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The Beneficence of Folk Art On Socio-cultural Psychology Amid COVID-19

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The Beneficence of Folk Art on Socio-cultural Psychology Amid COVID-19

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Abstract

This study explores the role of Indian folk artists in promoting social awareness during the COVID-19 pandemic by analyzing the interplay of socio-cultural psychology. It highlights the potential of grassroots engagement in policymaking by incorporating contributions from local actors, such as folk artists. Using media content analysis, this study examines selected electronic and social media reports published from mid-March to early December 2021, encompassing the first and second waves of the pandemic in India. The selection criteria focused on practical measures adopted by regional artisans to spread awareness about COVID-19 precautions and vaccination through folk art and craft. The findings reveal that folk artists employed innovative, culturally resonant methods to reduce vaccine hesitancy and disseminate critical health information. By documenting these creative responses, the study illustrates how folk art adapted to the pandemic's challenges, fostering societal resilience and awareness. It underscores the transformative role of traditional art in addressing contemporary crises and emphasizes the need for inclusive strategies to amplify such grassroots efforts.

Keywords: COVID-19, pandemic, folk art, artisans, Indian handicrafts, folklore

L'influence bénéfique de l'art populaire sur la psychologie socioculturelle

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Résumé

Cette étude explore le rôle des artistes populaires indiens dans la promotion à la sensibilisation sociale pendant la pandémie de COVID-19 en analysant l'interaction de la psychologie socioculturelle. Elle met en évidence le potentiel de l'engagement citoyen dans l'élaboration des politiques en intégrant les contributions d'acteurs locaux, tels que les artistes populaires. À partir d'une analyse de contenu médiatique, cette étude examine une sélection de rapports électroniques et de médias sociaux publiés entre mi-mars et début décembre 2021, couvrant les première et deuxième vagues de la pandémie en Inde. Les critères de sélection portaient sur les mesures pratiques adoptées par les artisans régionaux pour sensibiliser aux précautions et à la vaccination contre la COVID-19 par le biais de l'art et de l'artisanat populaires. Les résultats révèlent que les artistes populaires ont utilisé des méthodes innovantes et culturellement pertinentes pour réduire l'hésitation vaccinale et diffuser des informations sanitaires essentielles. En documentant ces réponses créatives, l'étude illustre comment l'art populaire s'est adapté aux défis de la pandémie, favorisant la résilience et la sensibilisation de la société. Elle souligne le rôle transformateur de l'art traditionnel dans la résolution des crises contemporaines et insiste sur la nécessité de stratégies inclusives pour amplifier ces efforts locaux.

Mots-clés : COVID-19, pandémie, art populaire, artisans, artisanat indien, folklore

1.0 Introduction

In visual art, the depiction of reality often extends beyond simple representation, becoming a medium through which artists convey their unique perceptions and lived experiences. Philosopher Merleau-Ponty, in his analysis of Cézanne's work, explored this idea, emphasizing the concept of 'lived perspective'—a view of the world shaped by personal understanding rather than objective accuracy (Merleau-Ponty & Smith, 1993). Indian folk artists similarly embrace this approach, using their work not only to depict everyday life but also to embody cultural beliefs, social narratives, and shared values. During the COVID-19 pandemic, this traditional art form became an unexpected but powerful medium for public awareness, expressing resilience and a collective response to the crisis.

The COVID-19 pandemic brought about unprecedented disruptions worldwide, with severe impacts on daily life and economies. In India, the lockdowns disproportionately affected informal sectors, particularly migrant workers and folk artists whose livelihoods relied heavily on social gatherings and marketplaces (Salamzadeh & Dana, 2021). For many folk artists, already navigating economic precarity, the pandemic compounded their struggles, posing significant challenges to their survival.

Despite these hardships, folk artists across India adapted their craft to raise public awareness about COVID-19. Deeply intertwined with regional culture and aesthetics, Indian folk art provided a compelling medium to communicate public health messages. Traditional forms, infused with local sensibilities, were adapted to spread messages of caution, hygiene, and safety during the pandemic's early stages (Satphale, 2020; Singh, 2020). As the country rolled out its vaccination drive in January 2021, state governments utilized folk art to counter vaccine hesitancy and educate diverse communities on the benefits of immunization—a challenging task given the varying levels of education and access across the nation (Pandey, 2021; Pathak & Philo Magdalene, 2022).

This study explores how Indian folk artists innovatively used their art forms to address health hesitancy during COVID-19, examining the effectiveness of folk art as a communication tool. Unlike previous studies that focus on art therapy or stress relief (e.g., Carr & Hancock, 2017; Chong, 2015; Naff, 2014), this research delves into the potential of folk art as a means of promoting public health awareness, particularly in crisis situations such as pandemics.

2.0 Research Objective and Problem Statement

Building on the unique role of folk art during the COVID-19 pandemic, this paper addresses the following research question: How can folk artists transform traditional art forms into effective tools for public awareness, and what role does socio-cultural psychology play in shaping communication in times of crisis? Grounded in socio-cultural psychology theory, this study aims to understand how the intersection of folk art and health communication can foster awareness and encourage behavioural change during public health emergencies.

