

Warli art- A reflection of tribal culture of Maharashtra

MEENU SRIVASTAVA

Professor

Department of Textiles and Apparel Designing, College of Home Science,
Maharana Pratap University of Agriculture and Technology, Udaipur (Rajasthan) India

ABSTRACT

The folk and tribal arts of India are very ethnic and simple, and yet colorful and vibrant enough to speak volumes about the country's rich heritage. Tribal art generally reflects the creative energy found in rural areas that acts as an undercurrent to the craftsmanship of the tribal people. Over the years they have found worldwide appreciation and admiration from art connoisseurs. Warli painting is the famous folk art of Maharashtra. Warli is the name of the largest tribe found on the northern outskirts of Mumbai, in Western India. Tribal people express themselves in vivid styles through paintings which they execute on the walls of their house. This was the only means of transmitting folklore to a populace not acquainted with the written word. The most important aspect of the painting is that it does not depict mythological characters or images of deities, but depict social life. Pictures of human beings and animals, along with scenes from daily life are created in a loose rhythmic pattern. Warli paintings are painted white on mud walls. A little backward economically, the warli tribals still maintain their indigenous customs and traditions. The present paper focus on the traditional art with the requisites of the modern world which would help to retain the ethnic value and can be put to modern day use. The growing popularity and commercialization of the Warli paintings have bright potentials for the uplift of these tribal people and integrating them with the mainstream.

Key Words : Warli, Tribes, Culture, Painting, Potential

INTRODUCTION

India had always been known as the land that portrayed cultural and traditional vibrancy through its conventional arts and crafts. Warli art is a beautiful folk art of Maharashtra, traditionally created by the Warli tribal women. This art was first explored in the early seventies and from then it was named as "Warli art". Tribal art generally reflects the creative energy found in rural areas that acts as an undercurrent to the craftsmanship of the tribal people. Tribal art ranges through a wide range of art forms, such as wall paintings, tribal dances, tribal music, and so on. Over the years they have found worldwide appreciation and

admiration from art connoisseurs.

Warli tribe is found in the northern region of Maharashtra where they live in small villages called "Pada". Warli people, simple and happy in nature, paint their walls with rice paste to tell the stories and represent the life around them. Warli art is unique in its simplistic style and direct expression of life. 1 Warli Tribesmen shun all influences of modern urbanization. Warli Art was first explore in the early seventies. when the practice of embellishing the walls of the house was the only means of transmitting folklore to a general populace not versed in the written word. 2 Warlis clearly assert their identity as separate from the other tribes and claim that they have been so called since the time of their earliest ancestors. The language of the Warlis contains many Sanskrit, Gujarati, Marathi and Hindi words. The art of the Warlis at any rate seems to belong to the phase classified as Neolithic in the rock paintings of central India. 3

The tribal (warli, malharkoli, kokani, katkari) of Thane district in Maharashtra make Warli paintings. Agriculture is their main occupation and provides bare sustenance to the Warlis. With paddy as their main crop, harvested once a year, there is little or no surplus for the coming year. An average of two to three acres for a family of five is barely sufficient for the year and the summer months find the Warlis looking for part-time jobs. The men of the family work during summer on other farm, constructing bunds, in bricks factories, repairing road for the Government or with the forest department. 4

For the Warlis, life is cyclic repeating it eternally. Circles best represent the art of warli, which has neither an end nor a beginning. At all occasions – birth, marriage, and death they draw circles, symbol of Mother goddess. Death is not the end for them; rather it is a new beginning. Similar to their religious beliefs the warli paintings carry this circular and spiral movement that gives an everlasting joy

Language :

About Warli tribe :

Warli is the name of the largest tribe found on the northern outskirts of Mumbai, in Western India. The tribes are forest-dwellers but have made a gradual transition towards being a pastoral community. They reside in the West coast of Northern Maharashtra. A large concentration is found in the Thane district, off Mumbai. A little backward economically, they still maintain their indigenous customs and traditions. They are spread out in the villages named Dahanu, Talasari, Jawahar, Jamshed, Ritali, Manor, Cosbad, Vikramgad, Mokhada, Vada, Palghara and several other parts of the district as well. The origin of the warli is yet unknown and no records of this art are found, but many scholars and folklorists believe that it can be traced to as early as tenth century A.D when man learnt to build walls of the house. This art was eventually discovered in the early seventies, and became popular for its unique simplicity and fervor for life.

The Warlis who are simple and happy in nature also include life around them in their paintings because they express everything they see, feel, and believe in life. Jivya Soma Mashe (born 1934) is an artist of Dahanu taluka of Thane district, the Maharashtra state in India, who popularized the Warli tribal art form

For the tribes, life is an eternal circle. At all occasions – birth, marriage, and death they

draw circles, symbol of Mother Goddess. Death is not the end for them; rather it is a new beginning. Which is why circles best represent the art of tribes, which has neither an end nor a beginning.

