painting *Bhitti Chitras* brings out their creativity.

Madhubani Paintings

Bihar



Madhubani or *Mithila* paintings are practised in the Mithila region of Bihar and adjoining parts of Terai in Nepal. The exact time of origin of this style is not known, but local mythology traces its roots to about 2500 years ago, to the *Ramayana*. During Sita's wedding to Rama, King Janaka, Sita's father, ordered that the entire kingdom should be decorated with paintings; moments from the wedding ceremony should also be captured. This is believed to be the beginning of *Madhubani* art. According to another school of thought, the ancient art of elaborate wall paintings or *Bhitti Chitra* in the state played a major role in the emergence of this genre. It is an exclusively feminine school of folk paintings; the deep religious beliefs of the local women could also have been an inspiration behind it. Through centuries, this art form has been passed down from mothers to daughters.

Like any form of folk art, *Madhubani* paintings also reflect the values, creativity, customs, and traditions of local people. W G Archer, a British civil servant who lived in the region during the colonial period, found these paintings in 1934, during a post-earthquake survey. Archer and his wife Mildred photographed the paintings and published their research findings over the next fifteen years. In the 1950s and '60s, Indian art scholars started showing interest in this genre. In 1966, a drought in the area led to the transformation of this localised, domestic art form into a national one. The economic crisis due to the prolonged drought led the women to commercialize this domestic art.

The vibrant colours used for *Madhubani* paintings are mostly natural: deep red from the *kusuma* flower and red sandalwood, black from burnt *jowar*, green from crushed leaves, blue from indigo, orange from the *palash* flower, white from rice powder and light yellow from turmeric mixed with banyan leaf milk. A variety of tools is used for these paintings - twigs, brushes, nib-pens, matchsticks and even fingers.

Madhubani paintings depict religion, traditions and social norms. The





borders are decorated with geometric and floral patterns. Initially, there were distinct styles of *Madhubani* art - *Bharni*, *Tantric*, *Katchni*, *Godna* and *Geru* - which were created by women from different castes. However, this distinction does not exist anymore; the different styles have merged into a uniform whole. Also, at first, *Madhubani* paintings had two forms: *Bhitti Chitra* or paintings on mud walls and *Aripana* or paintings on the ground or soil. They were created on freshly plastered mud walls and floors on auspicious occasions, only to be erased the next day. However, today, the paintings are also done on handmade paper, cloth and canvas. As the style has remained confined to a particular geographical area, there has not been much change in the content and style. A unique feature of these painting is that there are hardly any blank spaces. While the main theme revolves around Hindu deities like Krishna, Rama, Shiva, Durga, Lakshmi and Saraswati, heavenly bodies like the sun and the moon form the centre piece in many paintings. Scenes from royal courts and social events like weddings are also painted.

In 2012, 100 local trees were decorated with *Madhubani* paintings, depicting gods, goddesses and other religious and spiritual symbols, including scenes from the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*. This was done to prevent the felling of the trees to expand roads, and the plan succeeded. The paintings reminded people of their reverence for these figures, and the trees were saved from the axe.

Manjusha Paintings

Bihar



Manjusha is an ancient folk art of erstwhile Ang Pradesh, currently Bhagalpur city of Bihar. It represents the culture and rituals of the region. *Manjusha* art originated from the folk story of Bihula-Bishahari and has a religious significance, being associated with the Bishahari Puja. Bihula saved her husband, Bala Lakhendra, from the fury of Bishahari or Manasa, the snake goddess, who is known for her wrath when displeased. The worship of Bishahari can be traced back to the Indus Valley Civilization. This is a narrative folk art; earlier, singing the Bihula-Bishahari *Gatha* was an integral part of the art.

A *Manjusha* is a temple-shaped box made of bamboo and jute-straw, and lined with paper. It is used by devotees to keep the materials required for the religious ceremony. According to the folk tale, Bihula had requested that a boat be made with a cover to carry the dead body of her husband. The cover was painted to depict the sequence of events leading to his death. Bala Lakhendra was carried in the boat to *Indralok*. On the way Bihula encountered many difficulties, but she never gave up. The five Bishahari sisters took pity on her and returned her husband's life. The Bishahari festival honours the five sisters. During the Bishahari Puja in August, a temple-shaped box is made and the Bihula-Bishahari story is painted on it.

Members of the *Kumbhakar* and *Malakar* families were traditionally involved in this art. The *Kumbhakers* made pots on which the art was painted and the *Malakars* made the actual *Manjushas* or boxes. Interestingly, *Manjusha* art uses just three colours - pink, green and yellow. Pink signifies offering, green is for happiness and yellow is symbolic of prosperity. Borders are very important in this art. There are five kinds of borders: *Belpatra* (symbol of holy leaves, traditionally used in the worship of Shiva), *Lahariya* (waves of a river, symbolic of the ups and downs in life), *Mokha* (signs and decorations used by the ancient people of Ang region in their houses), *Tribhuj* (symbol of Shiva in Hinduism) and *Sarp Ki Ladi* (interconnected snake patterns, symbolizing unity).



Like *Madhubani*, *Manjusha* is also a line-based art form. However, while the line colour is black in *Madhubani*, in *Manjusha* it is green. Also, *Madhubani* is design-oriented art, whereas *Manjusha* is story-oriented.



Tikuli Art

Bihar



Tikuli is an 800-year-old intricate and rare art form of Patna, Bihar. It has its origins in the Mughal times, and enjoys great cultural significance. In Bihar, the word *Tikuli* means *bindi*, the bright and colourful dot worn on the forehead by most Indian women as a beauty accessory. Traditionally, *Tikuli* art was limited to decorating *bindis*, whereby a flimsy glass sheet was embellished with gold foil and jewels. The process involved melting glass, cutting it to size, adding colours, tracing patterns out of it and adding gold leaves. Traders would come to Patna to buy these *bindis* in large amounts. Women of royalty and aristocracy wore these little dots between their eyebrows to look more beautiful. The Mughals were active patrons of this art form. With the decline of the Mughals and the advent of British rule, *Tikuli* art gradually sunk into oblivion.

Tikuli requires great skill. Initially, the painting was done on glass. Then, as glass was fragile, it was replaced by wood, and finally by hardboard cut into different shapes—circular, rectangular, triangular or square. When gold became too expensive and scarce, enamel paint replaced the gold foil. Yet, in spite of so many changes, *Tikuli* has survived. From the confines of a small but beautiful piece of accessory, it has reinvented itself as an art form. Today, *Tikuli* stands as a symbol of female empowerment in Bihar; the art has been revived and developed into a source of livelihood for local women.



Creating *Tikuli* art is a painstaking process. The hardboard is coated with four or five layers of enamel. After the application of each coat, the surface is rubbed with sandpaper for a glossy, polished effect. Designs are drawn on the final enamel layer. Given the intricacy of the painting, the brushes used are very fine. The paintings are ideally made in spring and summer, when the temperature is optimal for the enamel coats to dry quickly. *Tikuli* paintings portray incidents from Lord Krishna's life, wedding scenes and festivals of Bihar.



Sohrai Paintings

Jharkhand and Bihar



Sohrai is a harvest festival celebrated in the states of Jharkhand, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Odisha and West Bengal. *Sohrai* paintings are traditional tribal paintings that were originally found in caves and later on the walls of mud huts. The art dates back to 10000 to 4000 BC, as is evident from the cave paintings of Satpahar in Hazaribagh district, which were made using similar techniques. The paintings are now done on paper and canvas too, since many contemporary village homes are made of brick and mortar. The art has also found an urban clientele. *Sohrai* art is based on nature; it is typically a harvest painting depicting the crop cycle.

According to *Santhal* mythology, Marang Buru, the *Santhal* god of the mountains, and Jaher Ayo, the goddess of the forests and elder sister of the *Santhals*, would visit their brothers on earth every year during the harvest season. To welcome them, women

would decorate the walls of their homes, and this is believed to be the origin of *Sohrai* art. From another point of view, once the monsoons are over, houses are repaired; the paintings are done on the walls as thanksgiving to nature. Having these paintings on the walls of a home is believed to bring good luck to the family. *Sohrai* art is made only by women and passed on from one generation to the next. Most of the women belong to the *Kurmi* community and live in the Hazaribagh district of Jharkhand, where these paintings are popular. The themes draw heavily from forest life. The biggest inspiration for these paintings is the artist's interaction with nature. Bulls, horses with riders, wild animals, trees, lotuses, peacocks, sparrows, squirrels, cows and horned deities are popular subjects. The paintings also celebrate the domestic cattle.

