

MODULE - 4

TRIBAL AND FOLK ART IN INDIA

15. Folk and Tribal Art

FOLK AND TRIBAL ART

Dear learner, I know you must have celebrated occasions and festivals of India. During these festivals we decorate our floors, wall etc. with a colourful design. These arts are known as folk art. So, now we will learn about various folk art and tribal art of India. Folk art is the art of the people of a specific geographical region. As such, the history of folk art and tribal art in India is as old as the history of its people. Some of the artifacts obtained from the proto-historic culture of India can also be categorized into a folk variety.

India is known all world-wide for its cultural diversity- each region here has its particular folk and tribal arts. In its traditional form, folk and tribal art in India is an activity of a particular geographical region or community carried out for public or personal good and is part of particular rituals as well as non-rituals. Drawings and paintings are made with available natural colours on both walls and the ground. A twig and a rag are turned into a brush. Made using yellow earth, ochre, chalk, lamp soot, rice powder, turmeric powder, sindoor, indigo, cow-dung and vegetable colours, these are usually executed by women. They are made around the year, different designs/motifs/compositions for different occasions; girls learn to make them under the guidance of older women and in turn, pass the skill and craft on to the next generation of girls. And the tradition continues.



OBJECTIVES

After studying the lesson, the learner will be able to:

- describe the main folk and tribal arts of India;
- describe the Warli paintings made by the indigenous Warli community of Maharashtra;

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Folk and Tribal Art

- identify the Gond paintings made by the indigenous Gond community of Madhya Pradesh;
- identify the Pithora paintings made by the indigenous Bheel community of Madhya Pradesh and Gujaart;
- explain the Madhubani folk paintings prevalent in the Mithila region of Bihar;
- explain about the Patchitra paintings of Kalighat, West Bengal;
- describe the Kalamkari paintings of South India.

15.1 WARLI PAINTING

Dear learner, first, you will get to know about the Warli tribal painting of India.

Basic Information

Made by the Warli people of Dahanu and Javhar areas of the Thane district of Maharashtra to celebrate harvest and weddings, this tribal Indian art form is known



Fig. 15.1: Palghat Devi Chauk

after its practitioners. The speciality of Warli painting is its simple, natural and ancient form. These paintings are similar to the prehistoric cave paintings found all over the country. Human and animal forms are created by joining two triangles at the apex. These unadorned, undetailed figures are brilliantly dynamic and harmonious. The paintings generally represent the environs and life of the Warli. Warli painting is traditionally done on walls. However, for the urban market, Warli painting is nowadays executed on paper and fabric as well.

Title	:	Palghat Devi Chauk
Medium	:	Water colours, mineral colours
Period	:	Contemporary
Artist	:	Jeevya Soma Mashe
Collection	:	Crafts Museum, New Delhi

General Description

This particular painting is made on the main interior wall of the house for wedding related rituals. A figure of Palghat Devi, the Warli goddess of fertility, is painted in the center of a large rectangle called *Chauk*. On the top two corners, representational figures of the sun and the moon or *Basing*, the ceremonial crown worn by the bride and the groom are painted. Below the figure of the Goddess are painted auspicious figures. The chowk is then surrounded by wedding scenes and everyday activities. These include the bridegroom riding a mare, men and women dancing, hunting and farming scenes, and drawing of toddy, flora and fauna. Married women invariably execute the *Chowk*, but after that, enthusiastic younger women cover the wall with a veritable collage of real and imaginary scenes from life.

Warli people build their houses by erecting a bamboo structure and then filling the gaps with mud. The walls thus constructed are plastered with cow dung and red earth slurry. Finally, the walls are decorated with paintings, traditionally by married women, made with a rice flour paste. One end of the stem of the local *salati* grass or the rib of the palm leaf is beaten into a fibrous mass and turned into a brush. The white paintings on a reddish-brown background have a rare elegance. Warli farmers first ritually offer freshly harvested paddy to Kansari Ai, the tribal deity of crops. For the occasion, Pashti designed figures are painted on the outer wall of the house and the mud storage containers by repeating paisley-like impressions of the fistled hand.



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INTEXT QUESTIONS 15.1

Choose the most appropriate option.

