

## Contribution and Representation of Women in Folk Art

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### **Abstract**

*This research is about the role of women in art. It shows how women have helped keep cultural practices alive. In rural areas women are the ones who make sure these artistic traditions are passed down from one generation to the next. They teach each skill like painting and weaving.*

*Women in areas do things like pottery and embroidery too. They also perform folk songs and dances. The art that women make is closely tied to the customs and rituals of their communities. It reflects who they are and what they value.*

*Women play a vital role in folk art, often depicted as mothers, workers, and symbols of beauty and strength. Folk artists embrace simple shapes, vibrant colours, and traditional patterns to capture daily life and culture. In many artworks, women are also associated with nature, fertility, and celebrations. These images reflect the values, beliefs, and roles that women hold in society. Folk art goes beyond just showcasing their responsibilities; it also conveys their emotions and identities. Through these pieces, we gain insight into how different communities honour and perceive women across various traditions and eras.*

*The study wants to show how important it is to help women artists. It thinks that women should have access to education and financial help. The government should also do things to support women artists. If we understand how important women are, to art we can appreciate it more. We can also help women be more independent and make a living from their art. This will help rural communities be stronger and more sustainable.*

### **Keywords**

*Unwavering, inventiveness, embroidering, Contemporary, safeguard, confronting*

## **Introduction**

India is celebrated for its vibrant and varied folk art traditions, with each state showcasing its own distinct style that mirrors its history, beliefs, and lifestyle. From vivid wall paintings to detailed handmade crafts, these art forms highlight the ingenuity of local communities. The art and culture of India are intricately tied to traditions that have been lovingly handed down through generations. Women play a crucial role in this cultural legacy. In many areas, they are the primary artists of folk art, learning these techniques from their mothers and elders. They use their artistic skills to adorn homes, mark festivals, and convey their feelings and thoughts. Through their unwavering dedication, women ensure that these traditions endure. Their efforts not only preserve India's cultural identity but also elevate folk art on both national and global stages. They use folk art to express their daily life, beliefs, and emotions. Women are often shown as mothers, workers, and symbols of strength, beauty, and fertility. In Indian folk art, their contribution is especially important. For example, in Madhubani painting, women traditionally create detailed designs on walls and paper, showing scenes of marriage, festivals, and nature. Similarly, Warli paintings often represent women in daily activities like farming, dancing, and cooking, using simple shapes. In Gond art, women artists use bright colours and patterns to depict stories, animals, and cultural traditions. These artworks not only highlight women's roles in society but also show their creativity and voice. Through folk art, women preserve culture and traditions while expressing their identity. Their contribution has helped keep these art forms alive and meaningful across generations.

### **Indian folk art and the role of women**

Indian folk art. Women are the primary creators and custodians of folk-art traditions in many regions of India. They acquire these artistic skills from their mothers and transmit them to future generations. Their daily lives frequently include folk art, which they utilize to embellish their homes, celebrate festivals, and commemorate significant events like weddings and births.

Through these works of art, women communicate their ideas, feelings, and cultural values. Women's roles in society are also depicted in several paintings and designs, including caring for family, working, and taking part in ceremonies. Women preserve traditions and sustain cultural identity via folk art. Their devotion and inventiveness help safeguard these art forms from extinction. Therefore, since women are both the artists and the driving force behind many of these lovely traditions, Indian folk art and women's roles are intrinsically related.

### **Indian folk art in which women play an important role**

In numerous folk-art traditions of India, women have traditionally served as the main keepers, transferring techniques from mothers to their daughters and employing art as a means for rituals, narratives, and social observations.

### **1. Madhubani Painting (Bihar)**

Madhubani stands out as one of the most renowned art forms created by women. For many generations, women in the Mithila area adorned the walls of their homes with these artworks during celebratory events such as weddings and the arrival of newborns. Employing materials like their fingers, small branches, and matchsticks, they produce colourful depictions inspired by nature and mythology. Contemporary artists like Dulari Devi have elevated this tradition from local households to international art institutions.

