

Ritual Art by Women of Rural India

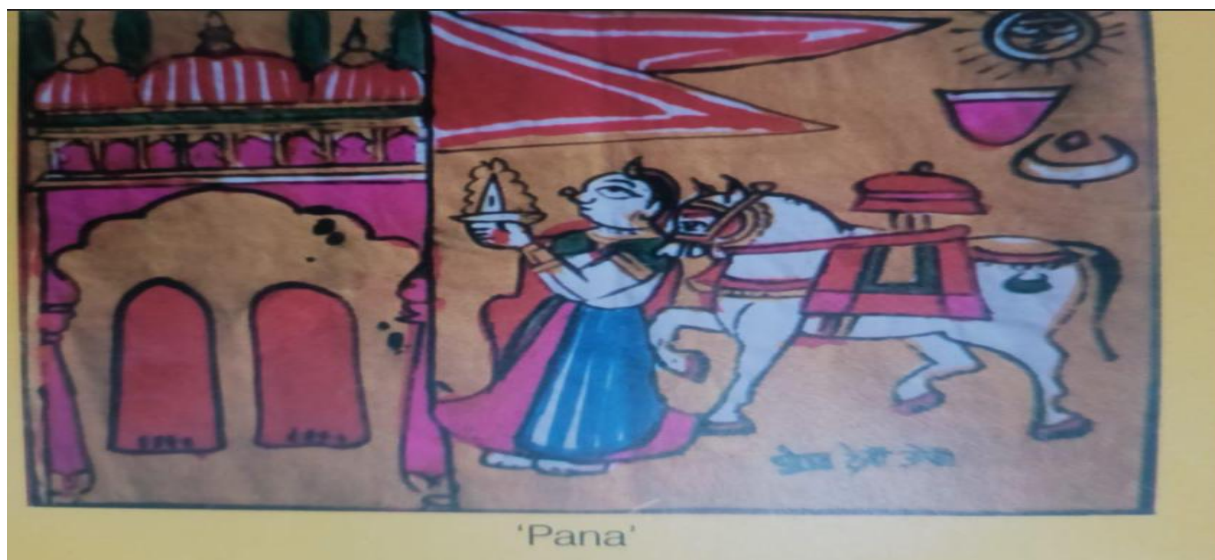
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The ancient Indian philosophy says that the existence of creation is based upon the union of male and female, and both have an equal position in the world.

From the status of women during the Indus Valley Civilization we learn that the society was women oriented. And during the Vedic Civilization woman was treated at par with man and learned women like Apala, Ghosha, Lopamudra etc.

had right to perform religious ritual like the rishis (saints) of that age. But then due to economic, political and social changes in the society, women were sometimes worshipped like goddesses and at other times treated as slaves. And a time came when woman was totally dominated by man and was consequently not allowed to read Vedas (the most ancient sacred literature of Hinduism) or perform any religious rites and kept in veils Confined to her home. But she did not accept defeat and found her outlet in the expression of folk-art, sought mental peace and gave vent to her feelings through art. She found solutions to all her problems of life like: life, death etc. in folk art. She has handed over this art from one generation to another, has kept the tradition alive and taught the women the art of survival.



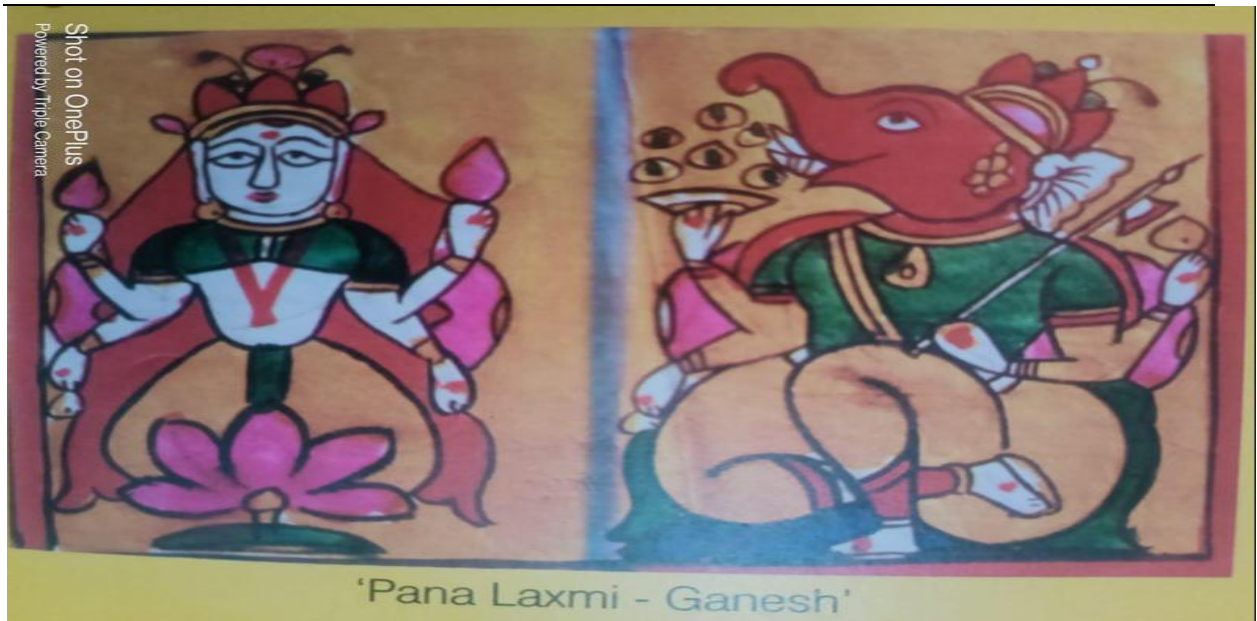
Folk art is indeed an expression of the inner mind and is as ancient as the history of human existence as a society. This art has formed a tradition that has been deeply engraved in the entire social fiber of India. Curiously enough women, particularly rural women, have taken up the task of preservation, addition and transfer of this great art-tradition to the posterity. These women artists have not only infused life in the ancient culture and tradition of art but saved it from the subordination of powerful classes that have erupted in the process of historical domination. Not only this they have strengthened art in such a manner that it can go further and keep pace with the Progressive world of art.