- Warli paintings are made in which Indian state?
 - Thane district of Maharashtra
 - Jhabua district of Madhya Pradesh
 - Madhubani district in Bihar
 - Kalighat in Kolkata
- Who is the artist of the Warli work; ‘Palghat Devi Chauk’?
 - Ganga Devi
 - Rabindranath Tagore
 - Jeevya Soma Mashe
 - None of them

15.2 PITHORA PAINTING

Now, we will learn one beautiful folk art, Pithora painting.

Basic Information

The Bheel and Bhilala communities of Jhabua district of Madhya Pradesh and the Rathwas of the Vadodra area of Gujarat have a long, rich tradition of Pithora painting. Since these paintings are executed to appease the local deity Pithora, they are known as Pithora paintings. The style and colour combination of the painting



Fig. 15.2: Pithora Painting

of the two communities are quite diverse, but the story and ritual connected with the painting are almost similar. When it comes to colour combination, the Bheel palette is comparatively simple, limited and old, while the Rathwa palette is marked by its vivid colours. The Rathwa Pithora painting also has more detail and ornamentation.

Members of the Bheel and Rathwa communities traditionally appeal to the deity Pithora to grant them a good crop or a son. When their wish is fulfilled, they commission a *Lakhindra* (traditional painter of sacred frescoes) to make these paintings in connection with the rituals. Nowadays, many Bheel and Rathwa artists are making decorative and exotic Pithoras for the urban buyer for a living. These nouvelle Pithoras are painted on paper or fabric with acrylic colours.

Title	:	Pithora Painting
Medium	:	Water colours, mineral colours
Period	:	Contemporary
Artist	:	Unknown
Collection	:	Janjateeya Sangrahalaya, Bhopal, M. P.

General Description

To thank Pithora for granting a good crop or a son, the Bheels and Rathwas commission a *Lakhindra* (traditional painter of sacred frescoes) to make Pithora painting. It is painted on the main inner wall of the house. The wall is first plastered with cow dung and mud slurry and then painted with lime or white earth. A rectangular space called 'Pithora's house' is created by painting an outline in white. The two horses in the upper middle portion represent the deity Pithora; other horses represent other deities. The painting contains every single prescribed figure: the two-headed mares, the lion, the elephant, the camel, the cow, the rabbit, the cobra, the scorpion, the cat, the peacock, the fish, the hen, the step-well, the woman drawing water, the water carrier, women whisking curds, the one-legged man smoking his *hookah*, the twelve headed demons, the man with baskets hanging from a yoke, a platoon, monkeys frolicking in the tree, the caged parrot, the palm tree, the beehive on the silk cotton tree, the sun, the moon, the farmer with his plough and team of bullocks, the couple in coitus and outside the frame is the black rider, the Kathia Sawar. They occur again and again in the ritual Pithora songs. Without even one of these companions of Pithora, the painting would be considered incomplete.

The material to be made for Pithora paintings is a twig of a date tree. It is cut, and one end beat with a hammer or stone till it turns into a fibrous mass, white colour (lime paste), vibrant pink colour (diluted *Mahavar*), brown colour (ochre), yellow colour (made with *Pewri*), green colour (made with *Balor* leave), black colour (made with lamp soot), blue colour (made with laundry blue or indigo).



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INTEXT QUESTIONS 15.2

1. In which states of India are Pithora paintings made and by whom?
2. Who are the Pithora paintings dedicated?
3. What is the difference between Bheel, and Rathwa Pithora paintings?
4. Who paints the traditional Pithora painting and what materials does he use?



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15.3 MADHUBANI OR MITHILA PAINTING

Madhubani is a famous folk painting in Bihar. So learners, let learn this folk painting.

Basic Information

Madhubani paintings are also called Mithila paintings. This genre of painting originated in the Mahdubani district of the Mithila region in Bihar. Traditionally, the paintings were made by women on the mud wall of the *Kohbar* (bridal



Fig. 15.3: Kohbar Ghar

chamber), so their theme was Hindu mythology and local beliefs. Painted with the aim of orienting the newlyweds to matrimony and fertility, the painters depict family and local deities, fertility symbols and local mythical figures. However, to cater to a growing urban market, nowadays artists are experimenting with secular themes and rendering the paintings on fabric, canvas, board and paper.

