

Exploration of Aipan Art for Empowering Women of Uttarakhand

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ABSTRACT

In India, majority of women is involve in the creation of the folk paintings of many regions, and as women perform all domestic work in rural areas, this type of work is also seen as domestic labour, whether it be for decoration or religious events. Such art had been considered secondary and appropriately developed on a global scale. After receiving attention from various organizations, Indian folk paintings have come to light and have started providing women with a means of subsistence. Aipan, a form of Uttarakhand folk art, will also be a better choice for women's empowerment. Aipan is employed in the specific auspicious ceremonies, also known as the chowki, that comprise unique motifs for each occasion. When there are any festivals, pujas, or ceremonies, these designs are created. After providing the necessary resources and trainings for women, the creativity of women can be indicated as an appropriate channel in this regard. The study is based on the evaluation of Aipan art in context to empowering women through it.

Keywords:

INTRODUCTION

The traditional and well-liked folk art of Uttarakhand is Aipan art. Alpana in Bengal, Arichan in Bihar, Bhuggul in Andhra Pradesh, Satiya in Gujarat, Chowk Pooran in Uttar Pradesh, Madna in Rajasthan, and Kolam in South India are just a few of the names given to this lovely art form that is practiced throughout India. The Kumaon and Garhwal regions of Uttarakhand are recognized for its magnificent folk art (Aipan art), which is particularly well-known there. As it is performed during all important rites, ceremonies, and special occasions, Aipan art has a unique identity all its own. Traditionally, this folk craft was performed in the past primarily by women from Kumaon using rice paste and red oxide (*Geru*).

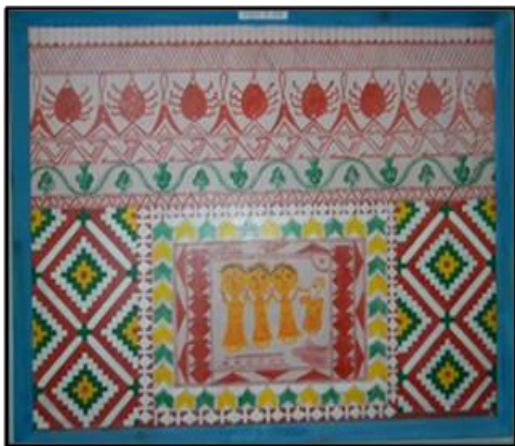


Fig-1 Namakaran Chowki,



Fig-2 Traditional Pattern of Aipan

Almora Museum, Source: Author

The floor at the entryway to homes and places of worship, as well as on the *duppatta* (scarf also known as Pichaura in Kumaon) and the bamboo winnowing tray "Supa," have all been decorated with the Aipan motif (a handmade tool for refining grains). And in accordance with tradition, it is passed down from mother to daughter (generation to generation) in the shape of lovely handiwork. In the state's Kumaon region over the past 20 years, numerous rock paintings from the protohistoric era have been found. Lakhu Udiyar and Lwethaap are two of them who are well renowned. When the Pahari Kalam (painting style) was being used in several of the Himalayan regions, Kumaon was presumably where it also developed. Unfortunately, there aren't many instances of this style in use right now.

The Aipan art is a very popular style of folk art in Kumaon, and it is displayed in a variety of settings by sketching diverse natural motifs, geometrical patterns, and other deities and goddesses. The tradition of creating clay idols from the period of Harella exists (Dikaras). All Kumaon homes have a dedicated spot for the art known as Aepan or Aipan. Aepan is a term that derives from Arpan. Although it is a pattern formed with the fingers, the word "Likhai" (writing) is frequently used to describe it. Aepan are utilised in ceremonial designs for Pujas, festivals, and ceremonies related to birth, marriage, death, and Janeyu (the sacred thread ceremony). Simple rice paste and ochre (Geru) colour are the only raw materials used. Mango wood is used to make chowkies, which are painted with unique designs according to the occasion. Aipans come in a wide variety of shapes and sizes, including the Saraswati Chowki, Chamunda Hast Chowki, Nav Durga Chowki, Shiv or Shivarchan Peeth, Janeyu Chowki, Asan Chowki, Dhuli Arghya Chowki, Acharya Chowki, Durga Thapa, Jyoti Patta, and Lakshmi Yantra. The Kumaon woman performs it according to custom using the correct procedure. According to tradition, they first use the cow dung solution to clean the floor or surface (they combined cow dung and water and applied the mixture on the floor of the puja room, at the entry to the house, and on the doors; in Uttarakhand, it is called Dehli). The Red Oxide "Geru" (red clay diluted with water) is applied to the surface in the shapes of a circle, square, rectangle, etc. after the surface has dried fully. They create the rice paste for the designs and motifs using this method, making sure that it is neither too thick nor too soft and can flow easily. Since the Aipan people have the belief that cow excrement removes all kinds of impurities and obstacles, cow

ding was a key component of their design. The women then used red clay (Geru) paste to create a circle. They make rice paste in parallel with this technique for the design and motifs. Color is achieved using rice paste, wheat flour, earth and vegetable dyes.



Fig.2 Pattern during Navratri Puja



Fig.3 Development of Chwoki during ritual

Source: Author

The image shown above (Fig. 2) was created at the Navratri Puja in a Bhimtal home, which is another important Hindu ritualistic occasion. There are many policies set up by the government and other organisations to address the issues with women's empowerment, however most of the time women are not fully integrated into the corporate world since there are flaws in every policy.