3.0 Literature Review

3.1 Definition of Art Categories

The categorization of art into 'folk,' 'traditional,' and 'modern' requires nuanced understanding to avoid oversimplification and stereotyping. Folk art refers to creative expressions that are deeply rooted in the cultural, social, and historical

contexts of a community. It is characterized by its functionality and representation of shared values, rituals, and everyday life, often passed down through generations (Lanier, 1980). On the other hand, traditional art is a broader category that encompasses artistic practices adhering to long-established customs and techniques, which may include folk art but can also extend to other cultural expressions like classical forms or ritualistic practices (Chalmers, 1981, 2019). Meanwhile, modern art distinguishes itself by prioritizing innovation and individuality, often challenging or diverging from conventional norms and cultural heritage to reflect contemporary themes and ideas (Feldman, 1980).

Understanding these distinctions helps students and scholars critically engage with folk art. This involves recognizing its egalitarian potential (Lanier, 1980), appreciating the interconnectedness between personal and cultural identities (Plummer, 1978), and acknowledging its fluidity as a category that defies rigid boundaries. Folk art, in particular, serves as a lens for understanding relationships between cultural heritage and everyday life, bridging the gap between fine art, popular art, and functional artefacts. Such an approach enables a broader appreciation of aesthetic values and highlights how perspectives on art evolve over time based on cultural and societal shifts (Chalmers, 1981, 2019).

3.2 Folk Art and Rural India

Folk art in rural India plays a vital role as a medium for cultural expression and community communication. Rooted in tradition, it is often a vehicle for celebrating festivals, rituals, and daily life, enabling communities to pass down shared experiences across generations (Ghosh & Banerjee, 2019). Indian folk art, which spans from regional paintings to crafts, is distinguished by its simplicity, stylization, and symbolic value. Appasamy (1982) identified key characteristics, including a preference for representational lines, simplified colors, and repeated motifs, which contribute to folk art's distinctive aesthetic and expressive power.

The diversity of India's cultural heritage, shaped by regional ethnicities and social structures, is reflected in various folk art forms like Madhubani, Warli, and Patachitra, each with unique stylistic and thematic elements (Dana, 2000; Gupta, 2008). These art forms are not just decorative but serve practical and religious functions within rural communities (Shobha, 2019). Folk art has historically been used to preserve knowledge, uphold traditions, and strengthen social bonds, fulfilling cultural and social needs that are especially significant in rural and tribal communities (Jones, 1987).

3.3 Folk Art as a Medium for Crisis Communication

In times of crisis, folk art has proven to be a powerful medium for disseminating information and raising awareness within rural communities. During the COVID-19 pandemic, folk artists in India responded to the crisis by using their art to communicate messages about social distancing, hygiene, and public health (Tilak, 2020). Despite limited access to modern technology and often facing economic hardships, these artisans leveraged traditional illustrations and paintings to convey vital health information to semi-literate or illiterate audiences (Vorobeve & Dana, 2021). This initiative highlights folk art's adaptability and utility as a culturally resonant tool for crisis communication.

The pandemic posed significant mental health challenges, such as grief and stress due to isolation and disrupted mourning practices, with potential consequences for post-traumatic stress disorder (Wallace et al., 2020). Folk artists addressed such issues by depicting shared emotions and coping mechanisms through their art, fostering a sense of community resilience and

empathy. As Tyabji observed, "though many fear the impact of COVID-19 may be the end of craftspeople, it is their creativity and resilience that could save them," (as cited by Tilak, 2021, para. 3) emphasizing the artists' role in not only preserving their craft but also offering solace and guidance in difficult times.

3.4 Socio-cultural Psychology in Folk Art's Role During COVID-19

From a socio-cultural psychology perspective, folk art serves as an effective medium to promote behavioural changes, particularly in health-related practices, through familiar symbols and narratives (Qazi, 2020). According to Vygotsky (1971), "Art is the social technique of emotion," (p. 249) integrating personal and social experiences to foster collective understanding. This theoretical framework aligns well with folk art's function in rural India, where art forms embedded in local mythology and tradition communicate public health messages in a culturally accessible manner.

India's rural health communication during COVID-19 required tailored approaches, given the country's vast linguistic and cultural diversity, and the limited literacy in rural areas (Pandey, 2021). Folk art, with its deep cultural resonance, effectively bridged the gap by presenting preventive health measures in a way that rural populations could easily understand and relate to. By using familiar visual symbols, folk artists made scientific information on virus prevention and hygiene accessible and memorable, encouraging communities to adopt essential health practices (Gangopadhyay, 2020; Pandey, 2021).

Furthermore, the use of folk art aligns with Festinger's (1954) theory of social comparison, which suggests that individuals assess their behaviours and attitudes based on comparisons with their peers. In the context of the pandemic, folk art created by local artists enabled communities to view preventive behaviours as socially normative and encouraged widespread adoption. As Ratner (1996) noted, cultural symbols and practices profoundly influence individuals' perceptions and behaviours within their social context, a principle that underscores folk art's effectiveness as a tool for social persuasion and behavioural adaptation.