### **2. Warli Art (Maharashtra)**

Among the Warli people, painting has historically been a ceremony carried out by married women, known as Savasinis. They utilize a basic color scheme of white rice flour applied to walls made of red mud. These artworks serve a purpose beyond mere aesthetics; they are considered to be engraved prayers for occasions like weddings and agricultural harvests. Although men have begun to participate in this craft, the revered mother goddess, Palghat, continues to be the focal point of their artistic expressions.

### **3. Kutchi Embroidery (Gujarat)**

In the arid area of Kutch, women belonging to tribes such as Rabari and Ahir transform ordinary fabric into stunning works of art. Utilizing silk threads, reflective mirrors, and beads, they intricately stitch their heritage and individuality onto garments. For these women, the act of embroidering not only fosters community connection but also serves as an essential income source that empowers them financially.

### **4. Aipan Art (Uttarakhand)**

Aipan is a ceremonial art form created on the floors by women from the Kumaon region. They begin with a foundation of red clay, known as Geru, onto which they apply white designs made from rice paste. These creations are thought to safeguard the household and welcome the goddess Lakshmi. Mothers impart these geometric designs to their daughters, ensuring that this cultural practice persists through generations.

### **5. Bengal Pattachitra (West Bengal)**

Historically, scroll painting, known as Pattachitra, was dominated by men, but in recent years, women have taken charge. In villages such as Naya, female artists like Swarna Chitrakar employ these elongated scrolls to raise awareness and express creative commentary on contemporary topics, including girls' education, health issues, and environmental concerns, transforming a traditional art form into a medium for social justice.

### **6. Bhil Art (Madhya Pradesh)**

The Bhil community crafts striking images of wildlife and crops using a technique that involves dots. Bhuri Bai was the pioneer female artist from her tribe to create works on paper and canvas. Her achievements opened the door for numerous other women from

tribal backgrounds to share their cultural narratives, allowing them to earn income and receive national acclaim.

### **7. Kasuti Embroidery (Karnataka)**

Kasuti is a refined hand embroidery style originating from Karnataka that can be traced back to the era of the Chalukyas. It is exclusively practiced by women, often on traditional Ilkal sarees. The artistry is so meticulous that it necessitates counting each thread of the fabric, and since no knots are employed, the pattern appears identical on both sides.

### **8. Mandana Art (Rajasthan & Madhya Pradesh)**

Mandana represents one of the most ancient forms of tribal painting for walls and floors. Exclusively created by women, it signifies the transition between seasons or the celebration of festivals. They utilize chalk and red clay to swiftly illustrate rhythmic designs, symbolizing protection and welcoming divine entities into their homes.

### **9. Kantha Embroidery (Bengal, Odisha & Bihar)**

Kantha stitching is a traditional art form originating from West Bengal and Bangladesh, with roots extending back for centuries and typically carried out by women in rural areas. Initially, it served as a method to repurpose worn sarees and dhotis, transforming them into cozy quilts through the use of a basic running stitch. In contemporary times, it showcases exquisite designs depicting flora, fauna, and scenes of everyday life in villages, granting numerous women essential economic freedom.

### **What changes can be seen in the depiction of women from folk art to modern art?**

**Folk Art: The Idealized Symbol** Folk Art: The Idealized Symbol. The depiction of women in Indian art has undergone a radical transformation, shifting from symbolic ideals to complex, realistic individuals.

### **Folk Art: The Idealized Symbol**

In folk practices such as Madhubani or Warli, representations of women were viewed through a shared perspective. They embodied elements of fertility, nature, and spirituality. Deities like Goddess Durga and Lakshmi were prominently featured, illustrated with prominent eyes and defined features to reflect strength and elegance. Within these art forms, women seldom appeared as “individuals”; instead, they served as archetypes—the mother, the bride, or the goddess. Artists like Sita Devi, known for Madhubani, thrived by mastering these conventional, rhythmic designs that honored domestic celebrations and mythological narratives.