The majority of women are accustomed to and find it simple to create patterns with their hands or fingers by dipping them in the rice paste and moving them around freely. However, they occasionally use utilize cotton material that has been tied to a pole and used as a brush. Currently, a variety of materials, including red paint and red materials (acrylic, fabric, posters, etc.), are utilised to create Aipan art. The media used to create Aipan art is also unusual because it is found on a variety of decorative items, such as invitation cards, book covers, and cushion covers. Similar acrylic colour decorations are used for wall hangings, flower pots, and pen and pencil holders.



Fig.4 clay idols with Aipan



Fig.5 Decorative Object

Almora Museum, Source: Author

Aipan art has changed as a result of people's busy lives, and there is a clear transition from traditional to modern adaptation due to a lack of understanding in the practice of folk art and people's search for a quick fix while staying connected to their roots and upholding tradition. Today, a variety of easy aipan-making techniques and tools are available on the market. These products include acrylic, fabric, posters, stencils, banners, and stickers, all of which feature the typical red and white colours and patterns. Pillowcases, pen stands, wall hangings, and flower pots are just a few of the items in the market featuring aipan themes and designs on them.

Empowering Women and Aipan

The most notable advancement toward increasing women's independence and influence globally is women's empowerment. Giving women the chance to progress in education, skill, technology, social recognition, and other areas is the idea behind women's empowerment. In order to empower women, their initial intellectual capacity must be raised, allowing them to reject patriarchal hierarchies and gender politics after considering their own inner fervor and spirit. "The process and the outcome of the process, by which women obtain greater control over material and intellectual resources, and challenges the ideology of patriarchy and the gender-based discrimination, against women in all the organizations and structures of society," according to Batliwala (1995). The arguments sparked by the 1980s feminist movement, in which women fought for equal rights despite their worsening status in society, gave rise to the idea of women's empowerment. Changes in political, social, and economic power across and across both individuals and social groupings were necessary for the sociopolitical and economic process of women's empowerment (Batliwala, Dighe 2008).

After providing those with the right tools and the flexibility to choose their careers, their skills and abilities should be developed in this regard. Many women in Uttarakhand work in agriculture, however due to a male-dominated society, especially in rural areas, they struggle with gender inequality and patriarchal hegemonies. In addition, despite the fact that they labour in agriculture, their male family members or counterparts handle household and marketing management. Since the empowerment and progress of femininity are inextricably linked to their inner self-awareness, their basic abilities can be strengthened for their mental growth and confidence based on their willingness. In this situation, since art has the ability to induce calm, the Kumaon women's treasure of traditional folk art known as aipan might prove to be a superior resource for their self-improvisation. The women who are obligated to work in agriculture but do not own land might select this route for marketing on an individual basis. For instance, regional or traditional art, particularly folk art, can be used to study the empowerment of women in the field of painting. Folk art is typically created by women and is based on local rituals. As a result of consideration, a lot of folk art has gained popularity and financial worth. The most well-known item in this category is Madhubani folk art from Bihar, which is also well-known on the worldwide market and is solely produced by women. Particularly important in India are the folk arts of Madhubani, Varli, Muggu, and Gond. These folk arts are unique to certain parts of India. For instance, Madhubani is from Bihar, Varli is from Maharashtra, etc. We're talking about Aipan paintings or Aipan art here. It originates in the Kumaon region of Uttarakhand and has special importance.

Conclusion

In order to empower the women in that region, it is thought that the Kumaon folk art style known as

Aipan will be a suitable medium. If the government and other organisations give them better resources, they will be able to find job and get recognition on the domestic and worldwide markets. With the assistance of some organisations, the women who are knowledgeable about the Aipan painting materials and procedures can also offer crucial training to those who are not yet familiar with the art. Because the work of art is not particularly difficult for the ladies and can be monetized in a variety of ways, they will make more money with fewer efforts.

There are numerous artists who have created a unique style in this genre of Indian folk art, and they are now being recognised with wonderful artistic tributes. The brilliant artist Jamini Roy might be considered first in this analysis since he produced a great work after being influenced by Calcutta's folk paintings and developed a distinctive style among other forerunners of the pre-modern period. In addition, Padmashree Jivya Soma Mhase, a famous and prominent artist, can be regarded in this way as a well-known artist for his Warli paintings and has gained recognition on a global scale for the magnificent folk paintings of Maharashtra. The other artist in this category is Nodni Kara, who is also gaining recognition. The marketing value of these paintings will therefore improve if the appropriate courses and trainings are provided, and the women will be offered full financial advancement. Additionally, creativity and the arts are known to be effective treatments for mental health issues, so when people make painting their primary employment, they can stay upbeat and free from despair. As the well-known artist Jatin Das has also created a fantastic collection of *pankhas* around the world, the Aipan painting can also be done on fan (*pankhi*) shape in a variety of styles to help students' creativity. These Aipan painted *pankhis* might also be included in the Jatin Das-founded *pankha* museum in Orissa. Thus, the motifs and patterns of the art can be explored further in various utility objects and items in their traditional forms, so that advancement and revival of the same can be done.

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12. Note: all images has been taken from the "Govind Vallabh Pant Museum of Almora" by the author besides the two images (2,3).