Natural mineral and clay-based colours are used for *Sohrai*: *dhudhi mitti* for white, *kaali mitti* or manganese black, *lal mitti* or red oxide from the local mines and *peeli mitti* or yellow ochre. That is why most paintings use only four colours—white, black, red and yellow. The colours are collected in the form of lumps and then powdered and mixed with glue to make them ready for use. *Sohrai* can be either monochromatic or colourful. A mud wall is first covered with a layer of white mud. While the layer is still wet, designs are drawn on it using the fingertips. The dark outline is made with cow dung, which was used to cake the walls.



Kohbar Paintings

Jharkhand and Bihar



Kohbar paintings are a beautiful and unique art form of Bihar and Jharkhand - a style of *Madhubani* painting done in the *Kohbar Ghar* or nuptial chamber to bless a newly-wed couple. The paintings are symbolic; they show fish, birds and snakes in union, or the lotus plant or a bamboo grove—signs of life and prosperity. The dominant theme is a pond with life forms that are known for their reproductive powers. This is supposed to ensure the fertility of the couple. The bamboo plant symbolises the man, and the fish symbolises fertility. The faces in the six leaves of the lotus plant represent the bride, whose fertility is compared to the lotus, rooted in the life source, the pond. Paintings

depicting Lord Shiva and Goddess Parvati are also considered very auspicious for the *Kohbar Ghar*, since of all the Hindu gods and goddesses, Shiva and Parvati's marriage is thought to be the most successful. The presence of Surya (the sun god) and Chandra (the moon god) in the *Kohbar Ghar* ensures



that they witness the wedding and shower their blessings on the new couple. The nine planets are also often chosen as subjects for *Kohbar Ghar* paintings. Love birds symbolise the ever growing love of the couple.



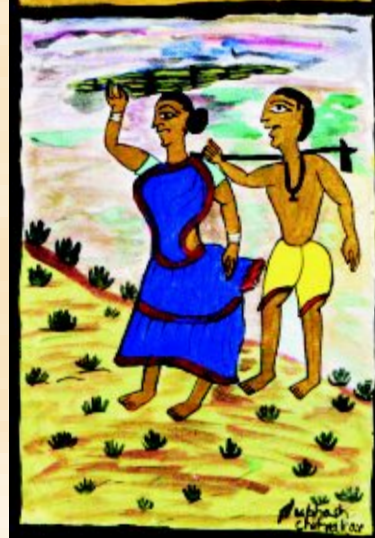
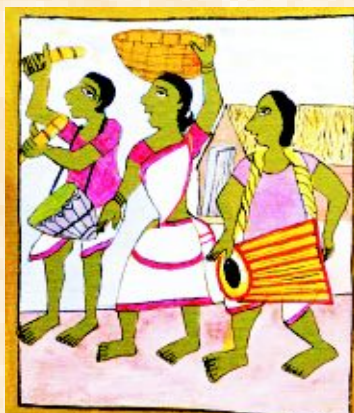
In a *Maithil* wedding, several rituals and customs are conducted in the *Kohbar Ghar* over four or five days. In the past, women painted the walls for the occasion, using natural colours, and the paintings were kept for at least a year after the wedding. Today, paintings are done on paper and put up in the *Kohbar Ghar*. The wall in front of which the rituals and customs are performed is well decorated. An *aripan* or *rangoli* is made on the floor. After the wedding, the bride and the groom spend four or five nights in the *Kohbar Ghar*. The marriage is consummated surrounded by these beautiful paintings. On the fourth or fifth day, the entire wedding ceremony, except the *phas*, is repeated in the *Kohbar Ghar*. Only after this can the wedding be declared complete.

Kohbar paintings are meant to ensure a strong bond of love and affection between a newly-wed couple. Different tribal groups and sub-castes introduce their own variations in this art form.



Paitkar Paintings

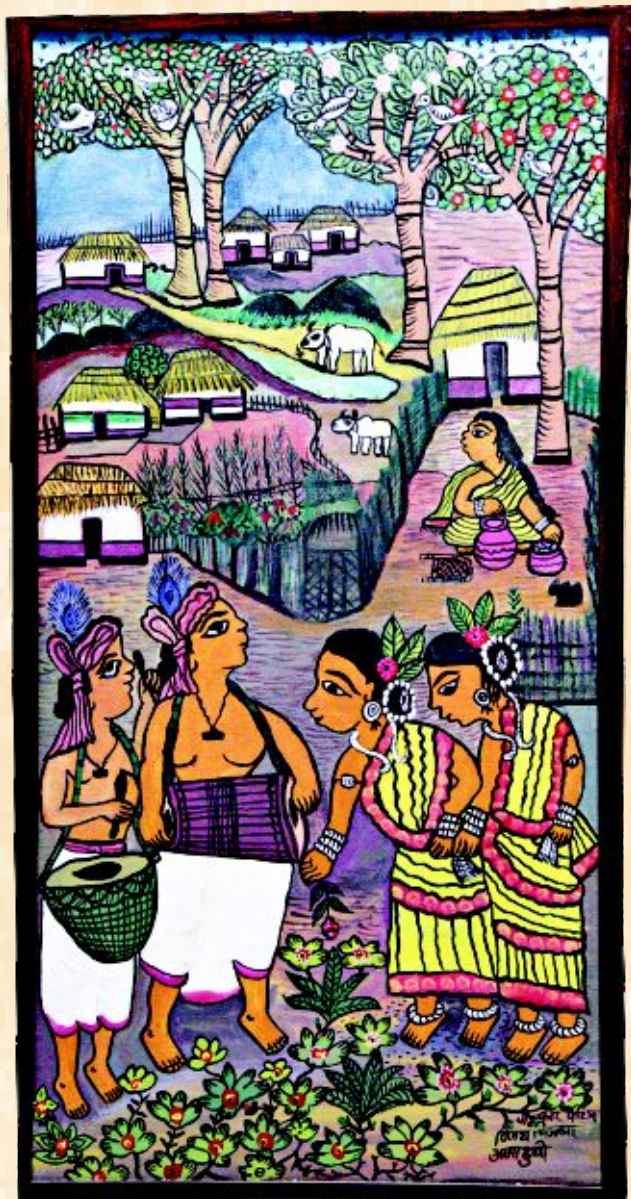
Jharkhand



Indigenous art and culture is always linked to identity. The *Paitkar* art form of Jharkhand consists of scroll paintings, a variant of the *Pattachitra* of Odisha and *Patashilpa* of West Bengal. It is practised by the *Chitrakars* (the community of artists) of the Amadubi village in Dhalbhumgarh area of Jharkhand. Though this style of painting is very old, unlike *Pattachitra* and *Patashilpa* it had faded into oblivion for a long time, due to lack of patronage.

Paitkar paintings have long been associated with storytelling performances. The paintings consist of a series of five to twenty frames, which describes the life of the tribal community, the rural area where they live, their festivals and practices. As with scroll painters from other parts of the country, the artist-singers move from one house to another, unrolling their scrolls and singing the story. This art form has remained confined to a small area, and the painter-singers have played a major role in disseminating the oral history of the region.

Paitkar scrolls are made from leaves and barks of trees. The paintings have bold lines and are earthy, vivid and very imaginative. Paintings are also done on paper or cloth. Mostly, water-based colours derived from nature are used. The artists collect the basic primary colours and use them to create other colours. Some important shades used in *Paitkar* paintings are white (lime powder), yellow and red (stone or soil), black (lampblack or burnt rice), blue (indigo) and green (broad bean leaves). In earlier *Paitkar* paintings, the dominant colours were olive green, deep brown and black. Later, indigo and ochre yellow were added to the colour palette. In the painting of religious or epic-based stories, red is the predominant colour. Human characters occupy most of the painted space. The subjects of *Paitkar* paintings include fairs, festivals, social life, mythology, Indian epics (*Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*), flora and fauna. The popular *Santhal* creation myth about *Pilchuhara* and *Pilchuburhi* is also an important subject of these paintings.