It was Indian folk art that identified its wisdom with the changing times and international situations and prepared a Coordinated base which was positive and creative in spirit. With the passage of time Indian culture and heritage of art went forward inhibiting changes that have made it more pervading covering the entire gamut of social life-patterns. These unknown folk artists, particularly women artists have displayed their abound love and unflinching faith in the land and in their conception and vision of art which flowed from their heart and culminated into art objects which enthrall the total consciousness level of the Nation.

In India this folk art is expressed in Mandanas (motif symbols painted on walls and floor basically on mud houses, representing traditional ideas of well being showered by the grace of God and goddesses), Mehendi (henna-decoration of hands of ladies and girls), Sanjhi painting (Chariot of goddess painted with the help of lines (floor decoration either with dry colors or wet colors). earthen pots decorated with colors. Thape (painted hands) Pane (Painted colorful papers) and Phad (scroll of painting) represent folk tale of heroic deeds of kings or brave soul or episodes of some God killing demons and protecting pious people, cows etc., are all different aspects of life style of women exhibiting their full faith in the established tradition of Social life and consciousness handed over to them from one generation to another.



One can see this folk culture retained by the rural women in their mud huts washed with yellow soil and painted with Haldi (Turmeric) soil), the Heena, Kumkum, Geru (red sticking chalk and mixture of other dry or wet colors on walls, door or windows. These types of painting on walls represent the variety of folk art in different regions of the states, in a traditional village (particularly in Rajasthan) house after house can be seen painted with welfare motifs, like village women carrying pitchers of water on their head wearing colorful dresses, peacocks, parrots, sparrows, elephants, horses, flags, Swastika etc. The entire village looks like an art gallery of rainbow colors. The artists of these 'heavenly creations' with handful of colors are mostly Women. All such creations only reflect the vibration of their deep-rooted joy which finds expression in these forms of art. This perception of the inner self is an absolute reality which is beyond our thoughts and beyond our concepts of time and space. The philosophy behind women artists creations should not be taken as mere Painting as they cannot identify the real spirit of creativity to discover the reality of soul or the inner self. It is this creativity which has been upholding the lofty ideals of morality. and it is because of this specialty that in spite of astounding physical and mental achievements the entire world is looking towards India for inner peace.



One can trace 'Swastika' motif in women's painting right from the beginning to this date, It stands for "good for all (everyone's well-being) and discards the narrow feelings of "this is mine and that is yours" because it is inspired by the Indian ideal of *Vasudeva Kutumbakam* (world as one family), single unit of human beings may be considering the outwardly different in color caste and creed, they are the same within. Therefore, our women artists paint Swastik motion on every auspicious occasion or festival or celebration. In India each day of the year is an auspicious occasion which keeps women busy throughout the year.

Every festive day symbolizes service, renunciation and resolution is reflected in painting of Mandanas, Thapas and Panas. The painting of "Shravan Kumar's Thapa" (Painted motif on wall) or the story depiction of Shravan Kumar sends messages of service and sacrifice for family elders. Similarly, the "Thapa of Gogaji" (Painted motif on wall) induces family members to strictly abide by their promises. These folk paintings bring home the best of our old culture and style of living and bind all members of family Together as one single unit. Indian women keep themselves busy al through the year in these paintings and worship with the sole object of keeping away their family members from tensions and strife which result from birth or death or collection of undue wealth. They in a way prepare them to tolerate the days of misery with courage and unity Thus the significance of the art-creations by women in the overall art treasure of paintings in Indian rituals cannot be measured in words.



The compulsion of the social transformation has had its impact on the existence of woman as a whole. In the past there were times when she reigned supreme position like a queen and was even worshipped as a goddess,

there were times when she reigned supreme position like a queen and was even worshipped as a goddess, At other times she was considered as a curse or punishment by god. It was the natural expression through the ritual based of painting that saved her from falling a prey to the pangs of psychological obsession or psychic disorders and brought her out of such a severe situation.

The values of life are rapidly changing now and women are in process of getting free from the social stigma that was attached to them right from their birth, now, when woman as child a young lady or even as an adult woman expresses her teachings and feelings through the art of painting is able to present a vision of healthy mentality, free from social and psychological tensions. Such creations not only give immortal representation to the cultural heritage of the state and the nation, at large, but also perform the significant task of fulfilling her duty towards humanity. Through her creativity, the Own individual identity. woman, has also strongly established her Own individual identity.

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