

THE INDIAN FOLK ART OF THE ANTHROPOCENE SPEAKS LOUDER THAN WORDS

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Abstract: This study is an effort to highlight the potential for art, particularly specifically folk art, to alter our perception of the natural world. It considers the Anthropocene, the age in which Earth is coping with the effects of calamitous human actions, and investigates whether or not Indian Folk Art may help. According to the study, a posthumanist critical aesthetic has always been present in folk art. These creative styles' depictions of nature may provide us with powerful answers to the Anthropocene. The first part of the article provides a critical posthumanist analysis of the relationship between Folk Art and the natural world. In both its subject matter and its medium, folk art reflects the Anthropocene's interconnectedness with nature. The next chapters examine several types of tribal and folk art, delving into the ways in which they reflect prevailing themes and the relationship between human culture and the natural world. Some folk paintings and tribal art at the 2018 India Art Fair are also discussed in the article. This dissertation focuses on four significant folk art styles (Gond, Pattachitra, Madhubani, and Warli), although the claims it makes are universally applicable to folk art as a whole.

Keywords: Folk Art, Anthropocene, Critical Posthumanism

Introduction

The ability to empathise is a product of the creative process. In my opinion, art is a powerful tool for bringing attention to taking action on social issues. Art brings people together, regardless of their social status, political leanings, or religious views. Research, education, awareness-raising, persuasion, community building, and political action may all benefit from this gathering. The arts have always served as a vital means of communication and tradition preservation. Even if it doesn't end the situation, it makes handling it far less difficult. Survival at a period characterised by Climate change, Global Warming, and Environmental degradation is the greatest challenge the planet faces right now. The degree to which human activities have begun to change the planet is shown by the fact that this age has been labelled the Anthropocene. The question of whether or not the Arts and Humanities are relevant in times of crisis is one that is brought to the forefront by crises of any kind and has recently been revived with the introduction of Covid 19. While science helps us understand the world, art has the power to influence people's perspectives and motivate them to make a difference. In his article on the relationship between art and environmental protection, Papavasileou et al. (2020) write, "Art is a source of inspiration and invention. Artistic expression has long been sought by those seeking to give voice to their inner thoughts and feelings. (p.288) Art encourages us to look within for answers to external concerns. Now that the value of art as a catalyst for

transformation has been demonstrated, we can turn our attention to folk art, one of the earliest forms of artistic expression and a particularly effective medium for protecting the natural world. Long before the Anthropocene and Eco-art movements gained popularity, folk art was working to improve humankind's connection with the natural world. Heartney (2020) writes that eco-art "harness[es] the power of art, including its tendency towards metaphor and verbal/visual play, its resistance to received ideas, and its willingness to colonise new areas of knowledge in order to persuade us to think differently about our relationship with the environment." Folk art has been doing this forever, challenging us to reconsider our perceptions of the world around us. Environmental concerns and biodiversity are not seen as "other" by folk artists. For them, it is a partnership devoid of formal authority and founded instead on a common understanding of the universe. All tribal art emphasises the importance of living in harmony with the environment. This article makes an effort to bring attention to Indian folk art, its relationship to nature, the ways in which it adheres to a critical posthumanist aesthetic, and the ways in which it has always reacted to the Anthropocene, even before the term was coined. Within a critical posthumanist perspective, the first portion of this article discusses the relationship between Folk Art and the natural world. In the second part, we look at the ways in which folk art reflects and reacts to the Anthropocene via the natural world, both in terms of its themes and the materials it employs. In the next chapters, we'll examine a variety of folk and tribal art styles and discuss the commonalities among them, including their emphasis on themes from nature. Some folk paintings and tribal art from the 2018 India Art Fair are also discussed in this article.

