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### Warli art: Diversification of traditional painting creating future, hope & happiness

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#### Abstract

India is a land, rich with art, tradition and culture. Most people, especially those living in the rural sector of India, practically make a livelihood by practicing various forms of arts and crafts. Warli art is an ancient Indian folk art tradition of painting of a Maharashtrian tribe called Warli. Warli is the name of the biggest tribe found on the northern outskirts of Mumbai. The village painters express their skill through natural colours and geometrical hand painting with wooden stick. The warli painting essentially depicts the basic principle of life which are used to depict human figures, animal's figures, houses etc. Warli art is known for its monochromatic depictions that express the folk life of socio-religious customs, imaginations & believes. 'White colour' is used on a red earthen background.

A study was undertaken to document the traditional art of painting, from Maharashtra (India). The data was collected with the help of personal interviews of Warli artisans. The study deals with the history, use of raw materials, technique and themes used in Warli Paintings in the context of the role of local artisans of Jawhar and Dahanu town of Maharashtra. This study focuses on the paintings of warli with special emphasis to the present scenario of Warli painting and to study its evolution from the past to present & adaptation of these traditional paintings on Home textiles and Apparels which is creating future for artisans and happiness to the customers. Adaptation of this traditional art on Home textiles and Apparels is creating happiness and hope for betterment of artisans and creating future for them too.

**Keywords:** Warli, traditional art, painting

#### 1. Introduction

Indian folk paintings are veritably India's pride. Indian paintings have been in the forefront for their superior creative & imaginative skills. They truly reflect her ancient tradition and heritage. Indian painting has a very long tradition & history in Indian art. The earliest Indian paintings were the rock paintings of prehistoric times. Tradition of painting has been carried on in the Indian subcontinent since the ancient times. Standing as a testimony to this fact are the exquisite murals of Ajanta and Ellora, Buddhist palm leaf manuscript, Mughal and Kangra School of miniature Indian painting etc.

Since time immemorial, these paintings, that ornamented the walls, homes and courtyards of the villagers and tribal, were generally ignored as primitive forms of expression. Indian Paintings can be broadly classified as the murals and miniatures. Murals are huge works executed on the walls of solid structures, as in the Ajanta Caves and the Kailashnath temple. Miniature paintings are executed on a very small scale on perishable material such as paper and cloth. The Palas of Bengal were the pioneers of miniature painting in India. The art of miniature painting reached its glory during the Mughal period. The tradition of miniature paintings was carried forward by the painters of different Rajasthani schools of painting like the Bundi, Kishangarh, Jaipur, Marwar and Mewar. The Ragamala paintings also belong to this school. warli painting was discovered by the world as late as the seventh decade of the last century. This art form is simple in comparison to the vibrant paintings from Madhubani. Indian paintings provide an aesthetic continuum that extends from the early civilization to the present day. From being essentially religious in purpose in the beginning, Indian painting has evolved over the years to become a fusion of various cultures and traditions. The Indian painting was exposed to Greco-Roman as well as Iranian and Chinese influences. Cave paintings in different parts of India bear testimony to these influences and a continuous evolution of new idioms is evident.

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## 2. Objectives

The major objectives of this study:

- To study the history, raw materials, technique and themes used and significance of the themes in Warli Paintings in the context of the role of local artisans.

To study its evolution from past to present and diversification of this art.

## 3. History of Warli Art

Historians believe that the warli tradition can be traced back to as far as the Neolithic period between 2,500, BC to 3,000 BC. It has since; travelled across borders & territories & home décor products with warli painting have an international appeal & demand too. The warli painting was discovered by the world as late as the seventh decade of the last century. This art form is simple in comparison to the vibrant paintings from Madhubani.

