



# FROM ROCK ART TO STREET ART- CAVES TO WALLS: AN INSIGHT INTO THE ARTISTIC DEVELOPMENT OF PAINTED WALL ART FROM PREHISTORIC TO MODERN-DAY IN INDIA

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**Abstract:** *The Indian sub-continent has a well-documented and a continuous tradition of rock art. The prehistoric rock art has slowly transitioned into the wall art of various ethnic communities such as the Gonds, Sauras, Santhals, Warli, etc. to name a few, so much so, that their wall art is known by the name of their community. These wall paintings form an important part of their culture and traditions, and are made on all important occasions and events. As these paintings move into the urban spaces, we see design elements in them incorporated in modern contemporary art forms like street art and graffiti. In this paper documentation and a comparative study has been undertaken of rock art alongside wall paintings and graffiti in urban spaces. A case study has been taken of Lodhi art district also. It was observed that through the ages man's stylistic elements while undergoing evolution and complexity have remained constant in their essence.*

**Keywords:** *Rock art, Tribes, Graffiti, Lodhi Art District, Wall paintings*

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## **Introduction**

It is now an acknowledged fact that the Indian subcontinent has a rich heritage of rock art. Sites with rock art have been predominantly found in rocky landscapes comprising sandstone and sedimentary outcrops. These regions include the Vindhya, Cuddapah, Kaladgi, Bhima basin,

Satpura and Aravalli ranges located in the present states of Madhya Pradesh, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Odisha, Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan. Among them, the Vindhyan ranges and Kaimur extensions are particularly rich in rock art shelters. The rock art tradition and culture of the country can be broadly classified into two types:

pictographs and petroglyphs (Boivin: 2004 :38-53).

The effort toward systematic studies of rock art is fairly recent. The study of rock art research in the past has been coupled with archaeology and anthropology in combination with art history. For a long time the study has involved a descriptive and documentative approach. Some of these include making drawings, taking photographs and other two-dimensional recording techniques. Today, photography is the most widely used and most convenient, the only drawback being the adjustment of light to capture the piece perfectly. For recording petroglyphs, rubbing and making tracings are the most common; this allows one to record the nature and roughness of the rock surface upon which the art is found. Moulds are also made for studying petroglyphs, but they have more disadvantages when it comes to efficiency and storage and is generally not preferred. Another commonly used method is stereo photogrammetry, which allows recording and documentation of the rock art in relation to its surroundings. It allows a three-dimensional recording of the entire site and enables in studying the rock art in its entirety with a more accurate interpretation of the meaning and function of images. Efforts are continually made to date rock art, and this remains one of the most popular studies. Today many scientific methods are also being used to investigate rock art, like pigment analysis, elemental analysis coupled with scanning electron microscopy. Extensive work is being done on the compositions and physiochemical nature of the paints or pigments used. These studies have allowed the understanding of geographical origins. By studying paint compositions, various binders have been identified via gas chromatography and mass spectrometry. X-Ray diffraction (XRD) or transmission electron microscopy (T.E.M.) is also used to measure the proportions of each mineral phase to differentiate between natural and human mixtures in each sample (Chalmin *et al.*: 2003: 1590 ; Gheco *et al.* 2020:1-14). Besides these methods, during the twentieth century many other methodological

techniques were used to understand rock art. Organisations like the Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts (IGNCA) launched many academic programmes to understand the artistic manifestations of rock art in India and to explore its place in the global context (Boivin: 2004: 38-53). Cultural anthropologists and archaeologists believe that studying rock art provides insights and help in unveiling signs of culture, and its study is a spatial manifestation of the society and culture at the time of its conception.