Jadu Patia Paintings Jharkhand

Jadu Patia is a rare art form, a variable of the *Paitkar* - a type of painting and storytelling closely linked to the identity of the local people. *Jadu Patia* scrolls were a very old tradition among the aboriginal *Santhal* people of West Bengal and Bihar (before Jharkhand was carved out of Bihar). *Jadu* means magic and magician, while *patia* means painter. *Jadu Patia* artists are called magic painters. The subject matter of these paintings is life after death. *Jadu Patia* artists move from village to village with their scrolls, chanting the traditional stories of creation, death and life in the underworld. This art form is believed to have the capacity to send the wandering souls of the dead to heaven and free them of all pain. Centuries ago, *Jadu Patia* painters would visit homes where a death had occurred. They would create a painting in which the dead person's eyes would not have pupils. The family would see this depiction as the suffering of the soul. To draw the pupils, the family would make an offering to the painter—a practice known as *Chakshudaan*. The theory was that once the painter completed the *Chakshudaan*, the eyesight of the wandering soul was returned, and he was at peace.

Nowadays, *Jadu Patia* paintings have a wider range of subjects; mythology and folklore have become important themes. Raw, natural colours like *geru pathar* (a red stone), *seem pata* (leaves of broad beans) and lampblack are mixed to get different colours. Paint brushes are made from thin twigs. The painters think of a concept, compose a song and make ten to twelve paintings based on the theme. The paintings are joined together with homemade glue in a series, following the storyline. The joined paintings are then rolled into a scroll. As the scroll is unfolded, the painter sings the story depicted in each painting. This special art form from Jharkhand's Santhal Pargana needs to be preserved so that it is not lost forever.

Patahilpa

West Bengal







Bengal *Patashilpa* is an art form that can be traced back to over 5,000 years. This style of painting has a strong link with the paintings of Harappa, Mohenjodaro and the Ajanta Caves. With the advent of Brahmanical influence, some of the artistes or *patuas* become Hindus. Again, during the Buddhist period, many *patuas* embraced Buddhist thoughts. That was perhaps the golden age of the *patuas*. Then, during the Muslim period, most of the *patuas* adopted Islam as their religion and were influenced by the Rajasthani style of painting imported to Bengal by the Mughals. This influence still shows itself in the paintings.

There are two types of *Patas* (paintings): the *Chauka*, which is a square or rectangle and the *Jarano* or *Gutano*, which is scroll. Scroll painting is one of the earliest art forms of Bengal, where it originated with the most ancient people of the Austro-Asiatic culture. The *Chauka* canvas is used for painting a particular deity or mythical or social subject. On the other hand, a scroll painting depicts a story serially. It is about one to three feet wide and ten to twenty feet long, depending on the length of the story. The two ends of the scroll are attached to two bamboo sticks. After completing a painting, the *patuas* sing the story as they show the pictures by unrolling the bottom of the scroll and re-rolling the top. These songs are known as *Pater Gaan*.

Patashilpa is actually a combination of *Patachitra* and *Pater Gaan*. *Patashilpa* is more or less a family affair, where every member of the family contributes in some way or the other to the art. The popular themes are derived from India's rich Hindu mythology and the great epics. Contemporary themes and social issues also find a place in the *Patachitras*.

There are three styles of *Patua* art:

1. Tribal style as seen in *Santhali Patas*
2. Bengal style as seen in *Kalighat Bazar* paintings
3. Popular style influenced by Rajasthani art

The paintings are made on a piece of cloth known as *pati*. The brushes are made from bamboo sticks and goat hair. The colours are extracted from natural herbs and plants.

The *Kalighat Patachitra*, which evolved from the traditional *Patachitra* of rural Bengal, occupies an important place in the history of modern art, as it is considered the first school of modern art in India. As the name implies, this school developed around the vicinity of the Kalighat temple in Kolkata, between the 19th and early 20th century. Around the middle of the 18th century, many *patuas* moved to Kolkata from the villages, and settled around the Kalighat temple. They soon realised that painting the big, long scrolls was time-consuming and not very economical, as there were not many buyers for them. Their clients were the people who came to the temple to offer prayers, who preferred to buy smaller, more affordable paintings to take home as souvenirs. Hence, the *patuas* started making smaller paintings. But they continued to use natural colours.

The paintings initially depicted religious figures like Kali, Durga, Shiva, Vishnu in his ten incarnations, and Krishna, as well as well-known characters of the time, like Jhansi ki Rani. Eventually, they moved beyond religious and mythological themes, and started



depicting contemporary social life of the 19th and early 20th centuries. The paintings had strong lines and bold colours, and the settings were simple. In time, the artists even painted satirical and humorous scenes from the *Babu-Bibi* culture, showing the changes in the social life of Bengalis under colonial influence. A painting would usually be a joint effort of a group of artists - often, a family. The different steps of a painting included the extraction of the natural colours, drawing the outline, filling in the colour, and adding the motifs and background design. Each member of a family would have a designated role to play in the creation of the painting.

As the *patuas* sold these paintings in a mass market, they often compromised on the quality: backgrounds were left plain, non-essential details were removed and only basic combinations of colours were used. They started using mill-made paper and cheap readymade paints. The practice of *Kalighat Pat* started to die out in the early 20th century, as there was a greater demand for cheaper, commercially produced images. Many *patua* families moved back to the villages and started looking for alternative means of employment and livelihood.

Even today, most of the *patuas* live a hand-to-mouth existence. Younger members of a family learn the art by observing their fathers and grandfathers. The *chitrakar* families cannot depend entirely upon the income the *patuas* earn from making icons and displaying scrolls.



Pattachitra

Odisha



Pattachitra is one of Odisha's earliest art forms, a folk tradition that goes back several centuries. It is characterised by vibrant colours and superb craftsmanship. *Patta* means *vastra* or cloth and *chitra* means paintings. *Pattachitra* therefore means paintings on cloth.

The preparation of a *patta* is an interesting process. A clean piece of cloth is spread on the floor. Powdered tamarind seeds are mixed with water to prepare a special gum. This gum is applied over the piece of cloth. Before the gum dries up, another piece of cloth is placed on top of it and a fresh coating of gum is applied. The *patta* is then dried in the sun. A paste of soft white stone powder and the tamarind seed gum, mixed in proper proportions, is applied to both sides of the dried *patta*. The *patta* is then cut to size and polished—first with a rough stone, and then with a smooth pebble, to make the surface suitable for painting. The polishing takes several hours and is done by the female members of the *chitrakar* or artist families. Traditionally, the *chitrakars* are men. While working on a painting, which may take several months, the *chitrakar* follows austere rituals such as eating only vegetarian food and sleeping on the floor.

The colours used for *Pattachitra* paintings are bright and made from naturally available raw materials. A brilliant and permanent white is obtained by powdering, boiling and filtering conch shells. *Haritala*, a kind of stone, is processed to get yellow. *Ramaraja*, a kind of indigo, provides the blue. Black is made from either lampblack or burnt coconut shells. Red comes from *hingula*, a mineral stone. A variety of shades are obtained from the primary colours through expert mixing. The unique aspect of these colours is that