Warli painting is an indigenous art of Maharashtra. The word ‘Warli’ come from the word ‘Warla’ which means the piece of land. Warli art is an ancient Indian folk art, tradition of painting of a Maharashtra tribe called warli. This art has been received popularity at national and international level too because of its simplicity in shapes, use of single white colour, requirement of minimum tools and creation of beautiful motifs by using simply lines, triangles, squares, circles and dots. Warli tribe resides near base of ranges of sahyadri mountains spreaded at northern side of Mumbai viz. Javhar, Dahanu, Talasari, Mokhada, Wada, Palghar village. They build their square bamboo huts coated with mud and cowdung and these mud walls are painted at the time of ritual functions and marriage ceremony. Warli tribe is fond of folk art and they worship god, goddess and ritual culture too. They depict their traditional lifestyle and their customs and traditions through this art of painting. Women are mainly engaged in the creation of these paintings. Warli art is known for its monochromatic depictions that express the folk life of socio-religious customs, imaginations & believes.

Warli Tribe has still preserved their independent existence through Warli art and folk dance ‘Tarpa Nrutya’.

Earlier Warli painting used to be etched out on walls of Warli’s houses, but nowadays they are being painted on papers, vases, mugs, bed sheets, textiles and apparels too. The wall paintings done only for special occasions such as weddings or harvests. These painting do not depict social life. Images of human beings & animals, along with scenes from daily life are created in a loose rhythmic pattern. Nested at the foot of the western ghat range in Maharashtra, India is the settlement of an ancient tribe known as the warli’s. These tribal people, who survive on forest produce & worship nature, have carved an international niche for themselves by virtue of their artistry. The name of the clan has given the name to the art form & today we know it as the warli painting. Artist & scholars believe the painting style.

## 4. Methodology

The locale selected for the study was Jawhar District, near Nashik, in Maharashtra state (India). A descriptive research design was planned. To get complete and authentic information, interview schedule and participatory observation technique was undertaken. The data was collected with interview method coupled with Observation Method. This method was consisted open end and closed ended questions. The questions dealt with demographic details, history of craft, process of producing craft, colors used for background and

painting and motifs used. A multi visit, interview method was implemented along with photographic documentation for the collection of authentic data. The sample size comprised of ten families, from Dahanu, Mokhada and Jawhar.

## 5. Raw materials used

Earlier warla’s they used to do the paintings on mud walls of their own houses. In this folk art of painting, design is never traced or drawn. It is a visualisation or creativity of artisan. Design is directly painted on walls with wooden stick. Background of design is earthen colour or reddish colour. House walls are painted with cowdung powder and coating is given with geru powder. White paste is made from rice flour and paste is prepared with water which was used for painting.

## 6. Painting Technique Used

- Design is selected.
- Without tracing design, it is directly drawn on paper or cloth.
- Bamboo stick is chewed at the end to make it as supple as a paint brush, is a simple tool used for painting.
- Motifs are painted with white paste on the walls or earthen pots, on wooden articles or on paper or on cloth.
- First the body of human figure is drawn by connecting two triangles and hands and legs are depicted in dancing position and then remaining design is accomplished by painting minute details.
- Cloth is ironed from the reversed side of the cloth.

### 6.1 The attributes characterizing almost in Warli paintings are

1. Use of natural and artificial white colour.
2. A border with simple triangle, squares geometric figures.
3. Symbols like Sun, Moon, Birds, Trees supporting the main theme.
4. Abstract-like Human figures, figures of deities and Bride-Bridegroom.
5. The faces of the human figures are circle, body with two triangles and females are identified with protruding curve line symbolising ponytail.

Warli painting is an emblematic expression of day-to-day experiences and beliefs. As such, symbolism, simplicity and beauty hold them together in a single school of traditional art.



Plate No 1: Painting Technique

### 7. Colours Used

The walls are made of a mixture of branches, earth and cow dung, making a red ochre background for the wall paintings. The warli use only white for their paintings. Their white pigment is a mixture of rice paste & water with gum as a binding.

To create variations geru, Turmeric, Kumkum, leaves, coloured flowers are used to extract natural dyes and gum from trees are extracted. Black colour is extracted from charcoal and used to depict cruel soul, Red colour from Butea Monosperma (Palas) flowers used to show existence of god Naradmuni and symbol of departed souls. Kumkum colour is used as symbol of prosperity. Yellow colour is extracted from pineapple.