### **Rock Art in India**

The earliest rock art in India can be identified with presence of simple human-shaped figures. These figures are depicted in various activities like hunting, dancing, running, etc. However, these may not be the oldest as they seem to be superimposed over some earlier patterned paintings (Boivin: 2004: 38-53). India has a rich rock art tradition from the Mesolithic period onwards. The paintings are mostly pictographic in nature and possibly portray a hunting and gathering population. All the paintings of this period are similar in content and display a considerable uniformity throughout the Indian subcontinent. The animals depicted have naturalistic forms, while the human figures lack dynamism; they are static and abstract. Male and female figures are differentiated on the basis of the depiction of bulk. Women are drawn bulky box-like whereas men are depicted in more slender forms. Some Mesolithic art also given diagrams of the internal organs of the animals, possibly these were meant to educate. From the paintings of this period one can get an idea about the variety in the flora and fauna. Among the great variety of animals depicted we find gaur, buffalo, rhinoceros, elephant, tiger, leopards, chital, nilgai, blackbuck, monkey, jackals, rat, porcupine, fox etc. As art in the Mesolithic period focuses on hunting and gathering scenes, spears, bows and arrows with barbed microliths also form part of rock art. Other activities depicted are fishing, singing, playing musical instruments, eating inside houses or enclosures. The paintings

have mostly been done in red ochre and shades of red, orange. White has been used also. Superimpositions studies have revealed many layers. Besides day to day mundane activities, some paintings reveal religious and cult scenes also (Boivin: 2004 : 38-53).

In the Neolithic period one can easily trace the onset of agriculture and the domestication of animals in the rock art. From hunting-gathering the themes of the paintings shift to a more domestic society. Neolithic rock art allows for the most reliable and accurate dates as there are reliable stratified proxies from contemporary protohistoric art forms. The animals are shown involved in draught work, pulling of bullock carts and even horse-drawn carriages are common (Boivin: 2004 : 38-53).

A more detailed glimpse of the society can be seen during the Chalcolithic with processions of acrobats, load carriers, musicians and dancers. During the Chalcolithic phase, agricultural activities take a back seat and a male perspective dominates the rock art of the Indian subcontinent. The women are depicted on the periphery and do not form the core of the paintings. In southern India, several of the chalcolithic rock art sites are near Megalithic burials (Boivin: 2004: 38-53).

In the Historic period we find we find ample evidence of petroglyphs. The petroglyphs from the region of Ladakh have a Buddhist narrative along with Kharosthi and Brahmi inscriptions. The paintings depict battles with caparisoned horses and elephants with armoured soldiers amount, fighting with metal weapons resembling spears, swords, daggers, and shields with occasional use of bows and arrows (Boivin: 2004: 38-53). Similar shreds of evidence can be seen at other sites in India. (Wakankar: 2008:65-72; Dubey-Pathak, et al: 2014:5; Blinkhorn 2021: 137).

Different scholars have mapped the distribution of rock art sites in India, the greatest accumulation of rock art sites is reported from Central India's quartzite and sandstone belt, mostly in the Vindhya, Satpuras, and Kaimur ranges. There are more than 450 painted rock

shelters in a chain of 31 hills in the source region of Betwa; 400 painted rock shelters in a cluster of nearly 550 rock shelters in Bhimbetka; about 250 painted shelters in Mirzapur; and about 650 painted shelters in 63 complexes in the Chambal Valley.

Peninsular India is very rich in petroglyphs, found upon its granite hills compared to Central India. Petroglyphs are found in Karnataka in Maski and Kerala in the far South. Maski is one of India's prominent petroglyph centers, where thousands of animal figures are incised on granite rocks. Piklihal, Chitradurga, Hampi, Korugodu, Koppugall, and Sangankallu also reported engravings and bruises. In Karnataka paintings are found in the Kalagdi group of sandstone hills at Ramdurga in the district of Belgaum, Badami, Aihole, and Pattadakal. The assemblage of Karnataka is mainly confined to the valley of Krishna-Tungabhadra. In Ketavaram in Kurnool, Chinnaur, Andhra Pradesh has paintings. And the bruises of Virpalli Mallasamudram, Sangananpalli and Lankapally are reported on granite hills. Rock paintings from the districts of Madurai, Nilgiris, and Tamilnadu in the South and North Arcot have also been reported. Some remarkable art paintings of long-horned and big-bellied animals in ranking pose, magic and mythology are found in the southern regions of India. Petroglyphs are seen in the north at 4000 m above sea level, in Kargil, Leh and Lower Ladakh regions. In the Himalayas, both pictographs and petroglyphs are found and reported in Almora, Kumaon, and Garhwal regions. Pictures and petroglyphs are found in the Himalayas in stratified sandstone, calcareous, slate, granite and schist belts. In the Bihar region of Makwa, Panesar, Jhania Pahar, and Dughdha Hathiada were reported rock paintings from the Kaimur range, while in the Singhbhum district, rock engravings from the Ghatsila range. India has more than 500 documented rock art sites. These are primarily rock art shelters where the inhabitants decorated the walls of their homes just as they do today.