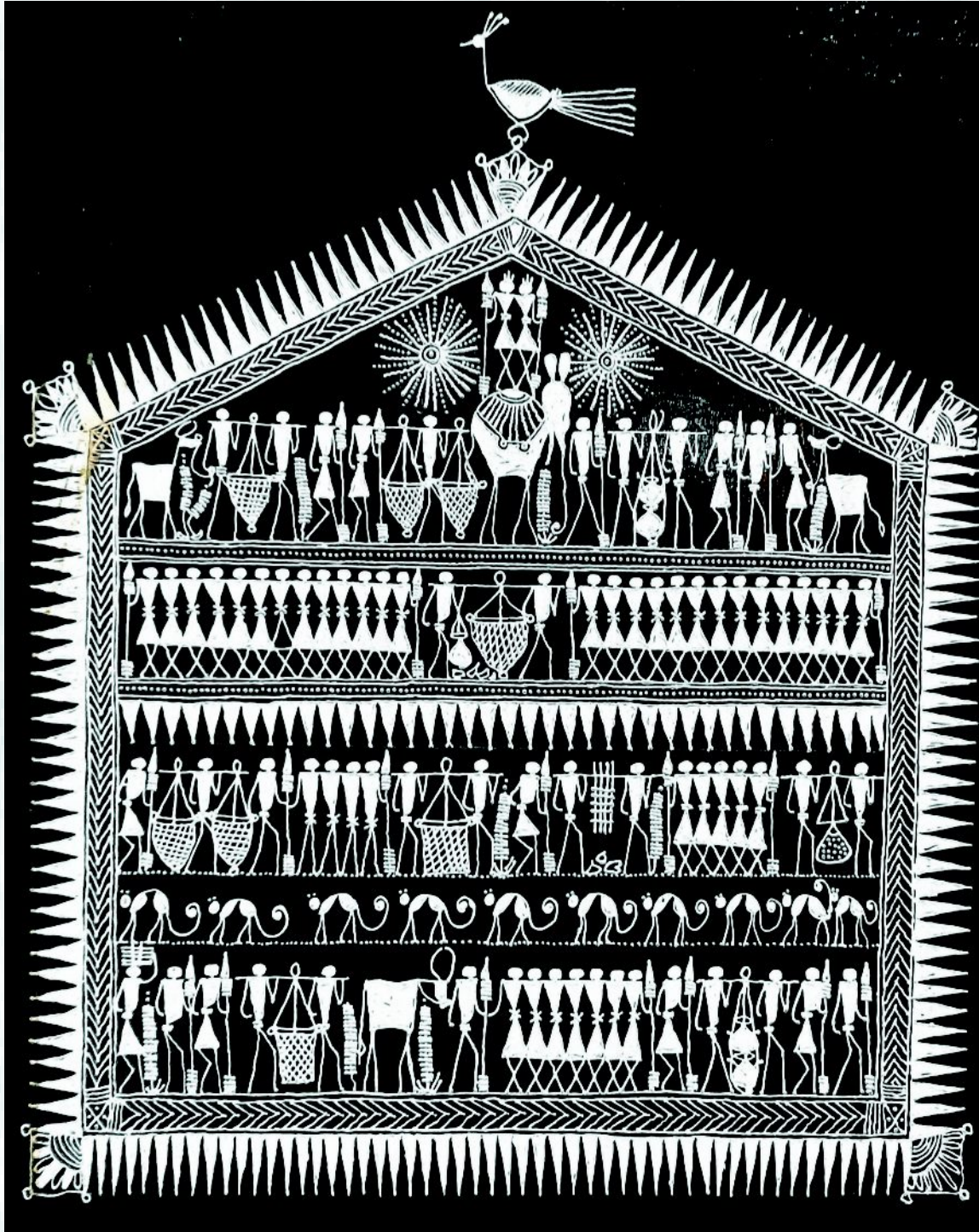
they retain their brilliance for a long period, and the gum used for treating the *pattas* keeps it free from insects. The canvasses are profusely adorned with colourful flowers, creepers and prominent borders. While traditional *chitrakars* continue to use several vibrant colours, modern artists tend to tone down the shades to match more refined tastes. The three types of brushes used—namely, broad, medium and fine—are made from the hair of buffaloes, calves and mice respectively. *Pattachitra* paintings are also done on wooden and bamboo boxes, pots and other decorative items.

The most important subject of *Pattachitra* is Jagannath, the lord of the universe. Themes are also taken from Hindu mythology and Indian epics. Over the centuries, this art form has absorbed many features from Mughal miniature paintings as well as paintings from western India (Gujarat) and southern India (Andhra Pradesh).



Saura Paintings

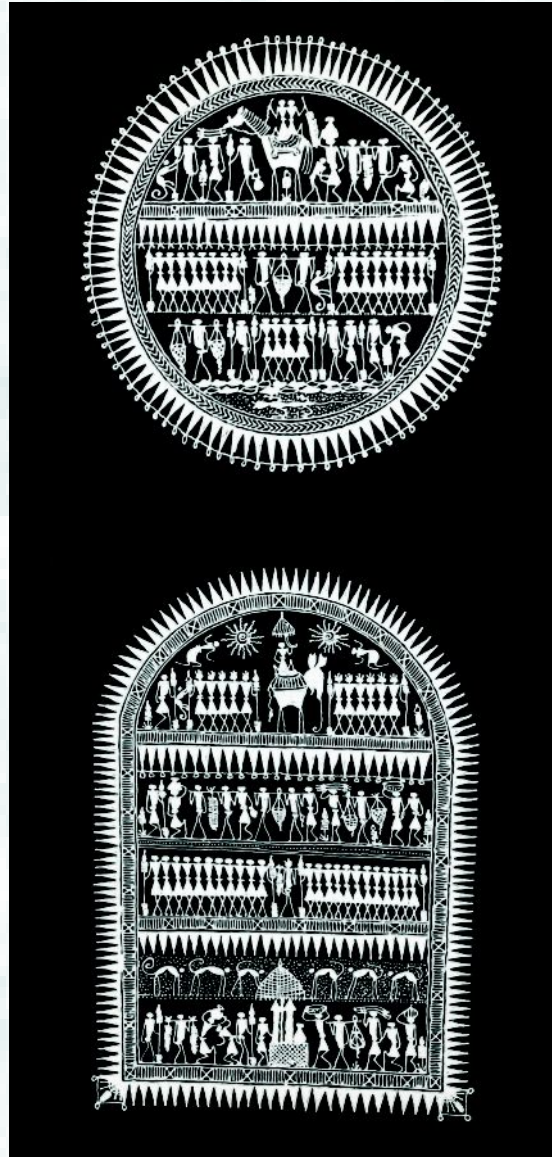
Odisha



The great Indian epics, the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, mention the *Sauras*. They are one of India's oldest tribes. And they have a rich tradition in art. The *Sauras* are famous for the variety of their paintings based on religious and ceremonial themes. The paintings are known for their elegance and ritualistic association. The *Sauras* remember the dead and their gods and goddesses through these traditional wall paintings drawn inside their houses. Each painting has a story behind it and an occasion to draw it. Various types of pictograms are drawn to appease the gods and ancestral spirits. The religious icons of the *Sauras* are called *iditals*. The minute details of the pictograms reflect the everyday life of the tribe, their social customs and their culture.

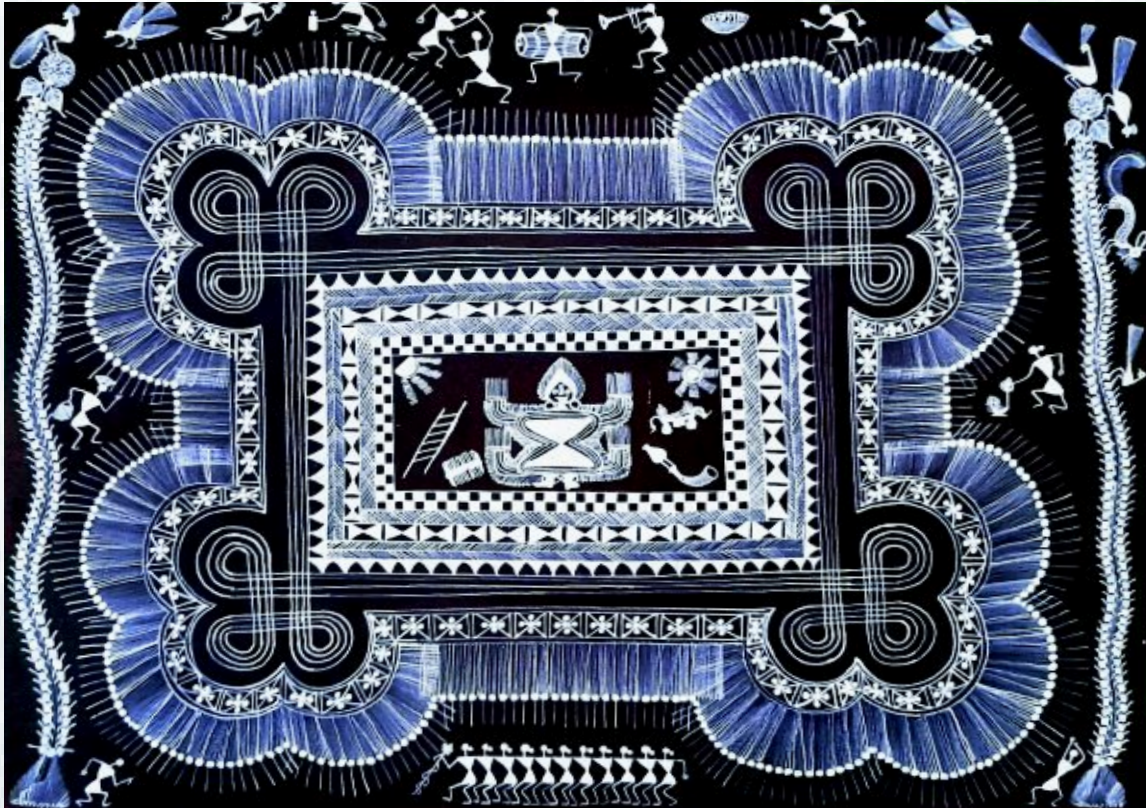
The *Saura* people are inseparably connected with their ancestors. They believe that the dead sometimes nurture their living descendants and yet, at other times, inflict upon them diseases from which they may even die. The relationship between the *Sauras* and their supernatural entities is very intimate and is reflected in their paintings. The *iditals* are primarily meant to propitiate the gods and ancestors. One could say that the *iditals* play the most important role in the life and religion of the *Sauras*. Each *idital* contains different symbols and scenes, depending on the purpose for which it is meant. *Saura* rites and religious practices feature prominently in all their paintings.