### **The Modern Transition: Realism and Emotion**

The 20th century introduced a movement that “humanized” female subjects. Amrita Sher-Gil, often likened to India’s Frida Kahlo, transformed this portrayal by illustrating rural women not merely as vibrant embellishments but as quiet, sorrowful individuals. In

pieces such as *Three Girls*, she showcased their inner lives and the challenges of their existence, shifting away from the traditional “attractive” folk style.

### **Contemporary Art: The Political and Personal**

Artists of the modern and contemporary eras have entirely deconstructed the notion of the “ideal woman.” Arpita Singh portrays older women amidst every day, chaotic surroundings, reclaiming the aging female physique from conventional standards of beauty. Nalini Malani utilizes female figures to address themes of violence and societal injustice, transforming women from passive muses into influential political witnesses. Anjolie Ela Menon reinvents the female figure with an eerie, melancholic intensity, merging traditional elements with contemporary feelings of isolation. Presently, the “Female Gaze” takes center stage. Women are depicted beyond mere symbols of fortune or fertility; they are shown with imperfections, aspirations, and multifaceted identities. This evolution from sacred depictions within village homes to those on the canvases of contemporary art galleries illustrates the growing voice of women within Indian society.

### **What role these art forms play in promoting women’s empowerment?**

Art forms play a significant role in promoting women’s empowerment by offering a venue for expression, recognition, and economic autonomy. From age-old crafts to modern digital art, these channels confront traditional power structures and encourage communal strength.

#### **1. Confronting Stereotypes and Redefining Stories**

Visual arts, literature, and performing arts enable women to break down entrenched gender norms.

**Visual Arts:** Modern creators utilize imagery—such as “broken chains” or vivid hues—to portray women as empowered and self-reliant rather than submissive figures.

**Literature:** Authors like Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and Virginia Woolf employ their writing to promote intellectual and artistic freedom, illustrating the battle for equal rights.

**Performing Arts:** Theater serves as a direct medium for raising consciousness about violence based on gender and confronting societal norms in both rural and urban areas.

#### **2. Financial Empowerment and Economic Freedom**

For numerous women, particularly in rural locations, art constitutes a crucial means of income.

**Handicrafts:** The handicraft sector, which includes over 80% of women in positions in countries like India, offers a route to financial autonomy. **Traditional Arts:** Artistic expressions such as Madhubani painting and Kutchi embroidery have transitioned from home decor to global products, allowing women to assume roles as primary income providers and community leaders.

### **3. Creating Community and Support**

Art nurtures a feeling of connection and collective effort.

**Collectives:** Women-driven artistic initiatives create an opportunity to discuss identity and representation while dispelling the myth of “the solitary genius” through models of collaborative assistance. **Digital Platforms:** social media and online art movements enhance voices on a global scale, linking women across different regions to address concerns like body shaming and gender discrimination. Ultimately, art serves as a “practice for freedom,” empowering women to not only convey their realities but also transform the very circumstances of their lives.

#### **Challenges faced by these women**

Although folk art serves as a strong means of empowerment, women artists encounter systemic obstacles in social, economic, and physical realms that frequently cast them as “invisible labourers.”

#### **1. Socio-Cultural Barriers**

**Interconnected Duties:** In traditional styles such as Madhubani, artistic expression is frequently regarded as an obligation related to home or rituals instead of a recognized career, creating a distinction that diminishes the difference between “art” and routine household chores.

**Limited Freedom of Movement:** Societal norms often restrict women’s opportunities to attend workshops, showcase their art, or directly market their creations in local marketplaces.

**Lack of Time:** The necessity to manage labour-intensive artistic tasks along with unpaid caregiving and household responsibilities restricts their professional development and available time for productivity.