FOLK ART AND NATURE: TOWARDS A CRITICAL POSTHUMANIST WAY OF BEING

Inspiration and expression are inextricably linked. Artists have always found great inspiration in the natural world. There is a wide variety of breathtaking scenery to be seen in India. It is characterised by rugged mountains, clear running water, verdant valleys, and a wide variety of plant and animal life. The oldest known examples of cave art also reveal that the caveman found inspiration in the natural world. Colonies emerged as a result of caveman's progress. Both hunting and farming eventually became necessary for survival. They really needed the rain and a strong crop. Animals were domesticated for their help. Because they were so reliant on the natural world, they came to respect it. Their artwork expressed this sentiment by depicting natural scenes like woods, fauna, mountains, showers, waterfalls, and the like. The majority of this kind of art was made to be shown on walls. Nature has long been an inspiration for works of folk art, both in terms of subject matter and aesthetics. Natural pigments, which will be explored at length in the next section, were increasingly used by painters as time went on and civilisation advanced. During this time and the years that followed, significant artistic styles emerged from different parts of the country. Styles such as the Warli art of Maharashtra, the Madhubani art of the Mithila area, the Gond art of Madhya Pradesh, and the Pattachitra art of Odisha all arose during this period. Nature remained one of the most repeated and

commonly utilised notions in these art forms, despite their engagement with a broad range of topics (including mythical ones and depictions of tribal life and terrain). Folk art's depiction of nature emphasises the complexity of the relationship between humans and the natural world. It's as if the natural world isn't simply something we can't live without; it's more like a member of the family who deserves our utmost respect and care. Nature is often given a divine position in these works of art. It's a tribute to nature's aesthetic appeal and its functional vitality. It represents a style of life that is increasingly seen as necessary in the face of the disasters of the Anthropocene. Before it was absolutely essential, it helped people cope with the Anthropocene. Shaw, a folk musician, is quoted saying that "Indigenous people do not look at nature and wildlife as resources, as something different from themselves" in an article published by Forbes India. Observing nature with an open mind and heart is essential. If we do this, it will be much simpler to learn about these species and coexist with them as fellow Earthlings. (2021) Before this word and the arguments surrounding it arose, critical posthumanism was already present in the very nature of folk art. We now understand critical posthumanism to be a worldview that places humans outside of any kind of central authority and instead sees them functioning within a relational network. People are seldom the focal point in folk art. Indeed, folk art has always occupied a pre-critical posthumanist space by depicting humans not as self-sufficient but as dependent on their natural environment for existence, promoting and engaging with new forms of solidarities based on a relational, intertwined existence. Thus, the triangular relationship between folk art, the Anthropocene, and Critical Posthumanism is complete. Folk art has always been thematically and stylistically critical posthumanist, making it an ideal reaction to the Anthropocene. The Gond people of central India are well-known for their distinctive folk art, known as Gond painting. The Gond tribal community uses it to preserve and promote their unique way of life. The wealth of colour and meticulous attention to detail in Gond paintings is what draws the greatest attention. The paintings are given movement and expression via the use of expressively painted lines and dots. Use primary hues like orange, yellow, blue, and red to make a bold statement. The beautiful hues used in these paintings come from a wide variety of natural resources including flowers, stones, soils, etc. Hibiscus flowers and leaves, for instance, may be used to extract red and green pigments. Sands found naturally in the area are mined for their yellow and brown hues, respectively, and are known as "Chui Mitti" and "Gheru Mitti." Black pigments for the outline are made from cow dung and charcoal. The natural world is an important motif in these works, which also borrow from mythology and folklore. This type of art also does a good job depicting the Hindu pantheon (especially Ganesha), the tree of life, and forest scenes. The tree is the most significant emblem in Gond art. The worship of trees includes Ganja, Mahua, Peepal, Tamrind, etc. The late Jangarh Singh Shyam is one of the most well-known figures in the history of Gond Art. His paintings were distinguished by their constant inclusion of natural elements including vegetation, woodlands, trees, wildlife, and avian life. We can see how far we have grown from the tranquility of our natural heritage by revisiting his paintings now, which not only bring back memories of a bygone era but also serve as a warning. The natural world is a