The day before the pictogram is drawn, the wall is washed by the women of the family with a solution made from locally available red earth. The brushes used for painting are made from date palm or bamboo twigs, which are slightly splayed at the end. For paint, the artist uses rice flour and water mixed in a small bowl. In the centre of every *Saura* house, one finds a grinding or pounding hole, where the rice flour is made with the help of a long pole. Lampblack and red ochre are other preferred colours.



Warli Paintings

Maharashtra



Warli paintings of Maharashtra, created by the Warli tribal community living in the north Sahyadri range, comprise a popular style of Indian folk painting. A large concentration of the community is found in Thane district, near Mumbai. The Warlis have their own customs, beliefs and traditions. The art represents the humble life led by these people. The name comes from the word *Warla* or *Varla*, meaning a piece of land.

This very rudimentary style of painting uses basic geometric shapes, like circles, triangles and squares. The circle is representative of the sun and the moon, and the triangle is symbolic of mountains, trees and the basic human anatomy. The square indicates a sacred piece of enclosed land. The central motif in every painting is the square, which is known as *Chauk* or *Chaukat*. There are two types of *Chauk* - *Devchauk* and *Lagnachauk*. The mother goddess Palaghata, who symbolises fertility, is drawn inside a *Devchauk*. Palaghata is also the goddess of marriage, and without a painting of Palaghata, a marriage cannot be solemnized.

Like several other folk art forms of India, *Warli* was also used to pass down folklore within a community, where the members were not familiar with the written word. The community graduated from being forest dwellers to a pastoral one. The paintings depict scenes from their daily lives, with human and animal figures. Mythological characters and deities are absent; bright colours are not used. Though there are no records of the origin of this art, its roots may be traced to as early as the 10th century AD. The paintings are done on earthen walls, made of red, brown or ochre mud, using just one colour - white - with occasional dots in red and yellow. The white colour is made from rice powder, which is made sticky by adding a natural binder. Bamboo sticks are used as brushes.

The monochromatic paintings are an expression of the imagination, beliefs and customs of the *Warli* community. Oft repeated themes include village landscapes, farmers cultivating land, marriage ceremonies, domestic animals and trees. A popular type of *Warli* painting includes simple human figures drawn in a spiral form and in concentric circles.



This image represents the belief that life is an eternal journey with no beginning or end. The harmony and balance in the painting is symbolic of the harmony and balance in the universe. In *Warli* paintings, the trees always soar above the figures of humans and animals, suggesting their sacredness. Elements of nature are the focal point of these paintings. Nowadays, *Warli* paintings are also made on handmade paper, usually brown or green in colour. The art form can be found on cloth, canvas, pottery and decorative handicrafts items.



Kalamkari Art

Andhra Pradesh and Telangana





Kalamkari is an ancient style of hand painting, done mainly on cotton textile and sometimes on silk, using natural dyes, by a process that involves as many as twenty-three intricate steps. Like several other Indian folk art traditions, *Kalamkari* too, was born out of the art of storytelling. Storytellers would travel from village to village, carrying the paintings with them, retelling popular mythological and religious tales. *Kalamkari* is practised in Isfahan in central Iran, and in the Indian states of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana. It is influenced by Persian art; the name too, is of Persian origin: *kalam* means pen and *kari* means craftsmanship. This art of drawing with a pen became popular during medieval Islamic rule. The wealthy Golconda Sultanate in Hyderabad patronized the art in the Coromandel and Golconda provinces. The practitioners of this art were called *qalamkars*, from which the term *Kalamkari* evolved. Several rural families in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana practise this art; it is their means of livelihood.

There are two distinct styles of *Kalamkari* in India: the *Srikalahasti* style and the *Machilipatnam* style. In the former, the *kalam* or pen is used for freehand drawing, and then the drawing is filled with colours. Since this style developed under the patronage



of temples, it has a strong religious identity. These paintings depict scenes from the *Ramayana*, *Mahabharata*, *Puranas* and other mythological classics. Chariot banners, temple hangings and scrolls were painted in this style. The *Machilipatnam* style flourished in Pedana, near Machilipatnam, in Krishna district of Andhra Pradesh, under Mughal patronage. It is influenced by Persian art. Flowers, peacocks and paisleys are popular motifs.

The fabric to be used for a *Kalamkari* painting is first soaked in cow dung and bleach, to give it a uniform off-white colour. To avoid the smudging of dyes on the fabric, it is then dipped in a mixture of buffalo milk and myrobalans. The fabric is then washed twenty times and sun-dried. Bamboo slivers are used to draw the outline of the painting, using a black dye. Then a flat-tipped brush is used to fill in the colours, one



at a time. After the application of each colour, the fabric is washed. The colours are very bright, and include earthy tones of red, blue, green, yellow and brown. Dyes are obtained by extracting colours from several kinds of roots and leaves as well as from mineral salts of iron, tin, copper and alum.

Kalamkari art is no longer limited to paintings; it is found in apparel and furnishing material also. A band of dedicated artists is taking this detailed, painstaking and complicated style of painting forward.



Chittara Art

Karnataka

The *Deewaru* tribe, residing in the villages of Hasunvanthe, Honnemaradu and Majina Kaanu in the Shimoga district of south Karnataka, have a beautiful art called *Chittara*. It adorns the red mud coated walls of their huts. The paintings, known for their vibrant colours and harmonious compositions, mostly depict the surrounding tropical forests, the important events in the lives of the tribe, their daily routine, the birds and animals around them, marriage, fertility, the sowing of paddy, the indigenous toys their children play with, the flowers they use for worship and so on.

Four basic colours - white, black, red and yellow—are used to create the murals. White is obtained from rice paste, red from local laterite soil, deep black from burnt rice and yellow from *gurige* seeds. The women of the household make the colours in form of powders in large quantities, and store them. When required for a painting, small amounts of the powders are mixed with water. The fine fibres of the local *pundi* plant are used for the brushes.

The motifs of *Chittara* art are geometric and consist mainly of lines. The drawings are freehand. Music fills the air as the paintings are created on the walls, as every situation and chore that is depicted has a relevant song associated with it. Marriage is the most important event in their lives and it is depicted in the paintings within the *Kalyan Mandap* or altar where the bridal couple is seated. The painting also includes the community, and captures the happy mood of the occasion. Sometimes, two weddings may take place in a family simultaneously. This is depicted in the *Pappali Chittara*. The *Mundige Chittara* represents the pillars of the home; a palanquin at the centre of the



painting carries the bride and the groom. The *Theru Chittara* is an illustration of the temple chariot festival, in which the devotees are seen pulling the ropes of the chariot.

Chittara art is now executed on handmade rice paper, so that it gets a wider market and the artists can augment their income. Traditional paddy husk *kalashas* and *torans* are decorated with *Chittara* art and sold as decorative items. Several terracotta and papier-mâché artifacts are also decorated with *Chittara* motifs. They form a part of the tribal art collection sold through various outlets. Practising this art form has a socio-cultural value. The women express their creativity through the paintings, and the customs and rituals associated with the art bring the community closer together.



Cheriyal Scroll Paintings

Telangana



Cheriyal is a quiet village on the outskirts of Hyderabad, in Warrangal district of Telangana. It is known for its scrolls. Earlier, this art form was prevalent all over Andhra Pradesh, with slight local variations in the different parts of the state, influenced by local customs and traditions, but now, it is confined to a single village.