3.5 The Socio-economic Impact and Resilience of Folk Artists

Scholars of oral literature and popular culture have highlighted how art forms like folklore, folk songs, and visual storytelling serve as powerful mediums to evoke collective memory, challenge societal norms, and critique authority (de-Graft Aikins, 2020). Similarly, in the Indian context, traditional folk arts have played a significant role in addressing social crises, including the COVID-19 pandemic. By incorporating symbolic elements such as satire, cultural narratives, and local traditions, these art forms have effectively communicated public health messages, reshaped social behaviour, and confronted deeply ingrained cultural taboos, showcasing their potential as tools for social awareness and transformation.

The COVID-19 pandemic has also shed light on the socio-economic challenges faced by rural artisans. Many folk artists are economically marginalized, with limited access to markets and modern technology, which exacerbates their vulnerability in times of crisis (Vorobeva & Dana, 2021). The spirit of folk artisans demonstrates a combination of economic necessity, cultural pride, and social responsibility. Crafts and the human spirit have always been intertwined, with creative expression offering a means to cope with adversity and provide community support. This is reflected in the global view that crafts and culture

contain ‘hidden meanings’ that help societies navigate moral and physical challenges, as Tyagi highlighted in Craftvillageblog (2020).

At the collective level, folk art contributes to social cohesion and identity, fostering economic integration and community participation. The arts play an essential role in strengthening social bonds, promoting national identity, and encouraging political discourse (Belfiore & Bennett, 2008; Brown, 2006; Hawkes, 2001). In rural India, folk artists embody these principles, using their art to advocate for health measures and resilience in the face of crisis, demonstrating the power of traditional practices in addressing modern challenges.

4.0 Methodology

This study examines how Indian folk artists adapted their crafts to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic and its associated vaccination drive, with a particular focus on creating social awareness. Our qualitative research was conducted from March 2020 to December 2021 and involved a media content analysis of documents sourced from online platforms, including national news outlets, social media, and other digital repositories.

4.1 Research Design and Data Collection

Given the urgency and fluidity of the pandemic, we adopted a flexible search strategy to capture diverse perspectives on folk artists' contributions. The primary goal was to analyze how folk artists perceived the crisis, responded to its challenges, and used their art to disseminate vaccination awareness. This approach included two phases:

- **First Wave Analysis:** We examined how folk artists articulated their concerns about the pandemic, the demands it created, and the targeted audiences for these demands.
- **Post-Second Wave Analysis:** We explored the role of folk art in promoting social awareness during the COVID-19 vaccination campaign.

We compiled 213 documents, encompassing (a) news articles, (b) government announcements, (c) open letters, (d) survey findings, and (e) event reports. A critical inclusion criterion was the explicit reference to folk artists' responses to COVID-19 and their initiatives to promote vaccination awareness. While the dataset represents a broad spectrum of sources, it primarily reflects North and East Indian contexts, given the regional focus of our research.

4.2 Content Analysis Framework

The study employed media content analysis, a well-established methodology for examining public discourse (Neuendorf, 2002). Following Lasswell's (1948) framework of "Who says what, through which channel, to whom, with what effect," (p. 117) we analyzed the collected documents for recurring themes and narratives. The analysis focused on:

- **Visual Content:** Representation of folk art and artists.
- **Language Usage:** Adjectives (positive/negative), tonal qualities (sarcasm, emotional, aggressive), and regional quotations.
- **Narrative Constructs:** Social, cultural, and psychological dimensions embedded in the media texts.

These elements were systematically coded and iteratively refined into thematic clusters to inform construct dimensions and concept development.

4.3 Document Selection and Ethics

Our selection of 213 documents aimed to provide a comprehensive yet representative sample of the discourse (see Table 1). Highlights from this dataset, particularly those demonstrating innovative applications of folk art for vaccination awareness, were prioritized in the results. Ethical considerations included respecting the public nature of media content while ensuring its representation aligned with the research objectives. Secondary use of social media and journalism was carefully contextualized to maintain the authenticity of narratives without compromising the integrity of the sources.

Ethical considerations included ensuring the public accessibility of all selected content and cross-verifying interpretations with artists' documented narratives to maintain authenticity. The dataset highlights innovative applications of folk art in vaccination awareness campaigns, such as Patachitra scrolls depicting community health messages (e.g., references from 'CraftVillageBlog' and 'Outlook India'). Secondary use of social media and journalism was contextualized to retain the originality of narratives while respecting cultural nuances.

Table 1: Overview of Dataset Composition

Category	Number of documents
News articles	68
Academic Research papers	61
Blogs/Online content	38
Social Media Posts	34
Regional Focus	12

4.4 Cultural and Psychological Dimensions

This section examines the intersection of cultural and psychological elements in driving social awareness during COVID-19. Table 2 summarizes the cultural and psychological elements associated with social awareness in the context of COVID-19.

Cultural Elements. Folk art leverages cultural cognition, social relevance, and narratives to effectively communicate messages about the pandemic.