Title	: Kohbar Ghar
Medium	: Water Colours
Period	: Contemporary
Artist	: Padmashree Ganga Devi
Collection	: Crafts Museum, New Delhi

General Description

Before he departs from his in-law's home after the wedding ceremony, the *Kohbar* is the groom's designated room in the bride's home in which the newlyweds conduct religious rituals. The Kohbar fresco is always painted by married women. Singing ritual wedding songs, they prepare the base by painting the desired portion of the wall with rice slurry. The figures are drawn with charcoal, or a thin strip of bamboo dipped in lamp soot. This strip is turned into a brush by rolling some cotton wool on one end, and vibrant colours are applied as desired. Traditionally the women themselves made colours with locally available ingredients like lamp soot or burnt heads of Sorghum or *Jowar* (black), turmeric or sap of banyan tree mixed with lime (yellow), Palash blossoms (saffron), Kusum blossoms (red), dull green (cowdung), Peepul bark (crimson), ink or indigo (blue), *Mahavar* (deep pink). A Kohbar fresco has fertility symbols, figures of deities and local characters like Naina Jogin, auspicious symbols like the moon, the sun, the tulsi plant, the parrot, the peacock, the fish, the cobra, the sparrow, the tortoise, the lily vine, the clove tree, the bamboo plant, the betel vine, the water pitcher etc. There are no empty spaces in a Madhubani fresco- the gaps are covered with geometrical and floral motifs, animal and bird figures.



INTEXT QUESTIONS 15.3

1. What is Kohbar? Which are the main motifs in a Kohbar?
2. What are the characteristics of the Madhubani painting?
3. What is the theme of the Madhubani painting?



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15.4 KALIGHAT PAINTING

Now, we will understand another folk art, that is Kalighat painting.

Basic Information

This style of painting is named after the place it originated and developed in Kalighat in Kolkata, where the famous Kali temple attracts millions of pilgrims from all over India. Kalighat paintings culminate and archive the social and cultural turmoil in 19th-century Kolkata. Around that time, the traditional *Patuas*, painters of scrolls and toys, had migrated to the city from rural areas of Bengal in large numbers. They began to paint individual panels for sale to the visiting pilgrims who carried them home as souvenirs of their visit to the city. To keep the costs low, the paintings were painted on paper in watercolour. The lines and colours were bold,



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Fig. 15.4: Sita with Luv Kush

and the figures simplified. Gradually they also began to depict local scandals, current proverbs, and current events. The nautch girl, the musician, the woman combing her hair, the chubby woman holding a red rose, the snake, the cat, the crayfish, the list of subjects was interesting. Later, Kalighat paintings were made on fine-quality hemp paper. They depicted Hindu Gods and Goddesses in garish colours. Their popularity in Europe led to lithographs of them being made in Germany. The style is kept alive by *patuas* who make copies of famous old Kalighat paintings for a living.

Title	:	Sita with Luv-Kush
Medium	:	Water colour
Period	:	Contemporary
Artist	:	Unknown
Collection	:	Private

General Description

The subject of this Kalighat painting, is taken from the Ramayana. It shows Sita with her two sons Luv and Kush, sitting on a rock under a tree. Sita is telling her sons a story and they listen spellbound. The comfort and closeness of the trio is evident. In accordance with the Kalighat tradition, drawing has been accorded primacy. The human bodies have been depicted with clarity. The curves of the female form have been highlighted with light and shade effects close to the outlines of the curves. Painted against the light orange background, the green foliage is prominent. In keeping with their status as guests in a hermitage, Sita and Luv-Kush have been shown wearing floral garlands. The hallmark elongated eyes and soft faces mark the work as an authentic traditional Kalighat painting. Materials to be used for Kalighat painting are paper, natural and vegetable colours, brush, gum, poster colours etc.



INTEXT QUESTIONS 15.4

1. Who were the traditional buyers of Kalighat paintings?
2. What was the medium used for Kalighat paintings, and what materials were required to paint them?
3. What were the themes of Kalighat paintings?



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ACTIVITY

Visit a folk art museum or studio and collect some folk and tribal arts. Make a collage with these artworks. Write at least two lines about these different type of folk and tribal artwork.

Collage	Write up

15.5 KALAMKARI

There are folk art found in different parts of India. Now let us learn about Kalamkari folk style.

