



Arts

EXISTENCE OF PRIMITIVE ART AND CULTURE IN SOCIETY

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Abstract

This paper aims to present folk art as one of the genuine art forms and also to give depth to the beliefs of the primitive traditions. The native Indian art has maintained its continuity till the present day. Folk art plays an important role in the society. The domestic art works like Rangoli, Mandana, the pictorial scroll paintings, the paintings of Hindu deities at Puri, the Pattchitra etc. are the traditional arts of India. These are quiet ancient arts which are done on festivals and celebrations especially marriages. The art produced by the folk artist or tribal people have been very largely short lived, but it still has authentic historical background as found in the archaeological searches of Indus Valley Civilization or Harappan culture. The absorption of tradition and the historical past is helpful for the present and it brings with it the experience to shape up the future. Indian art has been a priceless witness to artistic talents going through the phases of cultural developments and achievements of human creativity.

Keywords: Rangoli; Pattchitra; Mandana; Indus Valley Civilization; Harappan Culture.

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1. Introduction

Folk art is one of the genuine art forms which has its base in the primitive traditions. Indian classical literature ‘Kathasarit Sagar’ signifies “ocean fed by the rivers of story and legend”¹ So is the Indian folk art, like an ocean, is being fed by the rivers of popular artistic creativity from earlier times. The indigenous Indian arts of its nativity has maintained its continuity till the present day. It has survived the historical, social, economical and political development and made itself stand out as the Indian idiom. The characteristics of folk art with its history has played an important role in the society. The origin of this art dates back to the art of primitive natives of ancient times of this subcontinent. The Indian tribal communities have succeeded in preserving their cultural and traditional identities in the developed communities of today.

The two-dimensional traditional paintings can be distinguished in three groups mainly. First can be said as the domestic paintings which have been exclusively preserved by the women painters of the household. This is done to decorate the walls of the houses and the mud floors. The subjects

are generally the domestic events, festivities, celebrations, feast days. It is a non-professional art and intended for the well being of the family or community and to ensure prosperity. These are done with the simplest materials which are easily available around the settlements. The decorations on the floor are called Rangoli in Maharashtra, Oshan in Orissa, Mandana in Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan and many more in different states. All these arts have geometrical motifs like circles, rectangles, squares and triangles.

The paintings of Warli art and the Saora tribes or the tribal communities like Gond and Kol all have followed a visual tradition, especially the domestic art of the women. These women give expression to their emotions through these forms of ritualistic paintings. Black colour which is considered inauspicious is generally not used in these paintings. The paintings are restricted to the themes which are inherited, yet they add a spark of freshness by their imagination. They also comprise of other elements of Hindu deities, generally the goddess Lakshmi. Other elements of daily household activities, elements from nature like humans, birds, animals, trees etc. Sun, moon, stars are all depicted as sacred identities. The ancient Indian symbols Swastika, the Trident also occur as folk-art symbolism. Human figures and animals are drawn with triangles and rectangles in very simple styles which are identical with the rock drawings of the prehistoric times.

There are two more forms of professional paintings, in addition to these amateur ones. These paintings are blended with singing and story telling and the stories are like pictorial illustrations to their stories. This can be seen in the art of Chitrakathi of Maharashtra, who are the painters cum entertainers. In old days they also served as spies of rulers and specially the reign of Maratha kings, who gave details of kings and the kingdoms by establishing closer contact with people, ⁽²⁾ through their paintings. They moved from village to village and narrated the tales from the epics like Ramayana and Mahabharata, thus enlarging their range of audiences. They are found in the town of Paithan and the paintings are also called Paithan art of Maharashtra. The Phad painters of Rajasthan or the story tellers of Santhal tribes with their scroll paintings are few examples of these painters cum entertainers. There are references in Patanjali (second century B.C.), Vishakadattas's play Mudra rakshasa (c. fifth century B.C.) and Bana's Harsha Charita. ⁽³⁾

The third type of folk art can be classified as the art works done in the service of the temple. ⁽⁴⁾ The pilgrims take away mementoes of their deities of the temples. Demand today is met by brightly coloured prints. One of the most famous folk-art painting of the Hindu deities is from the temple of Jagannath at Puri in Orissa. The scenes from the epic Ramayana, the tales of life of Krishna are also painted in bright colours which are done on cloth and paper called as Patt-chitra (paintings). The tradition of body painting and tattooing is another primitive art and is quite ancient which dates back to early origins of Indian folk art. Another form of body decoration, the painting on palm and feet is mehndi which is a kind of temporary tattoo. This is done on festivals and celebrations especially marriages. Now this is done as a profession, which is highly in demand.