- **Cultural Cognition:** This refers to how individuals interpret and internalize cultural symbols and narratives. For example, paintings depicting the rural and urban impacts of COVID-19 not only convey information but also evoke a shared emotional experience that fosters collective understanding.
- **Social Relevance:** The thematic content of folk art ensures that it resonates with the community's experiences. Lyrics in local languages describing preventive measures like mask-wearing and social distancing illustrate this alignment with societal needs.
- **Narratives:** Folk art often embeds stories that integrate historical or mythological elements, enhancing the relatability of public health messages. These narratives make complex ideas, such as viral transmission, easier to grasp.

Table 2. Overview (Non-exhaustive) of Cultural and Psychological Elements Relevant to Social Awareness

Factors	Brief Description	Cultural and Psychological Implications	Examples
Cultural elements	Themes and frameworks in folk art	Cultural cognition	Lyrics describing COVID-19 and preventive measures
		Social relevance Narratives	Paintings illustrating rural and urban impacts of the pandemic
Psychological elements	Values, attitudes, beliefs, perceptions, and learning	Social awareness strategies	Awareness messages in local languages
		Epistemic vigilance Social responsibilities	Tributes to frontline workers through artistic representations

Psychological Element. The psychological dimensions of social awareness, as depicted in Table 2, focus on values, attitudes, beliefs, perceptions, and learning. These elements contribute to strategies that influence behaviour.

- **Social Awareness Strategies:** Folk art incorporates values and beliefs that resonate with audiences, prompting desired behaviours. For instance, awareness messages celebrating frontline workers through artistic representations instil pride and reinforce compliance with health guidelines.
- **Epistemic Vigilance:** This refers to individuals' ability to critically evaluate information. Artistic works presented in familiar formats and trusted local languages are more likely to overcome skepticism and misinformation.
- **Social Responsibilities:** Artistic tributes to frontline workers serve as reminders of communal obligations, encouraging people to act responsibly to protect others.

Practical Applications: Understanding these elements is essential for public health campaigns. Folk art's unique ability to connect cultural and psychological dimensions can be harnessed to enhance message retention and influence behaviour. For example, murals in villages illustrating proper handwashing techniques combine visual appeal with educational content, making the message both memorable and actionable.

5.0 Results and Discussion

5.1 Perception of Folk Artists for Spreading Social Awareness of COVID-19

Since March 2020, folk artists have created artwork emphasizing the importance of social distancing, the use of sanitizers and face masks, frequent handwashing with soap, and avoiding group travel. As Das Gupta (2022) observes:

The coronavirus pandemic and the ensuing lockdowns forced patuas to think anew. Through innovative measures, they widened the audience base for their performative art. On the one hand, consonant with their

traditional role, they appealed to local audiences on local issues, such as precautionary health and hygiene measures. On the other, through their reinvention in the digital space, they reached out to the larger global community on the universal issues of shared suffering (p. 55).

Similarly, the following folk arts have employed innovative techniques in traditional folk arts amid COVID-19:

Madhubani Paintings. It is a folk art form of painting. Its name is taken from a district of Bihar state of India (see Figure 1). These paintings are illustrations on handmade papers and walls using natural pigments. Madhubani paintings hold the status of Geographical Indication because of their confinement to a particular geographical area, and the same content and style of painting have been followed for the past few centuries. The origination of Madhubani paintings has been associated with Ramayana. It is believed that the custom of Madhubani paintings was started when King Janak invited artisans to decorate the walls of his palace on the occasion of his daughter Sita's marriage to Lord Rama. The women artisans of Mithila used to draw Madhubani paintings to decorate the interior and exterior of their homes for celebrating local festivities. It is generally found in rural settings of India, where homes are made up of mud. They put a layer of cow dung paste on the mud surfaces and draw mural paintings (Bhitti-Chitra), canvas paintings (Pata-Chitra), and floor paintings (Bumi-Shoba or Aripana) on them. However, the Madhubani paintings have moved from walls and floors to female apparel and lifestyle segments (Upendra, 1982). The Madhubani painting style is renowned for its straightforward yet graphic design. It gets its name from the Bihar hamlet of the same name. It also incorporates aspects of storytelling in a single frame and is primarily performed by women.

Figure 1: Craft map of India.



Popular village artist Ambika Devi is a folk artist of Madhubani paintings. She hails from Rashidpur village in the northern state of Bihar. She incorporated the use of masks and sanitizers into her depiction of rural Indian life (Gangopadhyay, 2020). Ambika Devi's painting adapts the tale of Krishna's rescue from the Krishna Charitas, where Vasudeva carries baby Krishna in a basket to protect him from the tyrant Kamsa. In her work, a masked doctor takes Vasudeva's place, carrying people in a basket to symbolize their rescue from the coronavirus. The use of intricate red and black lines on handmade paper, alongside virus icons on the doctor's coat, reflects the artist's tribute to healthcare workers. By connecting a mythological story to the pandemic, the painting celebrates doctors as modern heroes, emphasizing their role in safeguarding humanity during the crisis (see Figure 2).

Figure 2. Ambika Devi's Madhubani art. Tribute to doctors.



