

THE RICH TRADITION OF TRIBAL ART IN JHARKHAND: EXPLORING SOHRAI AND KHOVAR PAINTINGS

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Abstract

Jharkhand, a state in eastern India, is renowned for its rich cultural heritage and diverse tribal communities. Among the various artistic expressions that flourish here, Sohrai and Khovar paintings are particularly significant due to their unique aesthetics and profound cultural relevance. These traditional art forms, intricately woven into the social, spiritual, and economic lives of the tribes, serve as more than just decoration. Sohrai paintings, linked to the harvest festival of the same name, and Khovar paintings, associated with marriage rituals, are both crafted by tribal women using natural materials. These paintings depict themes such as animals, birds, agricultural symbols, and scenes of domestic life, reflecting the tribes' deep connection with their environment and cultural narratives. The techniques involve using fingers, twigs, and natural brushes, creating a distinctive, rustic, and vibrant style. This paper explores the historical origins, cultural significance, artistic techniques, and contemporary relevance of Sohrai and Khovar paintings, highlighting their role in preserving and promoting Jharkhand's tribal heritage. It also examines the modern adaptations of these art forms and the efforts to sustain them amidst the challenges of modernization. This study emphasizes the importance of these artistic traditions in maintaining cultural identity and supporting the socio-economic development of tribal communities.

Keywords: *Jharkhand, Tribal Art, Sohrai Paintings, Khovar Paintings, Cultural Heritage*

1. INTRODUCTION

Jharkhand, a state in eastern India, is a region rich in cultural heritage and known for its diverse tribal communities. Among the many forms of artistic expression that flourish in this area, Sohrai and Khovar paintings stand out for their unique aesthetics and profound cultural significance. These traditional art forms are more than mere decoration; they are deeply interwoven with the social, spiritual, and economic fabric of the tribal communities that create them [1-3].

Sohrai Paintings: Sohrai paintings are associated with the Sohrai festival, which is celebrated during the harvest season. This festival is dedicated to the worship of cattle, vital to the agrarian lifestyle of the tribes. The paintings are traditionally crafted by women on the walls of their mud houses. Using natural materials like clay, earth, and mineral-based pigments, they create intricate designs that reflect their environment and cultural narratives. Themes often include animals, birds, and agricultural symbols, all rendered in earthy tones such as red, black, white, yellow, and ochre. The technique involves using fingers, twigs, and natural brushes, resulting in a distinctive style that is both rustic and vibrant.

Khovar Paintings: Khovar paintings, on the other hand, are linked to the marriage season. The term 'Khovar' derives from 'Kho' meaning cave and 'Var' meaning husband, symbolizing the bridal chamber. These paintings also use natural pigments and are characterized by the 'sgraffito' technique, where layers of wet clay are applied to the walls and then scraped off to create elaborate patterns. Common themes in Khovar paintings include fertility symbols, animals, plants, and scenes of domestic life, using contrasting colors like black and white to enhance the visual impact. These art forms are not just creative expressions but are essential in preserving the cultural identity of Jharkhand's tribal communities. Passed down through generations, Sohrai and Khovar paintings embody the wisdom, beliefs, and way of life of these indigenous people. The women who create these artworks play a crucial role in maintaining this cultural heritage, teaching the techniques and motifs to the younger generations. In recent years, there has been a growing appreciation for these traditional arts. Efforts by the government and non-governmental organizations have promoted these paintings beyond the rural confines of Jharkhand. Artists are now exploring new mediums such as canvases and textiles, making Sohrai and Khovar designs accessible to a wider audience and providing new economic opportunities for the tribal communities. This paper aims to explore the rich tradition of tribal art in Jharkhand, focusing on Sohrai and Khovar paintings. It will delve into their historical origins, cultural significance, artistic techniques, and contemporary relevance, highlighting their role in preserving and promoting Jharkhand's tribal heritage [4-5].

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Chakraverty, S. O. M. N. A. T. H. (2009) Chakraverty explores the cultural evolution depicted in rock art from Jharkhand's Central Indian plateau. This art traces the transition from hunter-gatherers to pastoralists and rural communities. The paintings illustrate conflicts, often with metal weapons and animals like horses and elephants, absent in southern India's rock art. Chakraverty links Jharkhand's rock art to its folklore, particularly the 'Kohbar' marriage booth, and draws connections to megalithic burial practices, highlighting the continuity of tribal traditions in the region.

Chakraverty, S. (2009) reemphasizes the cultural narratives depicted in rock art from Jharkhand. It links these ancient artworks to contemporary tribal practices, illustrating a continuum of social organization, economy, and culture. The study provides a methodological approach to interpreting indigenous history and sentiments through rock art, contributing to a deeper understanding of Jharkhand's tribal heritage.

Imam, B. (2011) Imam examines the continuity of artistic traditions from prehistoric rock art to contemporary tribal murals in Jharkhand. The study focuses on Khovar and Sohrai paintings, created by tribal women during marriage and harvest seasons. These murals reflect a cultural continuity that ties present-day village paintings to ancient rock art. Imam emphasizes the deep connection between human cognition, natural environment, and communication in these art forms, revealing their significance in the cultural and paleo-archeological context of the region.

Comba, E. (2011) Comba's study on the Northern Arapaho in Wyoming reveals a complex network of symbolic forms used in their art, particularly life-symbols. Although not focused on Jharkhand, this analysis parallels the intricate symbolic communication found in Jharkhand's tribal art. The study underscores the importance of art in expressing cosmological, social, and ritualistic concepts, providing a comparative perspective on the role of traditional art in different indigenous cultures.