Cheriyal scrolls were used by the *Kaki Padagalu* community to relate stories from mythology and the epics. The storytellers stayed with the painters in their homes to guide them in the creation of a painting. As they narrated the stories, the painters picked up their brushes and began the visual depiction. The storytellers also suggested the colours to be used for each deity. The storytellers then used the paintings to narrate the stories to the villagers. For the farmers, after a day's hard work, these tales of gods and goddesses were a very pleasant diversion. The paintings enhanced the experience beautifully. The scrolls, sometimes as long as fifty metres, were like film rolls, showing the stories in great detail.

Cheriyal scrolls are made from rolls of *khadi* cloth, which is treated with a boiled mixture of tamarind, *sago*, chalk powder and rice starch. This treated cloth is very durable and can be left in the open. The scrolls are hand-painted with natural colours. The background of the paintings is usually red. In a long scroll, the first painting is usually that of Ganapati, followed by Saraswati - the two deities worshipped by the painters before starting a painting. This is followed by the scenes of the story in question. Each frame of the scroll can have a single scene or more, depending on the length of the scroll. It takes three or four months to complete a scroll.



Cheriyal paintings also portray the lifestyle of the seven communities living in the region—the *todi* collectors (*todi* is a drink collected from the palm tree), the *dhobis* or washermen, the *chamars* or leather workers, the *hajjaams* or barbers, the weavers, the fishermen and the farmers. Each caste and sub-caste has its own rituals, deities and stories, which are represented in these paintings.

Originally, the colours for these paintings were made by crushing stones of various colours, but now, *Cheriyal* artists use acrylic colours. The singing storytellers have become an almost extinct group, so the art is now appreciated only for its visual appeal. The paintings may not be perfect works of art, but they are a reflection of the local culture. The scrolls no longer find many buyers, so the art has reinvented itself to tell a single story on a single canvas frame.



Nirmal Paintings

Telangana



Nirmal paintings, which have derived their name from their place of origin, are the work of a community of artists who live in the Nirmal district of Telangana. As with many other folk art forms, the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* are popular themes here, as are human figures, particularly those of women.

The origin of *Nirmal* paintings can be traced to the south Indian *Kakatiya* dynasty, whose capital was at Orugallu (present-day Warrangal). The art was practised in the 14th century by a small group of artists, who were called *Naqash*. It was also patronised by the Mughal rulers. The Nizam of Hyderabad was accorded a grand welcome when he visited Nirmal. The venue was beautifully decorated using this art style and the chair reserved for the Nizam

was also painted in the same style. Suspended above the chair was an intricately designed banana bud, which opened up to shower golden petals on the honoured guest. It is said that the Nizam was overwhelmed by the superb quality of the art and thus began patronising the artists. In the 1950s, Lady Hydari brought *Nirmal* painters to Hyderabad, which was then a princely state, to promote their art.



The themes of *Nirmal* paintings are derived from the artwork in the Ajanta Caves as well as Mughal art. A golden hue set against a black background is the highlight of these paintings. The natural colours are extracted from minerals, herbs and other plants. First, a wooden surface is lacquered and the design is painted on it. Bright colours are used to fill in the outline and finally, the paintings are touched with gold and varnished. Over the years, *Nirmal* artists have moved away from painting scenes from the epics to focus more on the old Indian style. Now they also make lacquered furniture, boxes, large screens, trays and bowls, to keep up with changing consumer demands.

Kalamazhuthu

Kerala



Kalamezhuthu or *Kalam* is an ancient and unique form of ritualistic art found in the temples and sacred groves of Kerala. Here, deities are represented pictorially on the floor, using coloured powders or *kolapoddi*, during temple ceremonies. The creation of the paintings is accompanied by the *Kalampattu* (specific songs) and the *Kalapradikshanam* (the dance movements related to the puja). The visual depiction of the gods and goddesses, the accompanying music and ritualistic dance, along with the *puja*, collectively form the *Kalamezhuthumpattum* or the *Kalamezhuthupattu*.

The *Vishnudharmottara Puran*, composed 1500 years ago, has a story about the origin of *Kalamezhuthu*: the twin saints, Nara and Narayana, were doing penance at Badaryashrama. Indra sent female dancers to distract them. Narayana's mind, however, was far from being diverted; instead, he tapped on his thigh and created the picture of an extremely beautiful woman. According to another version, which is more widely accepted in the state, the picture was created on the floor and this was the beginning of *Kalamezhuthu* in Kerala.

The figure in a *Kalam* depends on the presiding deity of the temple or the sacred grove, the religious occasion and the caste or community creating it. The main deities depicted through this art include Bhagavati, Bhadrakali, Ayappan, Vettakkorumakan (Shiva *putra*), Darika (the *asura* killed by Bhadrakali) and Sarpa (Naga). For about fifteen minutes before the commencement of the drawing, a *puja* is performed by the *Melsanthi* or priest. This is accompanied by the singing of a *shloka* specific to the deity. The drawing is made on the floor, just outside the sanctum on the right of the deity. Each drawing takes two to four hours to complete.

Natural dyes obtained from charcoal, rice, turmeric, green leaves and lime mixed with



turmeric are used to prepare the five main colours - black, white, yellow, green and red. Strict rules about dimensions, choice of colours and other minute details are adhered to while creating a *Kalam*. The art starts from the centre and moves outwards; it cannot be done in the reverse order. The artist does not enjoy much artistic liberty in creating a *Kalam*, as this art is associated with religious beliefs. Folk rituals and art practices are transmitted exclusively through oral traditions, and this holds true for *Kalamezhuthu* also. No tools are used to make the drawings—the artists only use their bare hands. Extra decoration in the form of red hibiscus garlands and sprinkled *tulsi* leaves are allowed. The *Kalam* artists normally belong to the *Kurup*, *Theyyampadi*, *Nambiar*, *Theeyadi Nambiar* and *Theeyadi Unni* communities. The *Kalams* created by each community have their own characteristics. Ritualistic songs worshipping the deity are sung after the completion of a *Kalam*, accompanied by indigenous musical instruments.

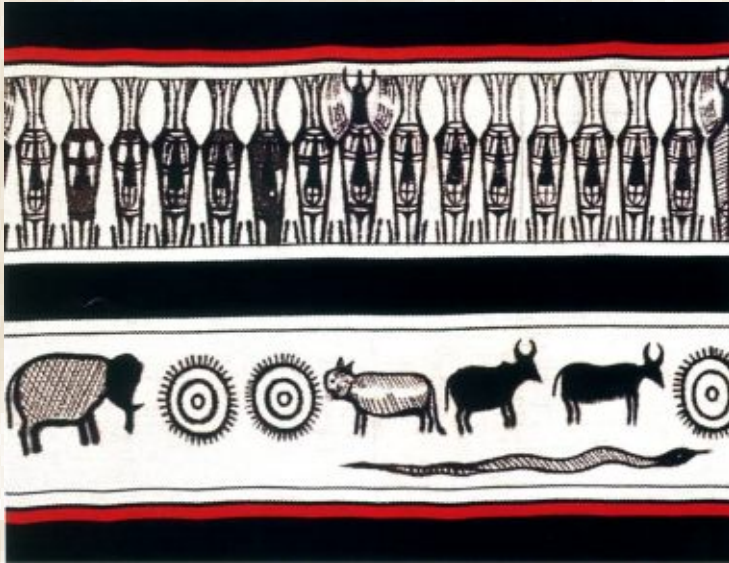


Karaku Marhe *Nagaland*



Karaku Marhe is a bamboo sheath painting indigenous to the *Angami* and *Chakesang* tribes. Black extracted from the barks of trees and white made from ashes of bones are the two colours used in this style of traditional painting.

Tsungko *Nagaland*



Tsungko is an indigenous style of painting of the Ao tribe of Nagaland, done on their traditional shawls. The materials used for these paintings are powdered charcoal, soot and the ash of burnt bamboo leaves mixed with the juice extracted from a latex plant.

