

## SIGNIFICANCE OF PHOTOGRAPHY IN PRESERVATION OF FOLK ART

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### Abstract

Photography is a versatile form of art and it has become an important facet of numerous disciplines while having its own uniqueness. The paper aims to highlight the role of photography in recording the folk arts of India. A visual archive of our rich culture, tradition and ideologies of India can be communicated around the world. It also discusses some of the measures that can be taken for protecting the different forms of art. Photography provides an appealing way of representing itself as well as other forms of art. It is a resource that is widely practiced by the people and has become an essential part of life in the present scenario.

**Key Words:** Photography, documentation, folk art, pictures, images

### INTRODUCTION

The word art itself is big enough to be explained. It has everything in it from a small dot on a paper to a surface full of colors, it is a skill, a mode of expression, communication, and it comprises everything in it. Our country is rich in art, culture and tradition not in a particular form of art; but in each and every field be it painting, dance, drama, music, poetry, sculpture, literature, architecture, or any other discipline. Folk art or traditional art acts as the essential element of Indian culture and tradition.

With the movement from rural to urban, passive to active life, we are somewhere losing our culture and traditions, which is not just affecting our lifestyle but also affecting the varied Art's like Rogan, Manjusha, Wasli, Terracotta, Dokra, Pattachitra, Gunjifa, Madubani, Gond, Santhal, mandhna, rangoli and many others are on advent of getting extinct with each passing day. These art forms are some of the remaining sources through which we can understand or get acquainted with the ideologies and beliefs of our ancestors which link us to our pedigree. Henceforth, these arts and traditions need to be conserved, protected, documented properly and should be promoted not just in our country but across the globe. Here photography can act as a medium through which the whole scenario of folk art can be altered. For the promotions, and documentation photography remains at the epitome of all the methods through which one can enjoy, learn, explore, and research about folk art for centuries.



Figure1: Rogan Painting. Source:  
<https://mediaindia.eu/culture/disappearing-arts-of-india/>



Figure2: Manjusha Painting. Source:  
<https://medium.com/@worthittsocial/top-10-lost-art-forms-of-india-396b263b005c>



Figure 3: Warli Painting. Source:  
<https://mediaindia.eu/culture/disappearing-arts-of-india/>



Figure 4: Terracotta. Source: <https://indiafolkart.wordpress.com>



Figure 5: Pattachitra. Source:  
<https://medium.com/@worthittsocial/top-10-lost-art-forms-of-india-396b263b005c>



Figure 6: Dokra Art. Source: <https://engrave.in/blog/dhokra-art/>



Figure 7: Ganjifa. Source:  
<https://medium.com/@worthittsocial/top-10-lost-art-forms-of-india-396b263b005c>



Figure 8: Santhal Painting. Source:  
<https://mediaindia.eu/culture/disappearing-arts-of-india/>



Figure 9: Rangoli. Source: <https://in.pinterest.com/pin/203225001905759377/>



Figure 10: Mandana Art. Source: <https://www.hindustantimes.com/art-and-culture/mandana-paintings-this-artist-is-struggling-to-keep-the-tradition-alive/story-r0EhVTA9VDhzWn11njoKNO.html>

## METHODOLOGY

For achieving the objectives of the present research, various books, journals, articles, magazines, websites were studied along with some interviews with curator, researchers, and photographers were conducted. Some visits were also made to the museums to understand the role and purpose of documentation.

## DISCUSSION

With the invention of photography in the 19th century, a massive change occurred around the globe. It became a great topic of discussion and people around the world either talked about the art or made use of it. It disseminated rapidly and became a part of other disciplines and benefited them. It altered the way of thinking and perceiving things. With the help of a camera, one was able to record the subject in no time and a most accurate manner.

Photography is a medium through which one can record reality in its purest form. With the growing technology and advancements, photography has reached each and every individual, in a form of a mobile phone or a camera. In recent time photography refers to the everyday practice of picture-making that serves numerous purposes in day to day life. It can be used for fun, memories, communication, documentation, exploration and any other purpose. It can be freely altered and creatively utilized.

Both the art form play a great role in history and the present scenario. But folk art being a traditional form of art is disappearing with each passing day and which is needed to be protected. The art of clicking pictures can play a humongous role in safeguarding it. The art of photography can help in not just the preservation of folk art but also in communicating it, in addition to it the digitalization of folk art a visual archive can be created and can be circulated expeditiously. On a border, context photography can be used as a medium to preserve, protect, and promote folk art for future generations, so that it can reach the audience to a large extent. Furthermore, with digitalization, the pictures can reach a large number of audiences and people can enjoy folk or traditional art irrespective of place and time.

The art of photography was introduced by the Britishers in India, to record the rich culture, traditions, architecture, caves, and numerous other aspects of our country. The Britishers knew the importance of photography and promoted this art. Several photographers both Indian and the British were appointed to document the rich culture and tradition of India. These pictures have become evident evidence of our cultural past. These images sturdily speak a lot about our ancestors, lifestyle, architecture, heritage, fashion, tribes, and varied artistic practices. Without such images, it would be difficult to have an acquaintance of the past. Moreover, these pictures also help in the comparative study, showcasing the changes that occurred in our surroundings from then till now.

While studying the picture archives of India, from the 19th century, regardless of some common subject matters, the photographers have captured some attractive pictures of the traditional art and artists like- dance, theatre artists, stage artists, paintings, sculptures, tribes, sketches, and other subjects matters related to art. These pictures help in understanding the character, life, art, and art practices of that period. These pictures act as a piece of evidence and inspiration for the present audience along with the artists to get inspired from the images. It states, who the artists were? what they were practicing? how they were practicing the arts? and much more. Moreover, these pictures narrate the beautiful stories of our ancestral practices and take us closer to our origin.