## Understanding Rock Art

Rock art, unlike other art forms, are narratives and depictions of moments or events of a specific time, space and region. The interpretations and understanding of rock art paintings cannot be absolute and fixed as it changes from perception to perception and from time to time. The true meaning may remain elusive because the artist/s have created this art as per their observations and universal view. Besides views, the paintings would also project the specific painting style of the artist and his/her taste. An individual sense of aesthetics and perspective can be expected. Studying rock art would mean looking at a fragmented past, and the best possible way to understand is to look for patterns and to try and assess the meaning behind them. Understanding the meaning of these would be like interpreting a meaningful action. These patterns can be generated by comparable analysis of contemporary modern societies by ethnographic studies. Anthropologists analyse them by drawing an analogy from tribal and folk art and to study their relation with native and indigenous people. Archaeologists also employ this and study this form of prehistoric art to study an idea culture of humans from the past to reconstruct them as dynamic, thinking and believing people. In Indian art appreciation, this distinct kind of enjoyment and critical judgement by scholars and experts is called *Sahridaya pariksaka*; this assesses the adequacy (*samarthyā*) and appropriateness (*aucityā*) of the piece under study (Chattopadhyaya 2008:190). Out of all archaeological artifacts and ecofacts, rock art is a rare form of evidence that gives a glimpse of the human point of view through its narratives and self-expression. There is a basic uniformity of ideas and themes seen within a certain locality, revealing that basic faith and ideas dominated the group's inspiration regionally and in totality. Besides looking at hidden themes, rock art also offers a sense of realism. This realism in rock art is a potential source for explaining prehistoric and early societies. Rock art, along with other artefactual evidences from the site, is a more

holistic and comprehensive way to understand and reconstruct past societies and their cultures (Chakraverty:2009:94-107).

From India, specifically the Central Indian plateaus, several distinct stages of culture have been identified from the rock art narratives. These themes or cultures are: Forest-based hunting-gathering and foraging nomads being the earliest, followed by pastoralists. Pastoralists give way to rural themes and communities with step by step introduction of wheel and animal power for transportation. These gave way to the early historic phases, where a lot of new and elaborate elements were introduced, including those showcasing conflict. In conflict and battle themes, the use of metal weapons, horses and elephants is documented (Chakraverty: 2009 : 94-107). At Bhimbetka, a total of 377 figures of armed men, which makes up around 54.40% of anthropomorphic figures, are documented. There are also battle scenes with individual warriors and even warriors shown in group conflict indicative of inter or intra ethnic struggle (Chakraverty: 2009 : 94-107). Horse rider figures are common in tribal and folk art of central and western parts of India. These form an integral and dominant part of the rituals, beliefs and practices of the tribal societies such as the Gonds, Murias, Korkus and Baigas. For these societies horse is a symbol of authority, power and prestige. The importance of horses is not only evident in the modern tribal societies but can also be seen in the zoo morphs of Bhimbetka, where a maximum of 561, accounting for about 33.33% figures are horses, and the figures of horse riders makeup about 89.95% or a total of 510 within the anthropomorphs, showing the heavy influence of animal on the mental capacity of the artists. It is not only about horses. In general, the central Indian region's rock art is dominated by depicting human figures with animals and artifacts. In comparison, these conflict based scenes are not commonly found in the Southern reaches of peninsular India. The majority of rock art shelters in South India are associated with megalithic burial practices (Chakraverty: 2009 : 94-107).



## Wall Art of Ethnic Tribal Communities in India

The Indian Subcontinent has one of the largest concentrations of ethnic tribal communities second only to Africa. According to the last census, around 90 million people belong to these communities. There are 573 recorded tribes, that make up 8% of the total population. Out of these, the Bhils, Gonds, Murias, Sauras, Warlis, Santhals, Rathwas are known for their wall art and paintings.