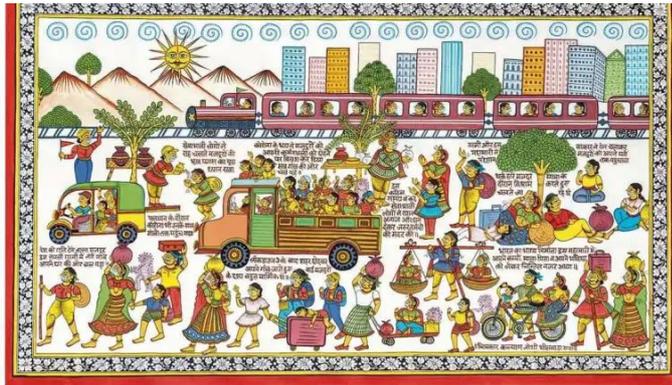
Source: Venkatesan, 2022.

Phad painting. It is one of the famous native scroll paintings of Rajasthan (see Figure 1). It is believed to date back to medieval times. These paintings were traditionally painted on phad—large cloths—depicting royal portrayals of festive processions and wars. It uses vegetable colors to depict Indian gods and goddesses (Shobha, 2019). The traditional 'phad' paintings of Rajasthan's Bhilwara region have been utilized by artist Kalyan Joshi to spread messages of social awareness to stop the pandemic (Gangopadhyay, 2020). The struggles of migrant workers journeying back to their villages during the pandemic resonate across the works of many artists. In a Phad painting by Kalyan Joshi, created with natural colors on fabric, the hardship of families carrying their belongings and children on foot is vividly portrayed. The artwork also captures moments of food donations to migrants, though the aid often arrives too late for many (see Figure 3). When asked what motivated him to create COVID-19-related paintings, he said since we are currently confined to our homes due to the lockdown, we concluded that we could still use our 700-year-old Phad Narrative Art to produce creative things that could benefit society or express essential social messages (Kalyan Joshi as cited in Craftvillageblog, 2020).

While explaining about what innovation he did with the Phad painting, he said: "to calm people down and educate them I have created masks that have important messages made in Phad painting on necessary precautions & preventions to be taken to avoid COVID-19 disease" (Kalyan Joshi as cited in Craftvillageblog, 2020).

Kalyan Joshi believes that his painted masks would bring 'effective communication' as well as add 'colors' to people's lives at a time when everyone is feeling so stoic and depressed.

Figure 3. Phad painting of Kalyan Joshi that he drew to depict the plight of migrant workers



Source: Bhuyan, 2021.

Patachitra painting. This is a folk art of Bengal and neighbouring states considered a combination of narrative and musical (see Figure 1). It portrays society, culture, religion, and local folklore (Chaitanya, 1976). It is made from natural color pigments. It is also known to be a social communique. The artisans have been painting and composing lyrics on social issues. The Patachitra is an assortment of communication techniques, including visual messages, oral traditions, music, and lyrics. The Patachitra artisans gallivanted and travelled from place to place and performed storytelling (Gupta, 1973). It was used as a medium of mass communication in the 16th century (Bajpai, 2015). Amid COVID-19, Swarna Chitrakar from Pingla village recently made Patachitra depicting the coronavirus in her painting. She has also composed beautiful lyrics describing the highly contagious coronavirus and spreading awareness about social distancing, face masks, and handwashing (HIPAMS India, 2020).

Apindra Swain is one of the renowned Patachitra painters. She hails from Raghurajpur in the eastern state of Orissa. She uses Patachitra paintings for COVID-19 awareness. The characters in her paintings are wearing face masks, maintaining social distancing, and hand washing (see Figure 4). The artisan composed beautiful lyrics describing the highly contagious coronavirus.

Figure 4. Patachitra painting by Apindra Swain



Source: Bhuyan, 2021.

Pottery paintings. Some artisans in southern India are also spreading awareness through pottery paintings (see Figure 1). A Chennai-based artisan, Joel Fertician, spreads coronavirus awareness by making paintings on earthen

pots (see Figure 5). He is giving social awareness messages of social distancing, using face masks, and staying at home through his painting skills. He is paying tribute to the police, health workers, and paramedic teams, who are the frontline warriors fighting with the invisible enemy during this time of the pandemic. He also emphasized that compatriots are contributing to breaking the chain of the virus by staying at their homes (Asian News International, 2020).

Figure 5. Joel Fertician is painting earthen pots to spread awareness about the coronavirus.



Source: Asian News International.

Chhau masks. Chhau is a folk dance of Seraikela, Jharkhand (see Figure 1). In this dance, dancers wear giant decorative masks made from papier mache depicting faces of boldly painted gods, heroes, birds, and animals. The Chhau dancers perform episodes from epics, including the Mahabharata, Ramayana, and regional legends, using martial art and acrobatic moves. Chhau dance is performed to celebrate the ‘Chitra Parva’—spring season—(UNESCO, 2009). In response to the COVID-19 pandemic and resulting lockdown, Chhau artisans made innovative and joyful masks and personal protective equipment. One of the skilled Chhau mask artisans from Jharkhand, Mr. Prabhat Kumar Mahato is innovating the traditional Chhau mask technique using layering papier mache, cloth, and clay, with an additional three-ply fabric used inside to cover the nostrils (see Figures 6 and 7). These masks are not absorbent, so they can be reused by wiping them down, making disinfection easier (Muthalaly, 2020). They used colorful traditional masks made from papier mache as sustainable masks that can be reused.