The embroidery on cloth done in the Pahari school called as Chamba Rumals is an art loved by the viewers. These were given as gifts during weddings and were done in very fine stitches. The fineness, precision and vividness of this needle artwork make it so close to the Pahari miniatures and murals that it appears to be their transcript on the fabric. This household artwork was done on domestic items like choli (blouse), cap, hand fan. The technique was drawn from the folk style. ⁽⁵⁾ Embroidery with applique work of Saurashtra, Bhuj, Kalamkari, wood carvings, terracotta, Kantha

work, masks of Bengal, Banaras metal sculptures etc are different kinds of arts carried by different groups across the country.

The art produced by the folk or tribal people have been very largely ephemeral. The materials used by the folk artist are easily destroyed and are perishable. Indeed, it is produced for eventual destruction. Once they have served their ritual and religious purpose it is left unattended as in the case of Rangoli, Aipan, Mandana or similar arts. The decoration on mud floors and walls are left to fade away or drain away in sun and rain. Constant repetition and reproduction from ages only helps the folk art with its continuity. Thanks to the continuous perpetual reproductions of the folk arts since ages which can be regarded as the indirect source of information of the art from earlier times.

The craft as an occupation is handed down from father to son. The amateur arts of women which has been passed down from generations is largely related to rituals or perhaps magical ideas which were done for the welfare of the family. They were not for commercial purpose but were bound up with home and family. In the past few decades there has been a steady increase in the industrial revolution which has reached the villages also and thus factory-made label is tagged to the folk art productions. To meet the requirements of export and tourist trade, the mass production has put a question on the authenticity of folk art. But it is indeed a good fortune that this process is fairly slow in India as compared to many other countries and so a total extinction has not happened in the creation of indigenous art of folks and tribes.

Renewal from national support has lent strength to the primitive folk artist who are aware of the traditional, historical and creative value of folk art. They are concerned to preserve and promote this native and cultural identity of the nation. Archaeological finds at the Indus Valley Civilization or the Harappan culture have clearly given the evidences of Indian folk art prevalent from early times. It has authentic historical background in spite of the perishable materials. But still the information or references gathered reflect the high art- architecture, painting and sculpture, terracotta potteries from the scanty citations found in early writings.

In the later stages of development of art in India came the illustrations of manuscripts and miniature paintings. Jain manuscripts of Gujrat date from around second century A.D. these are illustrations of religious texts so they cannot be wholly said to belong to the folk-art tradition. Due to lack of evidences the continuity from primitive art to these miniatures, correlation is lost. However, the role played by religion is determining in the evolution of folk art and is the imbibing force behind the aesthetic creativeness. The themes get visual expression in a painting by devotional minds, and fundamental values of culture. The absorption of tradition and the historical past is helpful for the present and it brings with it the experience to shape up the future.

Indian folk art needs to be regarded as an essential component of Indian art because of its long and continuous traditions and prevalence in the society even today and also because of its wide dispersal throughout the subcontinent of India. The material used in these in these arts are subject to decay, but they are found almost every where in India and thus could be easily used.

Despite the varied and eventful political history of Indian subcontinent, all these arts have remained within the sphere of traditions and culture of the villages and often bear the age-old tribal

beliefs. The conservative awareness towards age old forms of composition, to prevent and defend the cultural heritage of India has been done by these people. The rituals that go with these images and traditional magical beliefs, the ceremonial depictions are also continued by the smaller town craftsman. Indian art therefore may be regarded as a valuable witness of creativity of the journey of evolution of mankind and development of human culture. It is a source of inspiration for creativity and is gradually developing the viewpoints. It will emerge as something which has its roots inculcated in age old traditions and culture and yet new and forward looking. Indian primitive art has been a priceless witness to artistic talent going through the phases of cultural developments and achievements of mankind.

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