Tribal art is a form of visual representation of beliefs and culture of indigenous people and indigenous societies. These art forms represent their material culture and are often religious and ceremonial in nature. They are created during wedding ceremonies, as part of memorials for the dead and ancestor worship, to prevent diseases, protection in crisis, agricultural prosperity, and appeasement of elements of nature. Today they even act as a medium of livelihood with their growing demand in the commercial sphere (Rani & Agarwal 2019 : 83). By studying contemporary art alongside tribal art , one can easily draw some inferences between the two. First of all, there is a complete absence of realism in tribal art and lack of overlapping of elements. The various objects of the paintings are drawn at the same scale. Multiple stories are depicted in one panel with the absence of horizons. Tribal paintings have more symbolic elements to them. The facial expressions of figures are geometrical and lack resemblance to any person. The colour schemes for tribal paintings are distinct and do not follow the realism but the belief system and folklore (Rani & Agarwal 2019:83).

### Pithora Paintings

These paintings on the walls of their houses made by the Rathwas Adivasis are part of the surface art form made by the Bhils of Dhar, Jhabuas of Madhya Pradesh, and the Rathwas of Panchmahal to honour their chief deity Baba Pithora who is worshipped as the God of grains and plenty. The paintings are generally made during the spring season. These

paintings form an important part of the rituals and belief system of these tribal communities. They are also made for other auspicious occasions like a good harvest, peace and prosperity, marriages, and childbirths. The paintings are vibrant and have a lot of dynamism in them, and one important aspect is the repetition of motifs. The painters are known as the Lakharas and form groups of eight to ten painters. These painters are exclusively men and women though part of the process does not create the paintings. They are involved in the ancillary work of preparing the pigments and providing adequate nourishment to the painters. The Lakharas also have their own apprentices whom they train alongside. Making the Pithora painting involves community participation in storytelling, singing and dancing.

The paintings follow a set pattern, and it is made within a sacred rectangular enclosure called *cok*, surrounded by beautiful ornate borders. This enclosure is also segmented into various divisions, the upper part represents the world of Gods; below this is the main myth followed by kings and elephants and other animals. The bottom-most half has motifs of Earth, cowherds, Banias, as well as forest and minor deities as seen in Fig.10.1A (CCRT:2017:19-20).

### Gond Paintings

The Gonds are one of the largest tribal communities of Central India, with a population of more than four million. They are found primarily in the states of Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, Chhattisgarh and Orissa. This community is also subdivided into various sects, out of which the Pardhan Gond are known for their artistic skill. The paintings done by the Gonds are for religious and ritualistic purposes. They generally depict village deities like Marahi Devi, Phulvari Devi, Sanphaki snake, Sarpoti tree and even Lord Krishna in some themes. Gond paintings are simplistic in nature with clever use of dots, lines, curves, dashes, fine lines and geometric shapes like triangles, ovals, and circles. These paintings lack any border (Fig.10.1B)

The recognisable element in these paintings is the signature infilling pattern. These paintings allow the painter to create their own infilling pattern, which they use to distinguish the piece. Gond paintings are bright and visually very appealing. The dyes and pigments are organically prepared from their surroundings; for example, black is made from soil, and charred wood, yellow from the river bank soils, white is obtained from calcium and *chui* soils, red is made from *geru* or red soils, dark red is made from the sap of *tinsak* tree. The brushes are also locally made and are called *koochi*; for finer rendering, thin twigs are used. Before the art work is created, the wall is carefully cleaned, and prepared. Charcoal and lime are mixed with the medium while preparing the surface for painting. A paste made of cow dung, and straw is also applied on this surface prior to painting. After this paste dries up, a special soil called *Chhui* or *pidori* soil is applied all over the surface. This soil is a type of white clay found in areas inhabited by this tribal community and provides the ideal canvas for this artform. Black colour is primarily used to draw the outlines; after this step, patterns are created to depict a set theme. The most common depiction is of the tree of life and its connection with the environment around it. There are bold pictures of spirits, human figurines, horses, tigers and birds portrayed in symbiotic relationships with man and amongst themselves (Rao 2018: 973-977; CCRT:2017:23-26).