Figure 6. Chhau artisan wearing Chhau mask.



Source: The Hindu.

Figure 7. Chhau artisan making Chhau mask.



Source: The Hindu

5.2 Perception of Folk Artists for Spreading Social Awareness of Vaccination Against COVID-19

The health of artisans and their families has suffered greatly as a result of the second wave of the pandemic, as the majority of them contracted COVID-19 and lost loved ones. In contrast to the previous lockdown, during which artisanal innovation was at an all-time high, the second wave was marked by extreme suffering brought on by COVID-19 infection. The majority of the artists were occupied setting up beds, medications, and other necessities for either their families or friends. Due to the personnel shortage brought on by sick workers, ‘Work’ during the pandemic was at an all-time low.

In a meeting between India Craft Week and the artisan community, it was decided that all the artisans would actively participate in the government of India's vaccination drive, making sure they and their families received the necessary vaccinations. They also accepted the responsibility of spreading awareness and education among their fellow artisans and employees to ensure that everyone in their villages and districts received the necessary vaccinations in due time. The net skills would be retained, and the majority of the master artisans would be safe if the health of the artisans working in this field is good and mortality is kept under control—as they are an aging population. The craft industry has a history of overcoming adversity, and it is great to see that craftsmen and craftspeople are supporting the proposal as it is for their safety and health. The only solution was to inform them and set up a monitoring system to make sure that everyone in the community—including them, their family, and their neighbours got immunized (Craftvillageblog, 2020).

The following folk arts have employed innovative techniques in traditional folk arts for the COVID-19 vaccination drive in India.

Warli Painting. Warli paintings and art have a long and illustrious history. According to Yashodhara Dalmia's book "Painted World of the Warli," these paintings most resemble prehistoric cave paintings, and their origins have been estimated to be between 2500 and 3000 BCE (Dalmia, 1988). Its prehistoric status is further supported by the aesthetic similarity to these cave paintings. Warli art has been ingrained into tribal societies and passed down from generation to generation, and it has been kept to an incredibly high degree. The Adivasi community, which is located in the northern Sahyadri Range in western India, is the primary creator of Warli Art and Warli Painting. On the outskirts of Mumbai, the Warli community is the largest tribe (see Figure 1).

Anil Vangad, in his artwork, highlighted the value of the COVID-19 vaccination and how, following two doses, one can be safer and contribute to the safety of their family and neighbourhood (see Figure 8). When asked about his work, he said:

The only way to achieve our freedom is to eradicate COVID-19 from our lives through widespread vaccination; if we all receive vaccinations soon, it will mark a new ‘World Freedom Day,’ he continues. During the epidemic, we are living as though we are in a cage, despite being at home (Vangad as cited in Craftvillageblog, 2021, para. 6).

Figure 8. Tribal Warli Painting showing the importance of the vaccination drive.



Source: Craftvillageblog, 2021.

Kalighat Patua Painting. Kalighat painting, a distinctive subgenre of Indian art that originated in Kolkata (formerly Calcutta), West Bengal, in the 19th century, is distinguished by its vivid colors and strong edges (see Figure 1). These paintings evolved from the representation of gods and other legendary figures to reflect a variety of themes. These subpar works of art were created by Kalighat ‘patuas’ (painters) in order to make a living by selling to a large audience.

Anwar Chitrakar, in his artwork, depicted the conflict between those who support vaccination and others who are swayed by rumours (see Figure 9). When asked about his art, he described further:

In our society, people are terrified of vaccinations and prefer to focus on hearsay, which makes them fearful of vaccinations, the author continues. However, many are ignorant of the fact that vaccinations are crucial for maintaining our own health and safety. His artwork also depicts how people listen by holding their ears up yet hiding like rabbits when it comes to getting vaccinated (Chitrakar as cited in Craftvillageblog, 2021).

Figure 9. Kalighat Patua Style showing people are scared and they need to shred their inhibition.



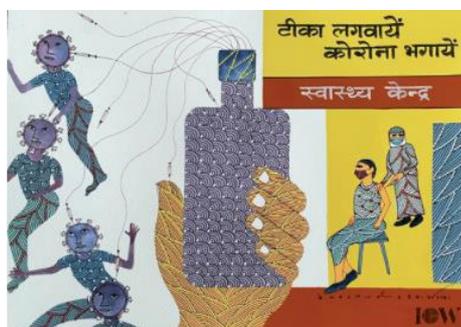
Source: Craftvillageblog, 2021.

Gond Painting. The Gond tribal community in central India is well-known for their folk art known as ‘Gond painting’ (see Figure 1). It is carried out in order to transmit and preserve the Gond tribal community's culture. In Gond art, vivid hues like red, yellow, blue, and green are frequently used. Charcoal, coloured soils, plants, leaves, and cow dung are a few examples of natural color sources.