Sanchipat Manuscript *Painting* *Assam*

Assam has a long tradition of painting on the bark of the *Sanchi* tree (*Aquillaria Agallocha*). The tradition was seen mainly between the 15th and 18th centuries. Oral practices are preserved through manuscripts for future generations. The exact time when manuscript writing began in Assam is not known, but it is assumed that *Harshacarita*, written by the 7th century prose writer Banabhatta, is the earliest

manuscript found that was written on the barks of the Aquillaria tree, locally called *Sanchipat*. Paintings done on the Aquillaria bark played a significant role in the socio-cultural and religious development in Assam, and are examples of the early art practices of the north-eastern part of India. This manuscript writing in Assam was introduced by the Hindu Brahmin scholars, but the actual time of origin of this tradition of writing on the bark of *Sanchi* trees is not known. A variety of subjects were covered in the writings – religion, astrology, medicine and astronomy – and the language used was either Sanskrit or Assamese. The art of painting on a *Sanchipat* began long after the introduction of writing manuscripts. Paintings on the *Mahabharata*, done during 1836 AD, have been found in the Barpeta *Sattr*, a Vaishnavite monastery situated in the Barpeta district of Assam. A painted manuscript, a treatise on elephants, called *Hatividyarnava* was compiled under the patronage of the Ahom king Siva Singh in 1934 AD. Manuscript paintings were used by the Vaishnava saints to communicate with the common people. Between the 16th and 19th centuries, many *Sanchipat* manuscripts and paintings were created in the different monasteries of Assam. *Sanchipat* paintings later become popular as the *Sattriya* School of Painting. Though other mediums were also used to create these paintings, the *Sanchipat* remained most popular, due to its ready availability in the region and for this base being most comfortable for the painter. The traditional technical knowledge of this indigenous art form still exists in the *Sattras* and is a cultural heritage of the country.



Floor Paintings



In India, the celebration of festivals, auspicious occasions, weddings and social gatherings is incomplete without some or other form of floor art. This ancient, ritualistic practice of painting on the floor is known by different names in different parts of the country: *Arooph* or *Likhnu* (Himachal Pradesh), *Kalma Jattu* (Kerala), *Chawk Purna* or *Sona Pakhna* (Uttar Pradesh), *Muggulu* (Andhra Pradesh), *Aripana* (Bihar), *Rangoli* (Maharashtra), *Sathiya* (Gujarat), *Rangwalli* (Karnataka), *Alpana* (West Bengal and Assam), *Jothi* (Odisha), *Apna* (Almora and Nainital) and *Pakhamba* (Manipur).



According to scholars, the art of floor paintings can be traced back to the Vedic times. The earliest visual trace of floor paintings can be seen in the seals of Mohenjodaro - a geometric design, resembling a *mandala*. In general, geometric designs (*Akriti Pradhan*) are found predominantly in the floor paintings practised in the mountainous regions of the country, whereas floral-themed drawings (*Vallari Pradhan*) are found in the Gangetic plains. Another set of designs, the 'floral geometrical', is seen in southern India.

The most commonly used motifs in floor paintings are the circle and the square. The circle is representative of the universe, and the square within a circle represents culture. An upward pointing triangle, like a mountain, represents stability as well as *Purusha*, the eternal male element within us. A downward pointing triangle, like a waterfall, is representative of *Prakriti*, the transient physical elements. When united, the two triangles become a symbol of the universe. The most elemental of all geometric designs, however, is the dot, which represents the soul. Another common motif is the footprint, which represents the entry of a deity into a home.

In different parts of the country, the forms of floor paintings, the occasions for which they are created and the frequency of creating them vary. In some states it is done on special occasions; in some others it is a daily practice. A floor painting is not simply a decoration—the process of creating it is also a form of prayer and an invocation to the gods, seeking their blessings. It can also be found at the entrance of a home, welcoming guests. The designs are always surrounded by an unbroken line, which is meant to bar the entry of evil spirits. This has reference to the *Ramayana*, where Sita had been instructed by Lakshman to not cross the unbroken circular line. But she crossed the *Lakshman rekha* and was abducted by Ravana.

In India, floor art is an artistic expression practised by women, and is traditionally passed down from mothers to daughters.

Aipan Uttarakhand



Aipan is a traditional form of floor painting, indigenous to the women of the Kumaon region of Uttarakhand. This ritualistic art is an integral part of all special occasions and ceremonies, is deeply associated with the religious beliefs of the people, and is believed to bring good fortune and ward off evil. *Aipan* is drawn at places of worship and in homes; some of the creations are of great religious significance.

Traditional *Aipans*, drawn using geometrical designs and flowers, are used to decorate the doorsteps of houses. They are combined with *Vasudhara*, vertical lines drawn in odd numbers, by dripping *biswar* (a rice flour solution made by soaking rice and then grinding it). The lines are surrounded by dots. *Aipans* without dots are considered

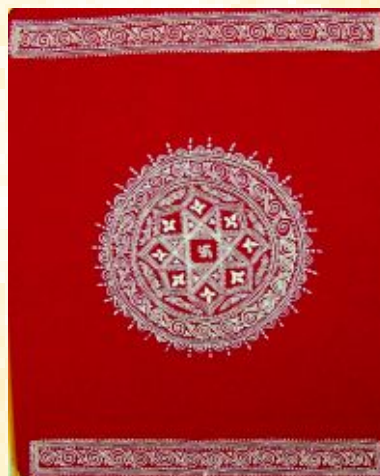


inauspicious as these are drawn after a death, during the *Shanti Path*. These are replaced by fresh *Aipans* with dots, indicating the end of the mourning period. The *Ashtadal Kamal Aipan*, an octagonal geometric pattern with lotus petals and a *swastika* at the centre, is drawn at a place where a *havan* is performed. On *Diwali*, the *Lakshmi Padchinha* or the footsteps of goddess Lakshmi are drawn from the main

entrance of a house to the place of worship. The *Lakshmi Peeth* decorates the *poojasthal* or place of worship. *Bhuiyan*, which are the negative and harmful forces or bad omens, are drawn on the outer side of a *Soop* - an ugly sketch of a demon. Lakshmi and Vishnu are drawn on the inner side of the *Soop*. On a particular day, the *Soop* is taken to every room and corner of the house and beaten with a sugarcane stick, signifying the removal of bad omens and negativity. This step is also meant to welcome Vishnu and Lakshmi, who bring happiness and prosperity to the home.

During wedding ceremonies, the bridegroom is made to stand in the *Dhuliarghya Var Chauka*, when he is welcomed with Vedic chants. The priest or the *Kulguru* of the bridegroom, who will perform the marriage rituals, stands in the *Acharya Chauka* during this ceremony. The *Janeo Aipan*, with thirteen dots in the centre, is especially drawn for thread ceremonies. The *Bhadra Aipan* is drawn at places of worship and *yajna*. Depending on the occasion, *Bhadras* can be of different types, with the number of dots varying; 12-bindu, 19-bindu, 24-bindu and 36-bindu *Bhadras* are common. The sixteen mother goddesses are worshiped after the worship of Lord Ganesha to ensure the smooth completion of a job. The *Jeev Matrika*, as the goddesses are known, is drawn on the left side of a wall, with Ganesha on the right.

The *Namkarna Chauki* is drawn in the courtyard of a house on the eleventh day after a child is born. The newborn is taken out of the house and exposed to the sun rays for the first time on this day. This *Aipan* is fixed for the first *Surya Darshan* of the child.



Mandana Paintings

Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh



Mandana is one of the oldest forms of tribal art in India, deeply intertwined with the spiritual beliefs of the people. The name *Mandana* comes from the word *mandan*, meaning decoration or beautification. This traditional decorative art of Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh is practised by the women of the *Meena* community, to protect home and hearth, to ward off evil forces and to welcome divine blessings into the house. In Madhya Pradesh, the paintings are made on the floor only, though in Rajasthan, they are also created on the walls. The paintings convert simple living spaces into works of art. *Mandanas* are part of occasions like Navaratri and Diwali. As they are drawn during festivals, religious worship and on auspicious days, the presiding deity of the festival becomes the main subject of the paintings, and they are used to invoke the deity.

First, the ground or wall is prepared with cow dung, mixed with *rati* (a kind of local clay) and red ochre. The motifs are then drawn on this base with lime or chalk powder, using a rudimentary brush made from date twig. Once the motifs are drawn, they are filled with colour. The two main colours are white and red. The white paint or *khadiya* is made from chalk and the red paint or *geru* is made from brick. Both are locally available. The main

themes of the paintings are religion, culture and wildlife. The designs range from basic line drawings to complex representations of gods and goddesses. Two prominent designs are *Tapki ki Mandana*, which uses geometric figures like triangles, rectangles and squares, and the *jaali* or lattice screen which is often found in Indian architectural designs. The women, in spite of having no formal training, are highly skilled, as the designs always turn out to be symmetrical and accurate. Popular motifs include flowers and plants, birds and animals, women at work and deities, particularly Ganesha. Drawing peacocks in all their glory is the artists' forte. *Mandana* art adorns both the interiors and the exteriors of the houses. Young girls learn the art by observing their mothers and other female relatives. As women work together to create *Mandanas*, their family and community feelings are strengthened. This is the social aspect of this art.