### 8. Themes Used and their significance

During marriages, Diwali festival, holi festival, during the season of crop harvesting and during other rituals, painting is done on warli's pada with full of enthusiasm and freedom. Their folk dance, daily life routine, Nature, gods and goddess, animals, birds, these themes are mainly use in painting. Through their artistic living culture and movements of human figures clarifies the theme and it's meaning. The warli painting essentially depict the basic principle of life which are used to depict human figures, animal's figures, houses etc. 'White colour' is used on a red earthen background.

Warli paintings use a very basic graphic vocabulary; a circle, a triangle & a square and paintings are monosyllabic. The circle and triangle come from their observation of nature, the circle representing the sun and the moon, the triangle come from mountains and pointed trees only the square seems to obey a different logic and seems to be a human invention, indicating a sacred enclosure or a piece of land.

#### 8.1 Devchawk Motif

The central motif in each ritual painting is the square, known as the "chawk". Mostly Chawks are of 2 types:-DEVCHAUK & LAGNCHAUK. This motif is a square motif, drawn during marriage ceremony on walls, which is known as "Devchawk" (God's square). Inside a devchawk, palaghat, the mother goddess symbolizing fertility is found. This process of drawing square with god is called as "Chawk Lihine". In the beginning, they just draw a simple line for name of god which is known as "Devregh" (line for god).

#### 8.2 Lagnchawk Motif

The lines are drawn on name of bride and bridegroom. In this motif, bride and bridegroom riding horse is depicted in the center of square. This motif is painted mainly by married women by performing rituals. Remaining part of it is painted with various motifs by women from their families and boys and girls with cheerful gestures, a sort of group painting.



Plate No 8.1: Devchawk



Plate No 8.2A: Lagnchowk



Plate No 8.2B: Lagnchowk

#### 8.3 Tarpa Dance Motif

Tarpa dance is a folk dance of warli tribe. Tarpa is a musical instrument of these tribe. "Tarpa" is made of dry bottlegourd, bamboo tubes and bamboo sticks, cord and wax. This instrument is beautiful looking and 2 feet to 6 feet in length. This dance is performed in circle by male and females by holding hands of each other's and clasping. Main Dance performer standing in center plays instrument Tarpa and Females get involved in this performance with free mind. This dance is started at the time of sunset and performed till sunrise of next day. So sun and moon motifs are seen in this painting. Sometimes boys and girls, they select their dance partner as life partner too through tarpa.



Plate No 8.3A: Tarpa Dance Motif

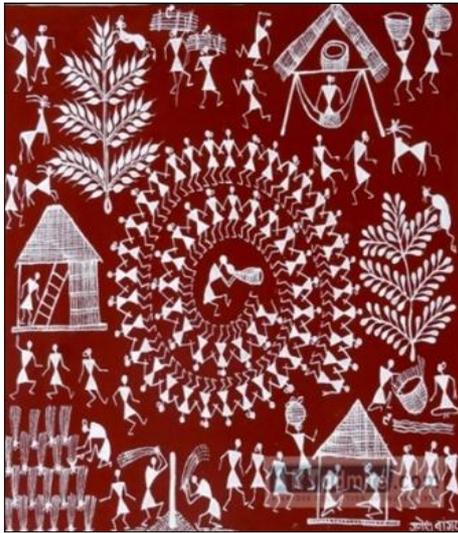


Plate No 8.3B: Tarpa Dance Motif



Plate No 8.6A: Birds and Animals



Plate No 8.6B: Peacock Motif

#### 8.4 Human figures

The central motif in these ritual paintings is surrounded by scenes portraying, hunting, fishing, & farming, festivals & dance, Human figures are represented by two triangles joined at the tip: the upper triangle depicts the trunk & the lower triangle the pelvis. Circle depicts the face without features like nose, eyes and ears. Males are identified from bunch of hair is shown and females with special hairstyle in circle called “Ambada”.