#### **2. Economic Marginalization**

**Manipulation by Middlemen:** Women often find it difficult to access markets independently, resulting in reliance on male intermediaries who oversee sales and retain a substantial share of the profits. **The “Invisible Worker” Issue:** In industries such as handloom and weaving, women engage in vital preparatory activities (such as dyeing and preparation of threads) that frequently go unpaid and unacknowledged as “skilled labour.” **Digital Disparity:** Lower levels of literacy and insufficient digital competencies impede their capacity to navigate e-commerce platforms or benefit from contemporary government initiatives. **Intellectual Property Rights Concerns:** Women’s creative contributions are often sold without proper credit, and there exists a notable gender disparity in the acknowledgment of Intellectual Property Rights within the realm of folk art.

### **3. Physical and Institutional Hurdles**

**Health Challenges:** Prolonged periods spent in fixed or uncomfortable positions—typical of Mithila painting—result in persistent musculoskeletal issues, particularly affecting the back, neck, and shoulders. **Lack of Acknowledgment:** While women are often the primary guardians of cultural heritage, they are frequently neglected for governmental honours and institutional recognition when compared to their male peers.

### **Present condition of Folk Art in India**

The current state of traditional art in India is a contradiction of lively rejuvenation and ongoing challenges. Globalization has created new opportunities in the market but has also compelled traditional craftsmen to shift to contemporary preferences, resulting in a fragile equilibrium between cultural legacy and economic viability.

#### **1. Economic Expansion and Global Integration**

Art forms such as Madhubani, Warli, and Pattachitra have managed to evolve from wall murals to mediums like canvas, clothing, and home furnishings. This shift towards “commercialization” has led to worldwide acknowledgment and a rise in consumer interest. Online marketplaces and social media platforms have enabled artists to connect with global audiences directly, eliminating the need for traditional intermediaries.

#### **2. Technological Evolution**

The initiative known as “Digital India” has extended its reach into rural areas. Numerous artists now utilize platforms like Instagram and WhatsApp to display their creative processes, effectively linking rural artisans with urban buyers. Government programs, such as the introduction of Geographical Indication (GI) labels, have contributed to safeguarding the originality of local crafts, including Kashmiri Saffron and Channapatna Toys, from counterfeit versions.

#### **3. Threats to Existence**

Despite the popularity of the “indigenous chic” movement, numerous traditional art forms are at risk of disappearing.

**Economic Sustainability:** Many young individuals hesitate to pursue careers in folk art due to unpredictable earnings and tend to choose consistent urban employment instead.

**Scarcity of Materials:** Factors like climate change and urban expansion have made it more challenging to obtain natural dyes and traditional timber.

**Mass Production:** Inexpensive, factory-made replicas frequently drive down the prices of authentic hand-painted or hand-woven products, undermining the value of artisans’ work.

#### **4. Government and Non-Governmental Organization Aid**

Organizations such as the Lalit Kala Akademi and various Handloom Boards offer funding and exhibition opportunities. Nevertheless, rural craftspeople continue to face

challenges due to insufficient access to formal credit and medical care, especially for work-related issues such as deteriorating eyesight or chronic back pain.

In conclusion, India's traditional art is undergoing a robust transition, relying on its capacity to blend with the contemporary marketplace while preserving its cultural essence.

### **Conclusion**

The role of women in Indian folk art is essential and transformative. For many centuries, women have served as the main protectors of these customs, transmitting skills from one generation to the next within their households. Artistic forms such as Madhubani, Warli, and different types of embroidery originated as home-based customs conducted by women to commemorate life and the natural world. Currently, their involvement has evolved from being private artisans to becoming public businesswomen. By incorporating folk art into the broader market, women are achieving financial stability and amplifying their social influence. This economic transformation enables them to confront outdated gender stereotypes and make investments in their families' education and health. Nonetheless, representation is still an area that needs improvement. Although women undertake the majority of the work, they frequently do not receive formal acknowledgment and have limited access to high-end markets. They are often underrepresented in award ceremonies and fail to occupy many leadership positions in comparison to men.

In summary, women embody the essence of folk art. Although they have played a crucial role in preserving India's cultural legacy, genuine empowerment will be realized only when they are afforded equal compensation, digital skills, and direct ownership of their artistic creations. Supporting women artists goes beyond merely preserving art; it honors the skilled hands that have sustained our culture.

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