	
<p>Figure 11: An image by Indian photographer Narayan Dajee, one of the few non-white members of the Bombay Photographic Society, from around 1860. Credit: Courtesy The Rajeev Rawat Collection, Jaipur. Source: <a href="https://edition.cnn.com/style/article/india-photography-19th-century/index.html">https://edition.cnn.com/style/article/india-photography-19th-century/index.html</a></p>	<p>Figure 12: From the album 'Musicians and Dancers' with silver gelatin prints shot by Gobindram and Oodeyram of Jaipur, 1880s. Source: <a href="https://sarmaya.in/whats-new/musicians-and-dancers-photos-from-the-1880s/">https://sarmaya.in/whats-new/musicians-and-dancers-photos-from-the-1880s/</a></p>
	
<p>Figure 13: Photograph inscribed "Women Grinding Paint," Calcutta, India, c. 1845, daguerrotype, 9.4 x 14.4 cm (The Metropolitan Museum of Art). Source: <a href="https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/art-asia/south-asia/x97ec695a:1850present-north-west/a/photographic-views-of-nineteenth-century-india-an-introduction">https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/art-asia/south-asia/x97ec695a:1850present-north-west/a/photographic-views-of-nineteenth-century-india-an-introduction</a></p>	<p>Figure 14: Woodcarver, Kashmir (1896). Source: <a href="https://www.merepix.com/2013/09/19th-century-india-rare-old-photos-lucknow-lahore.html">https://www.merepix.com/2013/09/19th-century-india-rare-old-photos-lucknow-lahore.html</a></p>

Photography is not just a recording of light, but it is a medium through which one can have a glimpse of the past, can record the present for a better understanding of the future. The art of recording light is a versatile form of art while upholding its uniqueness and importance. It easily collaborates with the other disciplines and sets its roots to promote them in the best possible manner like- sports, fashion, advertising, cooking, architecture, medical and many more. Accordingly, for folk or traditional art one can make use of- museum object photography /conservation photography or documentary photography for its preservation.

### **TYPE OF PHOTOGRAPHIC FIELDS**

From the umbrella of photography, museum object photography /conservation photography or documentary photography can be practiced for recording the folk art so that an accurate, interesting story can be formed and narrated amongst the people so that they not just have a glance at the pictures but can also relate to the art styles, enjoy, promote, practice and can connect to their roots. All these types of photography can be a game-changer for the field of folk art. The different fields are as discussed-

**Museum object photography/ Conservation photography** - It is the technique of capturing high-quality images of an artifact displayed or to be displayed in the museum. It is practiced in studio setups and with the trained professionals along with curators who handles the objects at the museum. As these artifacts are rare, fragile and can get damaged easily, for that a lot of precautions must be taken while capturing pictures of such a subject. It provides a wide range of information about the subject like- method of construction, condition of an object, and even display all its flaws. It also comprises images of when the subject was discovered, if any deterioration took place, if the product was damaged, if any restoration work was done both before and after. This field also comprises all information about the object along with the process through which images were captured, each and every minute detail is recorded about the subject. So, it would help for us the better understanding of the object and for the future references.

**Documentary Photography**- It is a kind of photography which is recorded in the form of a report and is presented in the most accurate manner without altering the subject. It dictates and comprises the basic and essential information about the subject. Documentary photography has a wide umbrella and can be practiced in the varied form of disciplines. The pictures are captured in high resolutions and can be practiced at any time. It can be practiced in both controlled and uncontrolled environment. More often they narrate a story about the subject.

These types of photography provide assistance for systematic representation of the folk arts, alongside intrigues and attract viewers. It also creates opportunities

for the growth and development of the arts in a well-defined manner. Pictures captured by these techniques or any other form of photography showcasing folk art represents the aspirations, social relations and aesthetic sensibilities of our rich culture. The pictures also create an indexical relation to our historical past. It is often found that the art forms are lost or it becomes very difficult to get information about the arts. As the artists are not practicing those arts because of lack of resources, awareness, financial crises, faced by the artists, or the arts has just disappeared. Where these pictures act as a medium through which awareness can be spread amongst the people. With photography one not records the art but also provides and develops a channel through which folk art, the life of the artists, process, technique, methods, and mediums can be communicated to a large number of audience around the globe in a short period of time.

Photography being fast and a medium that can be practiced at any given point of time from any location creates an easy channel to spread awareness amongst people. Along with the help of social media, it has become just a matter of second where one has to just click a picture and post it on his/her account and within a matter of seconds the pictures reach n number of people.

Photography has a conjuring power that can rebuild the lost indexical connection between art to the present world. At the peak of the expansion of the arts, the digital space can help in leaking the art style into the physical world. The resultant cognition, creative, functional seamlessness between these two supposedly separate realms and lead to a partial reintroduction of our spatial realities.

## **CONCLUSION**

The aim to record pictures of folk art to conserve the dying Folk arts before they completely disappear. It also aspires to save and encourage the artists and general public to get aware about these arts to practice the original form arts. Documenting these art will also help in the flourishing of such arts practiced in the remotest parts of the Indian subcontinent, but also go a step further and help with the encouragement of the local art trade that these art deserves.

These pictures also teach us about art. If one has to perform the art then also these pictures are a mere source of evidence and inspiration. These pictures become evidence of the past and communicate about the rich culture and traditions of India. If these artists and artworks are not recorded in the present then it could lead to trouble for the future generation and can lead to a huge gap in history. Moreover, it would be a great loss for us as they are the only channel through which we can connect to our origin and ideologies of India.

The initiative towards recording the folk or traditional art will lead to preservation of not just the art but also artistic concerns of originality,

authorship or style representations, cultural formation, aesthetic similarities, emotional, and affective values.

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