Plate No 8.4: Human Figures in day to day activity



Plate No 8.6C: Hunting scene with Birds flying in the sky, Horse, Butterfly

#### 8.5 Gods and Goddess

Circle is considered as symbol of lifecycle. Sun, Moon, Trees, Creepers, birds, things used in day to day life, Nature and Gods like vaghya god, Naran god and Panchshirya god motif is used to save family and Himai goddess and Hirwai goddess are mainly symbol of nature, depicted in this painting.

#### 8.6 Birds and Animals Motifs

As warlis are farmers, animal motifs like Cows, Bulls, Cocks, Hens, Sheep's, dogs are used in painting as these are domestic animals. Bird motifs like Peacock, sparrow are seen sometimes snake, frog is also seen. Peacock is a national beautiful bird depicted every where in traditional textiles, embroideries and paintings in India. Frogs are depicted for heavy rainfall, Scene of harvesting or farming is shown to grow grains in ample amount and prosperity.

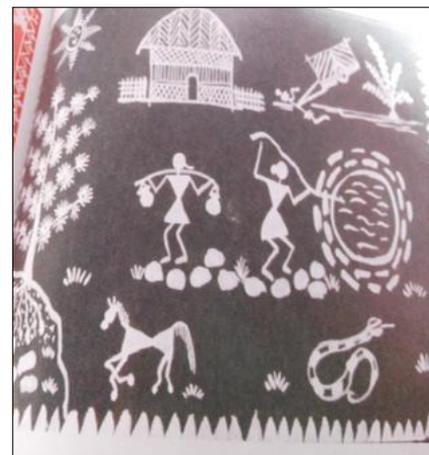


Plate No 8.7: Snake Motif

### 8.8 Festival Holi Motif:

Holi festival is the New year celebration of Maharashtra people mainly celebrated in the month of March.



Plate No 8.8: Festival Holi

### 8.9 Marriage Ceremony Motif

Marriage is one of the most important themes in warli art. A warli painting on marriage clearly shows their marriage god, palghat, birds, trees, men & women dancing in circles, various celebration, bride and bridegroom.

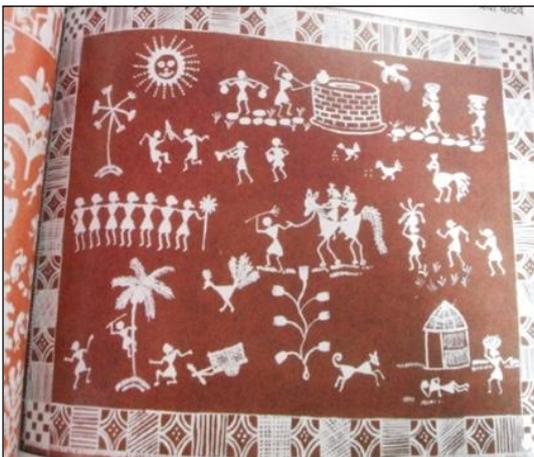


Plate No 8.9: Procession of Bride



Plate No 9B: Marriage Ceremony Bridegroom

### 8.10 Reaping Season Motif

While the reaping season scene is shown by the laborers cutting the crops in the field. On the other hand modern

adaptations in warli art include bicycles & transistors as well apart from flora and fauna. Musicians and agriculture being the traditional one.



Plate No 8.10: Reaping Season Motif

### 9. Evolution from past to present and diversification of this art

After getting this art popular, it has not remained restricted to the mud walls coated with cowdung, it has been crossed various mediums of painting like canvas, paper and received a status in house decorations. It is not only shifted to the walls of flats, Diwankhana of Bungalows but it is adopted proudly for beautification of Five star Hotels. It is also seen on household articles like, Coffee mugs, Files, Wallhangings, Paperweights. Main diversification of this art is its entry in textile world. Simple & aesthetic in apparel, warli art painting is back & gaining much wanted fame.