### Saura Paintings

Like the Gonds, the Sauras are also one of the oldest tribal communities of India. They have even been mentioned in the ancient texts like *Ramayana* and *Mahabharat*. The Saura communities of the Rayagada, Gajapati and Koratpur districts of Odisha are also known for their pictographs as the Saura paintings. Unlike other tribal communities, the Sauras make these paintings at the time of adversities, hardships, diseases and death. One of the important themes of these paintings is associated with *Ittal*, a Saura

deity. The deity is depicted with various signs and symbols; it is worshipped and is also used to invoke spirits. Sauras believe that their world is constantly interacting with gods, ghosts, spirits, and ancestors. And the paintings created by them actually serve as temporary dwellings for these beings. The main artist is also a priest called *Kuranmaran*. The basic format of the painting is in the shape of a rectangular house or square space. The painting process begins with divinations performed by a shaman to appease the spirit, ancestor or God who may have been the cause of the calamity or tragedy. The spirit is invoked by prayers and chants to come and occupy the painted ritual space. The Saura paintings are done in white with organically prepared pigments. The emphasis and highlights to the paintings are added by lampblack, red ochre, indigo blue and yellow. Also, Saura paintings lack negative spaces and have no empty space in them. Common motifs include horses with riders, monkeys on trees, deers, peacocks, dynamic human figurines, trees, astronomical bodies like the sun, new moon etc. as seen in Fig 10.1C (CCRT:2017:35-36).

### Santhal Paintings

Santhals are one of the major tribal communities of India and are found in the present-day states of Bihar, Jharkhand, Odisha and West Bengal. The Santhal community also has its own narrative artform. The clay is first worked by hand to create a low relief then the images are painted by hand using locally made materials and pigments. The Santhal paintings are not exclusive to men, and even women are allowed to create them. Like the art works of the Gonds, these paintings also have geometrical elements like triangles, squares, and parallelograms; however, animals and birds are the main themes. The more important and formal Santhal paintings are done by professional painters of the communities called *Chitrakars*. The paintings are of three types: the first type is in the form of rolled paper (scroll) with a divine figure or deity associated with an auspicious event, followed by another rolled type of depiction, and

the third type is called *Jadupatua*, also known as a magical painting of enlightenment. The theme of the paintings ranges from hunter-gatherers, deities, and animals (CCRT:2017:39-42). The paintings are quite simplistic in their format and are done in primary colours. It includes leafy patterns in the background, foreground and sometimes even borders. Also, besides being done in primary colours, Santhal motifs do not follow the logic in their colouring schemes, and motifs can appear in unexpected colours and patterns (Fig.10.1D)

### Warli Paintings

The Warli tribe is local to the regions of Maharashtra and Sahyadri mountain regions. They are found in Javhar, Dahanu, Talasari, Wada and Palghar villages. This tribe subsisted primarily on agriculture, and the majority of its members were members of farming communities. Their way of life, rituals, etc. depend on the monsoon. They worship deities of nature like wind, rain, lightning, and thunder alongside the Sun and Moon. This tribe also has its own narrative wall art called Warli paintings. This name is derived from the word '*warla*' meaning piece of land. This artistic tradition is dated to the Neolithic period between 2500-3000 BCE. The wall art is painted at the time of rituals and auspicious events like marriages etc on their square bamboo houses. Warli paintings have limited colours and are monochromatic depictions of the socio-religious customs, imaginations and beliefs of the people (CCRT:2017:29-32; Patil: 2017: 451-456). The paintings are made with simple geometric shapes like circles, triangles, squares and lines. The human figures are represented as triangles with the stick like limbs. These paintings resemble prehistoric rock paintings in their simplicity. The painting surface also does not require elaborate preparations and is simply painted on *geru* or red coloured wall. The figures and motifs are made using a white coloured rice paste. Brushes are locally made using *salati* grass or bamboo sticks. The central space in the paintings is taken up by

a square called *caukat*. Within this are circles, triangles, polygons etc. The Caukat contains the representations of the Palaghat goddess- a symbol of creative energy. Auspicious rituals like marriages are considered incomplete if the goddess is not drawn and present. She is also the deity of fertility for the Warli people. Interestingly only married women draw and create the Palaghat goddess within the Caukat. Each motif has its own characteristic presence, and there is no overlapping. The painting has a two-dimensional look to it, with all characters and elements of the painting visible as can be seen in Fig.10.1E (CCRT:2017:29-32).