History of Warli art :

While there are no records of the exact origins of this art, its roots may be traced to as early as the 10th century AD. Research suggests that the tribes are the propagators of a tradition which originated sometime in the Neolithic period between 2,500 BC and 3,000 BC.

Characteristics of Warli art:

The Warli art form is similar to the pre-historic cave paintings in its execution. This art is a two dimensional, with no perspective or proportion. Warli painting is simple and linear with the maximum use of triangular shapes. These extremely rudimentary paintings use a very basic graphic vocabulary: a circle, a triangle and a square. Human and animal bodies are represented by two triangles joined at the tip; the upper triangle depicts the trunk and the lower triangle the pelvis. While men and women are depicted in almost identical fashion, the only differentiator is the little knot of hair in the form of a bun, that indicates women. Stylistically, Warli Paintings can be recognized by the fact that they are painted on an austere mud base using one color, white, with occasional dots in red and yellow. The white pigment is a mixture of rice paste and water with gum as a binding agent. This sobriety is offset by the ebullience of their content.

Traditionally, when painting the mud walls, they use a bamboo stick chewed at the end, to make it work like a paintbrush. Even now, when they paint on cloth, they use a narrow stick dipped in white rice flour paste. Unlike the realism of Kishangarh Paintings, the themes in Warli paintings are highly repetitive and symbolic. Many of the Warli paintings that represent Palghat, the god of marriage and fertility, often include a horse used by the bride and groom.

Each painting is usually an entire scene that contains various elements of nature including people, animals, trees, hills etc. The thread that binds all these loose elements can be events like a marriage, a dance, sowing, harvesting or hunting. Different varieties of trees are drawn in detail forming intricate decorative patterns. Birds, squirrels, monkeys, snakes and other animals are also depicted, frequently in action. Other elements in nature like streams and rocks are also featured. The 'Tree of Life' and the 'Tarpa' dance are significant images often seen in Warli art. The Tarpa is a trumpet like instrument and many Warli paintings will have a tarpa player surrounded by drummers and dancing men and women.

Symbolism in Warli art :

Every symbols of Warli art has their own meaning and language. Men and women in spiral form and concentric circular designs in Warli Paintings symbolize the circle of life. The harmony and balance depicted in these paintings is supposed to signify the harmony and balance of the universe.

The sacred nature of the trees is suggested by their soaring heights in relation to the men and beasts. Dances of spring, of budding trees, of the meeting of lovers, and the poise and abandon form an important repertoire in tribal vocabulary. Nothing is static; the trees,

the human figures, the birds challenge and respond to each other, create tensions and resolve them. The art of the tribal people symbolizes man's harmony with each other and with nature. These paintings also supposedly invoke powers of the Gods.

Difference between other art :

Warli Paintings are very different from other folk and tribal paintings in India. Their themes are not mythological, nor their colours as bright as the ones seen in Madhubani Paintings. Neither do they contain the robust sensuality of the paintings found in Eastern India. Instead they are painted on mud, charcoal, cow dung based surface using natural dyes in white. Their linear nature and monochromatic hues make them similar to pre-historic cave paintings and aboriginal art in execution. These paintings also serve social and religious aspirations of the local people, since it is believed that these paintings invoke powers of the God.

Recent trends in Warli art :

The style of Warli painting evolved from its mural form. Even today, it is a tradition with the tribals to decorate the mud walls of the huts with paintings made in rice paste. The painting on paper is a fall-out of commercialization. Nowadays, these paintings are made on hand-made paper, usually green or brown, the colour of mud-walls with or without the cow-dung, with white paint.

Warli art is done in white on brown or red mud base in simple geometrical shapes. It has gradually diversified into different backgrounds with modern mediums to preserve the paintings. From walls and floor, to paper and canvas is the stepping stone to cater to the market for decorative art, which is highly commercialized. Warli paintings were never originally intended to be used for commercial gains. However, after they were discovered twenty five years ago, they became instantly popular, probably because they evoked the trumpets, drumbeats and songs of the Warli tribe through their simple motifs. Soon the tribes realized that the sale of their paintings made economic sense. In today's fast changing world of fashion, designers and manufacturers are constantly faced with the challenges of providing new designs to suit the rapidly growing fashion consciousness in the market.

Conclusion:

Tribal people express themselves in vivid styles through paintings which they execute on the walls of their house. This was the only means of transmitting folklore to a populace not acquainted with the written word. The most important aspect of the painting is that it does not depicts mythological characters or images of deities, but depict social life. Pictures of human beings and animals, along with scenes from daily life are created in a loose rhythmic pattern. Earlier Warli painting used to be etched out on walls of Warli houses, but nowadays, they are being painted on paper and canvas.

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