The vaccination bottle is given a lot of attention in Venkat Shyam's artwork since, since the epidemic, it has taken centre stage in everybody's daily life. His painting depicts the cruciality of the vaccination bottle (see Figure 10). When asked about his art, he said:

it is literally like a 'Ginni's bottle' that has miraculous inside, having eight doses of vaccination and being able to save eight people from Covid-19. As responsible citizens of India, we should take advantage of the government's free vaccination program and get vaccinated so that we can work together to battle this invisible threat (Shyam as cited in Craftvillageblog, 2021).

Figure 10. The tribal Gond painting reflects the significance of vaccine.



Source: Craftvillageblog, 2021.

Phad Painting. Phad is a 700-year-old tradition that has been handed down through one family's generations and has its roots in Shahpura, close to Bhilwara, Rajasthan (see Figure 1). A specific kind of scroll painting known as

phad tells in-depth religious tales about regional deities and gods. These traditional paintings, known as Bhopas and Bhopis, were carried by priest-singers of the Rabari tribe who would sing and perform tales of their regional deities, Devnarayanji—a reincarnation of Vishnu—and Pabuji. They were made as traveling or mobile temples. After sunset, the Phad artwork would be unrolled or unfolded and a performance would then take place in front of the villagers that would run well into the night. Perhaps for this reason the paintings are referred to as ‘Phad,’ which in the local language means ‘fold.’

Kritika Joshi in her folk art attempted to convey the idea that, even when receiving a vaccination, one must keep social distance and refrain from forming a long line because it could make the situation worse by not adhering to the social distance (see Figure 11). When asked about her art she said:

The only way to resume living pre-COVID-19 is through immunization. It provides immunity and prevents the virus that causes COVID-19 from spreading infections. This could save so many individuals in our immediate vicinity. The only thing that can protect us from this deadly disease, except immunizations, is social distance" (Kritika Joshi as cited in Craftvillageblog, 2021).

Figure 11. Phad painting depicts the significance of social distancing at the vaccination centre.



Source: Craftvillageblog, 2021.

Pithora painting. Pithora paintings are an extremely rich form of Gujarati folk art that is created on the walls by many tribes, including the Rathwas and Bhilalas, who reside in central Gujarat, 90 kilometres (56 miles) from Vadodara, in a village named Tejgadh (see Figure 1). Pithora paintings are more liturgical than artistic in nature. These rituals are carried out either as an act of worship or to ask God to grant a wish or a blessing.

The majority of people are terrified of vaccinations. But in the painting of Kamta Tahed, without any fear, everyone is assisting one another in realizing the value of vaccinations. Her art portrayed people waiting patiently for their turn for the vaccination (see Figure 12). Furthermore, she said:

People in our hamlet are eager to receive vaccinations after seeing the worst conditions and so many fatalities during the third wave. Since the majority of people in our village lack formal education, they do not observe the social distance. I want to raise awareness of the importance

of maintaining "social distance," especially when getting vaccinated, and of wearing a mask (Tahed as cited in Craftvillageblog, 2021)

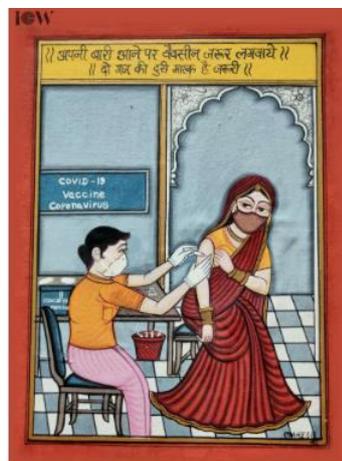
Figure 12. Pithora painting trying to educate tribals about the importance of vaccine.



Source: Craftvillageblog, 2021.

Pichwai painting. Pichwai is derived from the words ‘pichh’ which means back, and ‘wai’ which means textile hanging. The town of Nathdwara, which is close to Udaipur in Rajasthan, India, is where the painting style known as Pichwai (pichvai) first appeared about 400 years ago (see Figure 1). Pichwai paintings, created on fabric, are intricate and visually appealing representations of stories from Lord Krishna's life. A pichwai can take months to complete and is extremely difficult to do since even the smallest details must be painted precisely. Shrinathji, the deity who appears as a seven-year-old child in Pichwais, is a popular way that Lord Krishna is portrayed. Radha, gopis, oxen, and lotuses are additional typical pichwai painting themes. Pichwais typically portray holidays and events including (a) Sharad Purnima, (b) Raas Leela, (c) Annakoot or Govardhan Puja, (d) Janmashtami, (e) Gopashtami, (f) Nand (g) Mahotsav, (h) Diwali, and (i) Holi. Mahesh Vishnoi, one of the Pichwai painters in his artwork attempted to persuade everyone to be vaccinated as soon as possible so that the third wave could be prevented. His art focused on the importance of vaccination and one woman who is taking vaccination bravely (see figure 13). Furthermore, he said: We had the worst conditions in this second wave, thus everyone needs to get immunized promptly before the third wave in order to protect our lives and the lives of those we love” (Vishnoi as cited in Craftvillageblog, 2021).

Figure 13. Pichwai painting raises awareness of vaccine to avoid 3rd wave.



Source: Craftvillageblog, 2021.