### Evolution of Street Art

Street art, a form of public art, is our perception of the world around us. It is the artist's response and reaction to the society and place at the time (Bach 1992 :130). Art expressed in public places is not tied down by scale and size; it can be of any shape and size. It can be contextual with its surroundings or can also represent a stand-alone meaning, and it can also be an amalgamation of various mediums. All art cannot be categorised as public art. What constitutes a public art is dictated by certain principles. Public art of a certain region should reflect inclusivity of its various communities and people who were part of the whole planning and collaborative efforts. Accessibility is another criteria. Moreover, as public art is generally in open-air surroundings where it is exposed to elements of nature, it should be durable and should be sustainable. As public art reflects the mood and cultural diversity of an area, it should be aesthetically pleasing and should be of high quality. Public art should aim to soothe and educate. It should reflect the diverse interest of the masses and communities involved. It should be a tribute to the diverse culture of any given region and should not aim to isolate or segregate any community in any way. Expression and creation of public art should allow artistic freedom.

Many artists are now actively creating street art, and they are being encouraged by local

authorities to work towards spreading positive messages which would lead to a meaningful impact on the society. An evolution of public art has been found to be associated with the evolution of societies and urban spaces. Today the artists collaborate with various other professionals like landscape artists, architects, urban designers and city planners to develop socially aware and viable art, which leads to more meaningful and conscious projects (Kedia & Kapoor: 2018: 193-197)

### Public Art India

Perhaps, one of the earliest evidence of public art are the Buddhist murals of Ajanta in the Aurangabad district of Maharashtra that belong to circa third century BCE. In the present times, many street art festivals are also organised where artists, both amateurs and veterans come together to participate in beautifying public spaces in urban areas. One example is the establishment of Stuart India Foundation in Delhi, the Shillong Street Art Festival, and Kolkata Street Art Festival. In Delhi, the first street art festival was organised by Astha Chauhan and Matteo Ferraresi in 2012 called 'Khirkee extension'. The motivating factor was to examine whether it would be possible for street art to survive and thrive without any funding and support in a country like India. After the rise of social media and awareness programmes and platforms, more market was created for street art, specifically the murals and wall art culture. The development of the Indian Street Art movement thus began in Delhi. People associated with various street art companies started acquiring proper permissions to display and create murals in public spaces. Government bodies like New Delhi Municipal Corporation, Delhi Metro Rail Corporation, Swachh Bharat, Ministry of Urban Development, the Central Public Works Department came on board to support the street art movement, spread awareness, and pass on social messages (Sharma: 2018). Besides creating large scale awareness, the growth in street art culture has also led to changes in teaching pedagogy and school curriculums and the modernisation of

curatorial practices (Bhasin: 2018: 2).

Besides installations and sculptures, the majority of the public art is still expressed as 'Murals'. Apart from Murals, graffiti also forms part of wall art today. The study of street art provides an interesting proxy for the examination of public spaces within an area. In modern-day scenarios, we see Bollywood posters, typographic signboards, and images of deities painted in public spaces (Bhasin:2018:112-117). Street art, specifically wall art, could be an instrument for expressing either resistance or support by using public spaces as their canvas. Compared to many other cities, Delhi stands out for providing rich examples and case studies that allow an understanding of how wall art can exemplify the usage of public spaces for projecting contestations, politics, and social messages (Bhasin:2018: 112-117 ).In order to limit our object of study, we choose to look at wall art in a more defined sense, in the form of murals, graffiti and wall painting.

### Case Study of Lodhi Art

Lodhi Colony has a distinct place in the diverse urban landscape of Delhi. Lodhi Colony was not always a cosmopolitan area; it was among the last residential quarters built for government employees. It has low rise houses next to local commercial centres or markets like Meherchand Market and Khan market. Besides upmarket localities, the vicinity of Lodhi gardens also makes it a desirable area it has repetitive blocks that allow open walking layout, making it an ideal place for street art and murals. The street art of the Lodhi art district has led to the creation of public and accessible galleries that have woven itself into the city's fabric. The art scene of Lodhi Colony developed more after 2015 when St+Art India Foundation started painting giant murals on apartment walls. This endeavour was supported by Google Arts. Today, this district has over 30 artworks from nearly fifty prominent artists from Japan, Poland, and other countries who have let loose their talents and enriched this space (Fig.10.2).