Recently warli tribal artisans are getting exposure with urban culture and new generation of warlis are adopting motifs like city buses, heighten Buildings, Railway, Ships etc. But still today, motifs like Warli marriage ceremony, Tarpa dance in circle, Indian farming style, Birds and animals lifestyle available in surrounded nature, these motifs are preserving tradition of Warli. In this Global era of remix and fusion culture, even if this art is diversified, warli artisans are adopted this change by not tempting to spoil traditional originality of painting.

### 10. Role of Warli Artisans

The big attraction at Warli is that the village community of Javhar is involving in making this painting on various articles.. According to time and people, medium has changed. Now most of the artists use watercolors and handmade papers or canvas cloth. But they maintain the traditional characteristics and style and themes of paintings although the medium has changed. In order to create a new source of non-agricultural income, different organizations encourage the artists to produce their traditional paintings on handmade paper for commercial sale. This way now it also widely spread and becoming popular and giving hope and happiness to the society.

The craftsmen were aware of history of the craft. The method has changed to great extent in order to meet growing demand of the market. The production process has not changed in the number of stages but there is change in the natural ingredients used in different stages. Traditionally this painting was done on mud walls of houses but today it is used on Fashion Apparels like Dresses, Tops, Kurtis, Saris, Bedsheets, Dupattas, T-shirts on Home textiles like Curtains, Cushion

Covers, Pillow covers, Table cloths, Table napkins, Tablemats, Table runners, Doilyset, Bedsheets, filecovers etc. Similarly it is also done on accessories like Stoles, Scarfs, Purses, Evening Bags, Wall hangings, Portraits, Trey, Mobile Stand, Fancy Pots etc.

There is no organized market established for them hence they face difficulty in marketing their products. The younger generations have better avenues in learning skill and technical knowledge. They have mostly moved out of the village. Only few less skilled youngsters are pursuing this profession engaging other labourers.

### 11. Warli Paintings and Indian Fashion

Warli paintings are today a very popular fashion motif, with designers frequently using them to create fashionable saris, shirts, skirts, salwar kameez, shawls, stoles, tunics, kurtas and kurtis. The paintings can be either directly painted on the fabric or printed on it. Usually clothes with warli paintings are made of materials like raw silk and cotton which hold color easily. The stiffness of raw silk is preferred as it creates the perfect canvas to showcase Warli designs. They are either arranged in bold patterns all over the fabrics or restricted to the border areas.



Plate No 11: Warli on Top and Household articles



Plate No 12: Warli on Bags

### 12. Present Day Scenario

Today Warli paintings have gone much beyond being a simple tribal art. They are considered a sophisticated art form, frequently used to create unique paintings which are sold at very high prices. For the same reason, Warli prints are ubiquitous in fashion and home décor. From designer saris, silk cushion covers and linen bed sheets to mobile covers, purses and jewelry, this art has been adapted for a variety of decorative purposes. Warli paintings can also be easily reproduced using printing techniques which has further increased the customer base for this art. Printed Warli designs, though less authentic, tend to come in more diverse

colors and fabrics. Additionally, it is no longer the sole domain of the Warli tribe as artists and designers across the world have utilized this style in their creations.

### 13. Innovations

The increasing demand for Warli paintings in urban centers has led to the art form evolving newer, more diverse styles and varieties. This is especially true when it comes to clothes and fashion, where the classic white on red design is not the only option available. Bright colors like neon pink, green and red as well as muted shades of purple, beige, green and yellow are increasingly being used in Warli prints.

A recent innovation adapted by Warli artists is the depiction of modern, urban motifs like bicycles, auto rickshaws and roads. The basic symbols remain the same but the use of modern items creates a very contemporary vibe which appeals to a wider audience.

### 14. Interesting Facts

- 1) Warli prints and paintings are generally not used on any kind of footwear as this is an auspicious art form for the tribes.
- 2) Traditionally this art was exclusively done by women but with commercialization and greater demand, it has become the domain of male artists.
- 3) The cultural intellectual property right of Warli Painting is held by the Warli tribal community which has also set up a not-for-profit organization called the Warli Art Foundation devoted to promoting this art form.

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