6.0 Findings

The findings of this study reveal the multifaceted impact of the COVID-19 lockdown on folk artists in rural India, who are part of an unorganized sector. Like other sectors they faced significant disruptions, yet displayed remarkable resilience in sustaining their craft traditions despite minimal institutional or financial support. This resilience manifested through innovative adaptations in their artistic practices, underscoring the critical role of folk art in community engagement during crises.

A clear pattern observed was the use of traditional art forms such as Madhubani, Phad, Pichwai, Warli, Pithora, Gond, Kalighat Patua, Patachitra, Kavad art, pottery painting, and Chhau to address public health challenges. Folk artists creatively transformed their artwork into tools for social awareness, highlighting the consequences of the coronavirus and promoting preventive measures. For instance, the integration of culturally rooted symbols and motifs in these artworks fostered an emotional connection with rural communities, making the public health messaging both accessible and relatable.

Another significant theme emerging from the study is the application of socio-cultural psychology by these artists. Through the innovative use of regional languages and traditional visual styles, the folk artists were able to overcome literacy barriers, ensuring that even semi-literate and illiterate populations could grasp the intended messages. Their artworks, often characterized by vibrant colors and intricate patterns, proved to be powerful communication tools, effectively engaging their audiences and addressing vaccine hesitancy. This innovative use of native aesthetics to convey public health information exemplifies the unique intersection of art and behavioural psychology.

Additionally, the findings underscore the ability of folk artists to adapt their practices to create new use situations for their art. The artists transformed their craft from mere aesthetic objects into mediums of social utility, exemplifying how traditional art can serve as a vital resource in crisis communication. This adaptability not only helped sustain their livelihoods but also highlighted the enduring relevance of folk art in addressing contemporary societal challenges.

This study demonstrates that folk artists responded to the crisis by creatively repurposing their skills, offering a compelling example of how traditional cultural practices can adapt to meet the demands of modern emergencies. The findings emphasize the role of folk art as both a source of resilience for artists and a mechanism for effective community engagement in times of crisis.

6.1 Highlights and Implication

- Folk art is crucial in any country as most social structures are based on folk mythologies. Folk artists can play a significant role in disseminating information about coronavirus and bringing desired social change in terms of new normal like social distancing, wearing face masks, and washing hands with soaps.
- The study highlighted the current state of folk artists struggling for existence and losing their source of income. However, instead of losing hope, they use folk art as a weapon to create social awareness about the coronavirus.
- Folk art can find its significance in new use situations apart from the traditional purpose of the craft.

- Folk artists use cultural and social-psychological methods to explain threats, precautions, and remedies in a way that people in their region can easily understand.
- This study can serve as a guide toward addressing social issues relating to epidemic and pandemic policy-making. As such, it would be a powerful tool for policy-makers, not-for-profit organizations, and civil society in creating social awareness amid COVID-19.

7.0 Limitations

This study has limitations. First, it is not based on interviews with artists and audiences who consume the COVID-19 art forms mentioned in the study. Rather, it is based on the secondary data available from online media. This was because most of the study was conducted during the lockdown phase in India. Moreover, it was the ethical way of conducting the study and refraining from the health risks of COVID-19 in face-to-face interviews. Second, our engagement was limited to social media and electronic media. Incorporating the artists' perspectives and consumers' opinions would have strengthened our arguments. Third, artists' and consumers' responses would have provided insights into the additional contribution of folk art to socio-cultural psychology. However, this is the first study examining how folk art can contribute as a social awareness tool and ascertain the impact of socio-cultural psychology in effective awareness amid COVID-19.

8.0 Conclusion

This study concludes by emphasizing the transformative role of folk art during the COVID-19 pandemic, showcasing its potential as a tool for resilience, cultural survival, and social awareness. The research highlighted how folk artists, part of the unorganized and less-supported craft sector in India, demonstrated remarkable innovation and adaptability amid the crisis. By repurposing their traditional skills to communicate health messages, these artists not only sustained their craft but also contributed to public health efforts, such as promoting vaccination and preventive measures.

The findings underscore that folk artists' resilience is rooted in their creativity, self-belief, and entrepreneurial spirit. Their ability to innovate—whether through variations in design, storytelling, or patterns—allowed them to connect deeply with rural and semi-literate communities. The vibrant use of colors and regional languages proved instrumental in spreading social messages effectively and efficiently. While their efforts have shown significant impact, the study highlights that with additional support from government and stakeholders, these artists could achieve even greater potential.

Moreover, this study reaffirms the enduring power of Indian folk art in navigating crises. Crafts such as Madhubani paintings, which addressed deforestation, or Patachitra, which provided emotional solace after natural disasters, exemplify how these art forms have historically served as tools for communication and community resilience. In the face of the COVID-19 pandemic, these crafts once again demonstrated their ability to connect people, foster hope, and sustain livelihoods.

By bridging cultural and social psychological survival strategies with artistic expression, folk art has emerged as a testament to human adaptability and determination. The study concludes that the unorganized craft sector, though vulnerable, possesses untapped potential to thrive even in adversity. With targeted support and recognition, these enduring crafts can continue to serve as powerful tools for communication and resilience in both local and global contexts.

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