**Fig. 10.1**

A: Pithora wall art at National Crafts Museum & Hastkala Academy, New Delhi  
B: Gond wall art at National Crafts Museum & Hastkala Academy, New Delhi  
C: Saura wall art at IGRMS Odisha  
D: Santhal wall art at National Crafts Museum & Hastkala Academy, New Delhi  
E: Warli wall art at National Crafts Museum & Hastkala Academy, New Delhi



A



B



C



D



E

Fig.10.2

**Fig 2: A:** Depiction of the Famous Dancing Girl from the Indus Valley Civilization

**B:** Fusion Art by Rakesh

**C:** Gupt Dwar mural in Block

**D:** Sameer Kulavoor's Mural, depicts people clicking selfies—human figures bent backwards. The focus has shifted from living the moment to collecting images,

**E:** Yip Yew Chong's mural, A singaporean artist known for replicating everyday scenes into art. Through a soulful representation of the landscape and people of Lodhi Colony, the artist salutes the life of the common man.



## Discussion

As is evident from the data and context given above, India has a rich heritage of rock art, right from the Mesolithic period and continuing up to the historic period. Some tribes like the Gonds, Santhals and Sauras still practice rock or wall art in some form, thus maintaining a continuity in this legacy. The distribution of the rock art sites is also widespread across the country, from famous sites such as Bhimbetka to lesser known rock art localities of southern and northern India, this particular art form has been documented from all over the sub-continent by multiple scholars. Since India is a land of continuous traditions and very old communities and cultures, it makes it a prime candidate for many anthropological and comparative studies. In this paper also an analogy and stylistic evolution of wall art has been attempted to be studied by tracing the rock art forms, spread and further comparing it with tribal communities to the urban artists. The rock art from various time periods can be separated from each other on the basis of their stylistic features, themes and even pigments. The rock art of the Mesolithic period is simpler, with man being a part of the natural environment and inconspicuous in its surroundings. It further develops as man's relationship and interaction with the environment changes. This change is reflected by the earlier simple stick figures of the hunter gatherers that change to the complex agricultural and farming scenes during the Neolithic period. Some scenes also portray complex rituals and stories. The advent of horses and men mounted atop elephants and horses, mark the transition into conflict themes. With these evolution in the themes, the representations in the men and women also change with addition of elements which clearly differentiate one gender from the other. Man's position in the paintings also changes from being one with the scene to being a central and dominant entity. Eventually as prehistory closes in and historic periods start, the rock art themes and stories are adopted by the tribes which inhabited the areas. These tribal

communities made these paintings central to their culture and traditions, wherein it became essential to create wall art during any important function, event or festival. Wall art making became tied to ancestor worship for some communities and became important part of the death and funeral rites. Slowly and subsequently these wall arts became a key identifying feature for these tribes. As urbanisation set and society started encroaching upon the tribal lands and areas, with lack of economic opportunities and effects of segregations and illiteracy, it is these wall arts like Madhubani, Pithora etc which became a source of livelihood for the communities. Today they form an important part of our handicraft industry and have a high demand in both international and domestic markets. In this way these wall paintings which found their roots in rock art and transitioned to cultural elements, found their way into urban spaces and modern society. Once into the mainstream art platforms, the wall arts of various communities have continued to inspire and lead various art movements around the country. The case study was done for Lodhi Art District which is a vibrant area allowing free expression to many artists. Here also we see certain design elements taken from the wall art of the tribal communities (Fig.10.2). No matter the theme decided or portrayed one can always find at least one stylistic element from the tribal wall arts in the graffiti. Thus from prehistoric rock art to tribal wall arts to urban graffiti analogies and a comparative can be generated to understand how certain motifs, designs or even stylistic elements, borders etc evolved and are further being adapted and portrayed according to various artists and their perspectives.

## Conclusion

This is a preliminary study based on observation and documentation of rock art and its development to wall art and finally leading to urban graffiti. The paper provides an insight into the continuous cultural traditions of some tribes who continue to practice wall art and is central to their culture and

identity. It also focuses on how modern day artists are taking inspiration from these communities and incorporate their design elements in their artworks. It thus provides a ground work and further opportunities for more comparatives and design studies in this field.

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