common subject in Gond paintings, but it also has a symbolic meaning for the artists. In the Gond religion, depicting trees is seen as a means of communicating with the divine. As the tree grows, so does one's spiritual connection to God. Thus, nature serves as a bridge between human beings and the forces that lie beyond them. The paintings of the Gond people are a vital part of the preservation of their culture. It is one among the most populous indigenous groups in Madhya Pradesh. The very beginnings of this people group are entwined with the natural world. The legendary Gond hero Jatba, after whom the people of that region are called, is claimed to have been born of a virgin as a gift from the gods. The legend has it that he was born in the shadow of a bean plant and raised by a snake who covered him with its head. This link exemplifies the interdependence sought by critical posthumanists in the Anthropocene. This youngster matured into a powerful warrior and king of the Gond. The tribe's name has deep roots in nature, and not only because that's where the tribe came from. The Dravidian word Kond, meaning "lush green mountains," is the source of the term Gond. The tribe's members care deeply about preserving the planet. Everything that sustains them is the natural world, including animals, streams, and verdant mountains. They had a fundamental faith in the interconnectedness of all things even before science proved it. They understood that the loss of even the most seemingly insignificant species, such as birds and bees, would have far-reaching consequences for their way of life. All of these procedures were known to the Gonds. Even though they were just regular tribal people, they had insight that we lack, even in a crisis. In an essay titled "storytelling becomes a strong element in every [Gond] painting," Parashar (n.d.) writes for The Indigenous. Many ceremonies from the past are shown in the artwork, along with an emphasis on man's connection to the natural world. Everything is precious and intertwined with nature in the perspective of a Gond artist. Figures 1 and 2 make this point very evident. These photos showcase stunning examples of Gond art, each of which portrays some aspect of the Gond's connection to the natural world. The message in each of these pieces of art is quite similar. Both depict an amalgam of human and animal characteristics. Critical posthumanism focuses on this kind of hybridity. In this context, human beings lose their independence and get entangled inside a complex eco-critical system. Art for the Anthropocene aspires to do the same thing.

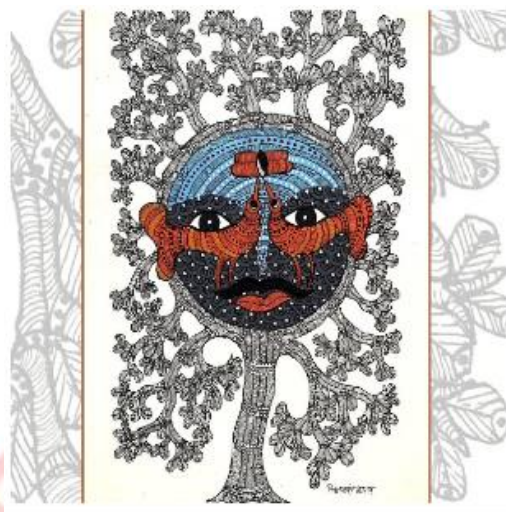


Figure 1. Retrieved From <https://www.memeraki.com/blogs/news/gond-art-residing-in-the-heart-of-India>



Figure 2. Retrieved from <https://www.atelierom.guru/gond-art>

Conclusion

In the battle between logic and emotion, logic identifies the issue at hand while emotion provides the motivation to solve it. Keeping this in mind, it's clear that both are necessary in the battle against the Anthropocene's ills." Feeling is the essence of art. That's what we mean by "passion." It's a good way to face the fact that everything is temporary. This research demonstrates how reverting back to classical models may be a productive strategy for development. While folk art isn't likely to solve all of our problems, it may point us in new

directions. It might help us realise what we've been losing out on. The feeling of longing for the past that it evokes in us might be used as a catalyst for positive social transformation. We can see a future thanks to these "maybes," but only if we are willing to change our habits and take inspiration from more ancient practises and beliefs. Folk art, with its simple aesthetic and universal themes, has the power to awaken a doltish populace to the need of protecting the natural world.

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