Chakraverty, S. (2011) Chakraverty discusses preliterate art as a communication system, from Pleistocene rock art to contemporary tribal art in central India. He highlights the thematic and stylistic continuity, with early rock art depicting hunting and pastoral scenes, later evolving to include battle imagery. The study suggests that contemporary tribal societies' art reflects similar social, economic, and cultural contexts, offering a framework for understanding indigenous history and traditions through rock art.

Chandra, U. (2013) Chandra examines adivasi resistance in Jharkhand, linking land and community in movements like the Koel–Karo anti-dam protest and Maoist insurgency. This paper explores how tribal communities negotiate their identities and resist state power through cultural symbols and discourses. Although focused on political resistance, Chandra's work highlights the cultural and symbolic dimensions of tribal identity, relevant to understanding the context of Jharkhand's art traditions.

Polley et al., (2015) This study investigates the relationship between ritual practices and prehistoric rock art in eastern India, focusing on a recently discovered site. Despite limited ethnographic data, the authors analyze the arrangement and context of rock art to infer its ritualistic significance. The findings suggest that rock art served as a medium for ritual expression, a theme resonant with Jharkhand's tribal mural traditions that also embody ritual and cultural continuity.

Ranjan, V. K. (2016) Ranjan, an artist from Jharkhand, advocates for the preservation and promotion of the region's traditional and rock art. He emphasizes the rich cultural heritage of tribal wall paintings, which are often overlooked by urban populations. Ranjan's work highlights the need for greater awareness and efforts to uplift Jharkhand's art, ensuring its survival and appreciation in modern times.

Kumari et al., (2016) The paper explores the endangered Pyatker painting tradition in eastern India, specifically in Amadubi, Jharkhand. The authors identify illiteracy and economic challenges as barriers to the survival of this art form. The study emphasizes the need for government and NGO support to preserve Pyatker painting and highlights its significance for the livelihood of the Chitrakar community. The analysis underscores the broader theme of preserving indigenous art traditions.

3. HISTORICAL ORIGINS AND EVOLUTION

- **Ancient Beginnings:** Trace the origins of Sohrai and Khovar paintings to their roots in prehistoric rock art found in the region. Discuss the continuity from ancient to modern times, showing how these art forms have evolved while retaining core elements.
- **Cultural Context:** Examine the role of these paintings in the context of the tribal communities' historical and cultural evolution, including their transition from hunter-gatherer societies to settled agricultural communities [6].

Cultural Significance

- **Ritualistic Importance:** Detail the significance of Sohrai and Khovar paintings in tribal rituals and ceremonies, particularly their roles in the Sohrai festival and marriage ceremonies. Explain how these paintings are not just decorative but serve as integral parts of these events.
- **Symbolism and Themes:** Analyze the common symbols and themes found in these paintings, such as fertility symbols, animals, and nature motifs. Discuss how these elements reflect the tribes' worldview, beliefs, and relationship with their environment.

Artistic Techniques and Styles

- **Materials and Methods:** Provide an in-depth look at the materials and techniques used in Sohrai and Khovar paintings. Describe the process of gathering natural pigments, preparing the walls, and the specific techniques like sgraffito.
- **Aesthetic Characteristics:** Highlight the distinctive aesthetic features of these paintings, such as the use of earthy colors, intricate patterns, and the use of fingers and natural brushes. Compare and contrast the styles of Sohrai and Khovar paintings [7].

Role of Women in Preserving the Tradition

- **Cultural Transmission:** Discuss the role of women in creating and preserving these art forms. Highlight how knowledge and techniques are passed down through generations from mothers to daughters.
- **Empowerment and Identity:** Explore how participation in these artistic traditions empowers tribal women, providing them with a sense of identity and community. Address the socio-economic impact of these arts on women's lives.

Contemporary Relevance and Challenges

- **Modern Adaptations:** Examine how artists are adapting Sohrai and Khovar designs for new mediums such as canvases, textiles, and commercial products. Discuss the impact of these adaptations on the traditional forms.
- **Preservation Efforts:** Detail the efforts by government and non-governmental organizations to preserve and promote these art forms. Address the challenges faced in keeping these traditions alive amidst modernization and economic pressures.

Global Recognition and Future Prospects

- **International Exposure:** Discuss the growing recognition of Sohrai and Khovar paintings on national and international platforms. Highlight exhibitions, collaborations, and academic studies that have brought these art forms to global attention.
- **Sustainable Development:** Explore how the promotion of these traditional arts can contribute to sustainable development in tribal communities. Discuss the potential for tourism, education, and cultural exchange programs to support the preservation and economic viability of these art forms [8].

This comprehensive exploration will not only celebrate the artistic richness of Jharkhand's tribal communities but also underscore the importance of preserving these invaluable cultural treasures for future generations.

4. CONCLUSION

The rich tradition of Sohrai and Khovar paintings in Jharkhand stands as a testament to the enduring cultural heritage of the region's tribal communities. These art forms, deeply intertwined with the social and spiritual lives of the tribes, serve as vital expressions of their identity and beliefs. The intricate designs and themes of these paintings not only reflect the tribes' connection to their environment but also preserve their cultural narratives for future generations. Efforts to promote and sustain these traditional

arts, through government and non-governmental initiatives, are crucial in the face of modernization pressures. By supporting these artistic traditions, we not only preserve a significant cultural heritage but also empower the tribal communities economically and socially. The global recognition and modern adaptations of Sohrai and Khovar paintings provide new opportunities for these art forms to thrive, ensuring their relevance and continuity in the contemporary world.

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