Basic Information

The word Kalamkari is derived from Persian *Qalamkari*, which means the craft of the pen. Kalamkari is a craft style which uses pen and colours to paint figures on fabric. At times the design is created using a mix of pen drawing and block printing. Mostly practised in the southern states of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana, earlier the style was practised in other areas as well. Under the patronage of the Mughal rulers, the craft of Kalamkari reached its zenith, and kalamkari textiles were exported to many Asian and European countries. Historical documents tell that around the 18th century, Kalamkari fabrics constituted a large chunk of India’s textile trade with Persia and the countries of the Middle East. Coromandel and Pulikat on the eastern coast of Southern India were major centers of textile export, possibly the reason Srikalahasti and Machilipatanam developed as key centers of Kalamkari production. While the Srikalahasti style of Kalamkari developed around a temple town and was patronized by temples, its theme is Hindu mythology. Only the “Kalam” or pen is used for a free-hand drawing of the subject and filling in the colours. The Machilipatanam style developed under the patronage of Mughal rulers and is a mix of pen work and block printing. To cater to the demand and need of its patrons Machilipatanam style favoured the use of motifs like the ornate arch, flowers, animal figures, tree of life. Machilipatanam produced namaz-mats, tents, and curtains for its largely Asian markets; bedsheets and quilt covers for the European market; scrolls, towels, and scarves for the South Asian market; jacket and dress fabric for the east Asian market.



Fig. 15.5: Sita Swayamvar

Title	:	Sita Swayamvar
Medium	:	Kalamkari
Period	:	Contemporary
Artist	:	Unknown
Collection	:	Personal

General Description

This panel shows a dramatic incident from the Ramayana. Ram has just broken the bow of Shiva, and Sita is about to garland him. Behind her stands her father, king Janak. Painted on a black background, the light blue figure of Janak, the yellow figure of Sita and the dark blue figure of Ram stand out. The black lines are drawn with the reed pen work highlight the details. The clothes and jewellery of the figures have been painted in red, pink and blue. The scene is framed by an



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ornamented geometric border. **Kalam**, or the reed pen is prepared by sharpening one end of an 8-inch long stick of reed or palm. On the middle of the stick, a bit of wool or felt is rolled. This absorbs the colour or ink, and a slight pressure on this roll allows colour to flow onto the fabric being painted.

Colours are mainly natural in origin. Black, red, yellow and blue are the primary colours. They are mixed in different ratios to prepare green, orange and purple colours and different shades of them. Black colour is used for outlining.

The method: Kalamkari painting is a complicated process. It is done mainly on a cotton fabric. The sequence is given below:

- The fabric to be painted is soaked in a thin buffalo or goat dung slurry. Then it is bleached by drying in strong sun.
- The bleached fabric is treated with a solution of *Harad*.
- The desired figures are block printed or drawn on the treated fabric with a pen or brush.
- Now red colour is applied with a brush.
- Then blue colour is applied with a brush.
- The painted fabric is dried and then washed in running water.
- The fabric is dried and treated with milk.
- Green and yellow colours are applied.
- The fabric is allowed to dry and then washed in running water and dried again.