With more and more village homes now being made of brick and mortar, this art form is gradually dying, since its main prerequisite is the clay walls of mud huts. To help with its survival, *Mandana* art has been adapted on canvas, hardboard and cloth.



Alpana

West Bengal, Tripura, Assam

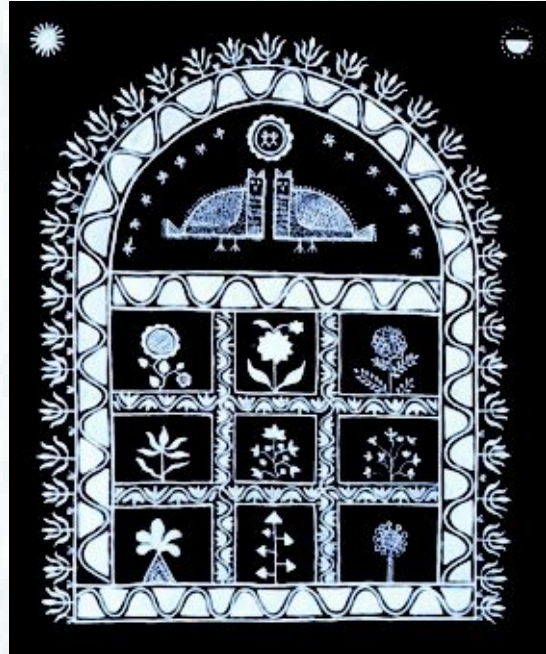
Alpana is a traditional art form used to decorate domestic courtyards, entrances and walls in West Bengal, Tripura and Assam, as an auspicious symbol. The name comes from the word *alimpana*, meaning to plaster or coat. As with other floor art forms, it involves no formal training, but is generally practised by women, and passed down from mothers to daughters. White stone, lime and rice flour is used to make a paste. Generally, the artists create the intricate designs with their fingers. Sometimes, flower petals, or a touch of colour, particularly red and yellow, is added to the traditional white *Alpana* to make it brighter. Some of the women are so talented that they can depict whole scenes through their *Alpanas*. While remaining connected to the age-old traditions of the art, the women also experiment with new forms and colours.

Alpanas possibly date back to the pre-Aryan times. They are associated with religious austerity—the *vrats* or *brotos* (fasting rituals) and *pujas* observed by rural women for the well-being of their families and for wish fulfilment. There are specific *Alpana* designs



for each season, based on the rituals. Creating an *Alpana* is also an occasion for women to get together. *Broto Alpana* combines prayer and painting; it is an appeal to the gods to grant wishes—good monsoon, protection of the crops, a good harvest, wealth and prosperity, and blessings in the form of children. Agricultural communities use *Alpanas* to drive out evil spirits. An *Alpana* can even be made daily to welcome a new day. An *Alpana* at the entrance of a house pleases anyone entering the house, thereby ensuring happiness in the home.

Alpanas have unbroken lines and are drawn freehand. They are temporary, as fresh designs are painted for each festival. Besides the usual flowers, leaves, fish, lotus, owl and sun, a special shape called the *kolka* is very popular as an *Alpana* motif. The most common *Alpana* has a circular shape, which is made for a deity during her worship. There are special *Alpanas* for Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth, which represent the owl (Lakshmi's carrier), a granary, a conch shell and the lotus flower.



Kolam

Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Telangana, Karnataka, Kerala



The tradition of *Kolam* is believed to have originated over 5000 years ago, during the pre-Aryan period. Today, it is practised by women in their households all over the states of Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Telangana, Andhra Pradesh and Kerala. The art is passed on from one generation to the next through oral instruction instead of formal training. An integral part of all traditional festivities, *Kolam* designs are drawn to welcome Lakshmi and drive away evil spirits. This form of floor art is executed with coloured rice flour, similar to the *Rangoli*

of northern India. However, while *Rangoli* is a free-flowing art, a *Kolam* is drawn around a grid pattern of dots. The dots are then joined by lines and loops to create the intricate designs, always keeping in mind symmetry and precision.

According to popular belief, *Kolam* lines must be completed to symbolically prevent evil spirits from entering inside the patterns, and thereby the house. Abstract designs blend with philosophical and religious motifs in a *Kolam*. Fish, birds, animals, zodiac signs, a circle (representing nature), a square (representing culture) and a pentagram (representing the five elements) are common motifs. Complex *Kolams* are drawn on special occasions. A ritualistic *Kolam* created for a wedding often extends all the way from the doorstep to the street. Devotees draw *Kolams* at the entrance of temples in gratitude for the granting of wishes. On special occasions, other ingredients besides dry rice flour, like limestone and red brick powder, are also used. In rural mud houses, the floor where the *Kolam* is to be drawn, is first washed with water and swept well. The *Kolam* is then drawn while the floor is still wet, so that the design holds better.

There is a story behind the old practice of using nothing but rice powder to create *Kolams*. It was said that Lakshmi enters those houses where all creatures are welcome. As the rice powder was used at the entrance of the house, ants did not have to walk too far for a meal. It also attracted birds and other small creatures to the house. During the day, the *Kolam* could be trampled on, blown away by the wind, eaten by ants, birds and other creatures, or even washed away by the rain. So a new *Kolam* would be created the next morning.

Aripana Bihar

Aripana is the variation of floor art that is prevalent in Bihar, and which dates back to the Indus Valley civilisation. No ceremony or ritual in the state is complete without an *Aripana* adorning the ground. Traditionally, an *Aripana* was drawn on land that was to be cultivated, to make it fertile. Rice paste, vermillion and some other colours are used, but no brushes; women draw with their fingers. Images of human beings, birds, animals, flowers (particularly the lotus), leaves, trees, fruits, tantric symbols, gods and goddesses, *diyas*, the *swastika* sign, mountains and rivers feature in Bihari *Aripanas*.

Muruja Odisha

Muruja are patterns drawn on the floor with powders of different colours. The powders are all made by indigenous methods. The white powder is obtained from powdered rice, black from burnt coconut shells, yellow from the petals of marigold flowers or turmeric, and red from clay or bricks. In the Indian month of *Kartik* (November), women of Odisha observe different kinds of penance and draw *Muruja* designs near the holy *Tulsi* plant. These are also drawn on the containers used for storing grains, on the pavilions erected for household deities, on the threshold of homes, and on earthen pots used during weddings and other auspicious occasions.



Rangoli Northern and Western India

The traditional symbols for a *Rangoli* are the lotus flower, mango, fish, birds (parrots, swans, peacocks), human figures and foliage. A *Diwali Rangoli* can be a depiction of a



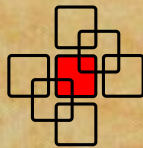
diya, flowers or Lakshmi and Ganesh. A *Rangoli* may be dry or wet, depending on the materials used - gypsum powder, coloured sand or dry pigments, along with unprocessed materials like seeds, grains, spices, leaves and flower petals.

Johti and Chita Odisha



Johti and *Chita* belong to rural Odisha. These art forms have a social and religious significance. During the harvesting season, when grains are thrashed and stored, rural women offer prayers to goddess Lakshmi. It is on this auspicious occasion that the walls and floors of the mud homes are decorated with *Chita* and *Johti* using a semi-liquid paste of rice called *pithau*. Although these are generally drawn with fingers, sometimes a brush is prepared by attaching a piece of cloth to a twig. This is dipped into the white rice paste to draw patterns on the wall. Occasionally, the paste is sprinkled on the walls, and a pattern resembling bunches of paddy emerges. Throughout the year, the women of Odisha perform several rituals to seek divine blessings and to establish a relationship between the mystical and the material. For every ritual there is a specific motif for the wall and the floor. The motif used for Lakshmi Puja is a stack of paddy. Durga Puja is marked by white dots superimposed with red, signifying the worship of Shiva and Shakti.





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