

## **FOLK ART: THE MODERN FORM OF PREHISTORIC INDIAN ART**

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### *Abstract*

*This research paper explores the evolution of Indian folk art as a modern manifestation of prehistoric Indian art. It examines how early humans used pictorial representations as a means of expression in the absence of a written language, leading to the development of various folk art traditions over time. By analyzing prehistoric cave paintings and their transition into established folk art forms such as Madhubani, Warli, Gond, and Bhil paintings, this study highlights the continuity of artistic expression in India. The research underscores the significance of simple lines, symbolic imagery, and cultural narratives in both prehistoric and folk art, illustrating how visual storytelling has remained a fundamental aspect of Indian artistic heritage.*

### *Keywords*

*Prehistoric Art, Folk Art, Indian Art, Painting*

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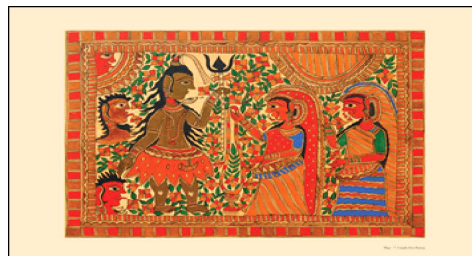
## Introduction

The origin of human existence and the evolution of consciousness have always been subjects of research. When combined with the study of artistic creations, the inquiry becomes even more profound. Early humans, upon perceiving the world around them, likely questioned their surroundings, leading to the emergence of various cultures and traditions. Before the advent of written language, primitive humans used pictorial symbols to express their daily lives, etching images on cave walls and rocks. These early depictions, often representing activities such as hunting celebrations and group dances, eventually evolved into more structured forms of art.



**(Pre-Historic Art)**

As civilization progressed, these artistic expressions found new platforms in temples, palaces, and homes, giving rise to distinct folk art traditions across India. The evolution of prehistoric art—from the rock shelters of Bhimbetka, Kaimur Hills, Likhunia, and Ajanta-Ellora—mirrors the development of folk art in various regions. Folk art styles such as Madhubani (Bihar), Kalighat painting (Bengal), Pattachitra (Odisha), Warli (Maharashtra), Sanjhi and Kohbar (Uttar Pradesh), Gond and Bhil paintings (Madhya Pradesh), Aipan (Uttarakhand), and Pichwai (Rajasthan) emerged as a direct continuation of prehistoric visual storytelling. Both prehistoric and folk art share a fundamental characteristic: they rely on simple lines, bold colors, and symbolic imagery to depict human experiences, nature, and cultural traditions. These artistic expressions, rooted in religious and social rituals, continue to be an integral part of Indian heritage.



**(Pre-Historic Art)**

### **Prehistoric Art and Its Evolution**

India has always been a land of diverse cultures and traditions, where art has played a vital role in human expression. From ancient times, painting has been considered the most revered form of art, as reflected in the Vishnudharmottara Purana, which states: **“Among all arts, painting is supreme, as it bestows righteousness, wealth, desires, and liberation.”**

In prehistoric times, when language was yet to be developed, early humans relied on pictorial representations to communicate. Cave paintings found in various parts of India depict hunting scenes, daily activities, and social gatherings. These artworks, created using natural pigments, prioritize expression over technical precision, with a focus on bold lines and minimal colors rather than shading or perspective.

Prehistoric paintings often feature images of wild animals, hunting expeditions, dancing figures, and ritualistic celebrations. These depictions, despite their simplicity, effectively convey emotions and narratives, demonstrating that art itself was a language of expression. The absence of detailed anatomical precision is compensated by the emphasis on movement, rhythm, and symbolism.

As human civilization progressed, these rudimentary depictions gradually transformed into more structured and refined art forms, reflecting the social, cultural, and religious changes of the time. This transition paved the way for the emergence of folk art, which retained the fundamental characteristics of prehistoric paintings while adapting to the evolving cultural landscape.



### **Folk Art: A Continuation of Prehistoric Traditions-**

With the advancement of civilization, the need for artistic expression did not diminish but rather evolved. Just as a child, without a structured language, expresses emotions through gestures and drawings, early humans used visual art as their primary medium of communication. Over time, with the development of language and organized societies, art adapted to new cultural contexts, giving rise to folk traditions.

As India transitioned from prehistoric settlements to organized kingdoms, each region developed its own artistic identity. These regional art forms, shaped by local traditions, materials, and social customs, came to be known as folk art. Folk paintings, like prehistoric cave art, primarily focus on nature, human life, and religious beliefs, using simple compositions and vibrant colors.

One of the most prominent examples is Madhubani painting, also known as Mithila art, which originated in Bihar. According to legend, when Lord Rama and Sita were married, King Janaka commissioned local artists to decorate the walls of Mithila with intricate paintings. This tradition continued for centuries, with Madhubani artists depicting wedding scenes, mythological stories, and natural elements such as the sun, moon, and flora. The paintings follow three main styles: Kachni (line drawing), Bharni (color filling), and Tantrik (geometric symbolism). Similarly, Sanjhi art from Uttar Pradesh, traditionally created for Durga Puja and Krishna worship, consists of intricate stenciled designs made from colored powders. Sanjhi paintings feature celestial bodies, religious symbols, and scenes from Krishna's life, reflecting a deep connection between folk art and spirituality.

Another significant folk tradition is Gond painting, originating from the Gond tribal community of Madhya Pradesh. Dating back approximately 2,500 years, Gond paintings depict folklore, mythology, and daily life, with a strong emphasis on nature. Created using natural pigments, these paintings are characterized by intricate patterns and rhythmic compositions, reflecting the community's deep connection with their environment.

The Bhil tribe, one of the oldest indigenous communities, has also contributed to India's folk art heritage. Bhil paintings, known for their repetitive dot patterns and earthy color palette, depict community life, deities, and ancestral stories. Despite their simplicity, these paintings exude a unique aesthetic appeal, showcasing the artistic ingenuity of the Bhil people.

### **Conclusion**

This research paper highlights the intrinsic connection between prehistoric Indian art and folk art traditions. The absence of a structured language in prehistoric times led early humans to use pictorial representations as a means of expression, a practice that continued into later centuries in the form of folk paintings. As Indian society evolved, regional variations in culture, traditions, and beliefs gave rise to distinct folk art forms, each maintaining the core characteristics of prehistoric cave paintings—simplicity, symbolism, and emotional depth.

Through an analysis of various folk traditions, including Madhubani, Sanjhi, Gond, and Bhil paintings, this study demonstrates that Indian folk art is not merely

a decorative practice but an extension of prehistoric visual storytelling. The continuity of artistic expression from ancient rock paintings to contemporary folk traditions reinforces the idea that folk art is, in essence, the modern manifestation of India's prehistoric artistic heritage.

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