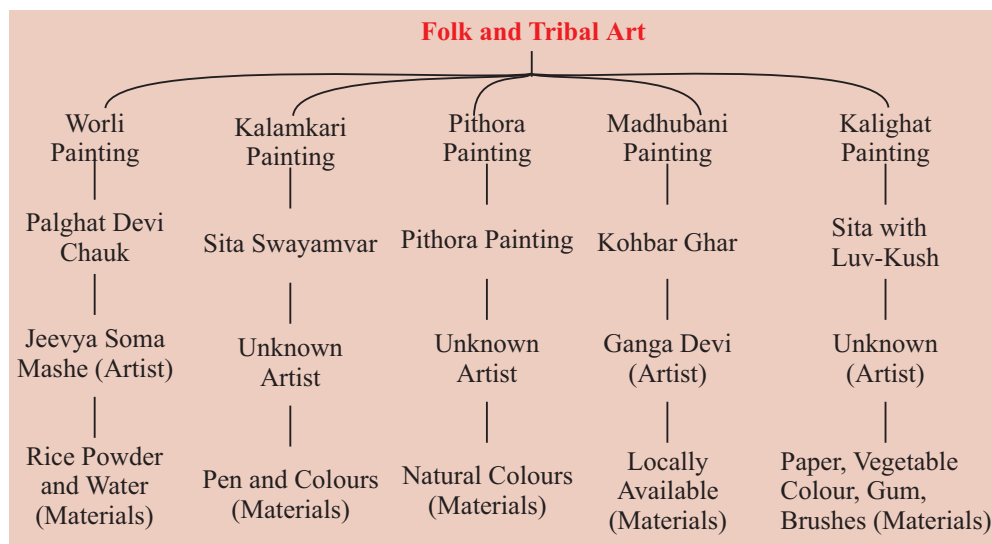
INTEXT QUESTIONS 15.5

Fill in the blanks:

1. The colour used in Kalamkari paintings are,
2. Before drawing the figures in black, the bleached fabric is treated with a,
3. Kalamkari textiles were exported to, and many Asian countries.



WHAT YOU HAVE LEARNT



Notes



LEARNING OUTCOMES

The learner can

- make the colours using locally available materials to paint the folk and tribal artwork.
- use different types of folk and tribal art to decorate their houses and other artworks.



TERMINAL QUESTIONS

1. What is the Warli painting made particularly to celebrate a wedding in the family called, and whom is it dedicated to?
2. What is the Warli painting made to celebrate the paddy harvest called?
3. Who traditionally makes the Warli painting, and what materials are used for it?
4. Describe three characteristics of the Warli painting.
5. List the motifs used in a traditional Warli painting.
6. What is the definition of folk and tribal art?
7. Name the different styles of tribal mural painting and the states where they are practised.



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8. Write about motifs of Warli painting.
9. In which state of India does the Madhubani painting have its origin? Describe its religious and social significance and name the motifs of the *Kohbar* mural.
10. What is Kalamkari? Name its two major styles and explain how they are different from each other.
11. Who were the painters of Kalighat paintings? Describe its characteristics and list its subjects.
12. Write short notes on:
 1. Materials used for folk tribal paintings
 2. Kohbar ghar
 3. Pashti painting
13. Where did the Madhubani painting originate? Why is it also known as Mithila painting?
14. List the materials and colours required for making a traditional Madhubani painting.
15. Describe two characteristics of Kalighat paintings.
16. Where did Kalighat painting originate, and in which period?



ANSWERS TO INTEXT QUESTIONS

15.1

1. (i) Thane district of Maharashtra
2. (iii) Jeevya Soma Mashe

15.2

1. The Bheel and Bhilala communities of Jhabua district of Madhya Pradesh and the Rathwas of the Vadodra area of Gujarat have a long, rich tradition of Pithora painting.
2. The paintings are known as Pithora paintings because they are dedicated to the local god Pithora.
3. The Bheel palette is comparatively simple, limited and old, while the Rathwa palette is marked by its vivid colours. The Rathwa Pithora painting also has more detail and ornamentation
4. The traditional painter of Pithora murals is called *Lakhindra*. The Pithora mural is made on the main inside wall of the house with easily available natural colours.

15.3

1. Kohabr ghar is the groom's designated room in the bride's home before he departs his in-laws' after the wedding ceremony. The newlywed conduct religious rituals here. Kohbar murals depict Hindu Gods and Goddesses, fertility symbols, auspicious symbols and motifs.
2. A Madhubani painting is heavily detailed; it depicts episodes from Hindu epics. The faces in the visage, vibrant natural colours and the geometric ornamentation on the border are some of its key characteristics.
3. The themes of Madhubani painting are Hindu mythology, folklore and life in general.

15.4

1. Kalighat paintings were bought by the pilgrims who visited the temple.
2. Kalighat paintings were painted on mill-made hemp paper in watercolour. The materials used for making them were: paper, natural and vegetable colours, brush, gum, poster colours etc.
3. The most in-demand Kalighat paintings were Hindu icons, although Kalighat painters also depicted scenes from everyday life.

15.5

1. natural vegetable colours.
2. solution of *Harad*.
3. Iran Indonesia

GLOSSARY

Ritual	The way of carrying out worship
Palghat Devi	A rural deity
Lithograph	a printing technique in stone
<i>Patua</i>	the painter of Kalighat
Archives	stories of old documents
Apex	highest point



Notes

