

**Introduction to Indian Art – An Appreciation**  
**Prof. Soumik Nandy Majumdar**  
**Department of History of Art**  
**Indian Institute of Technology, Kanpur**

**Module – 04**  
**Folk Traditions 1: (art and ritual)**  
**Lecture: W3 – L4**

Welcome viewers to MOOCs online course on Introduction to Indian Art and Appreciation. Well, in this week we have already covered three modules and we are left with two more. So, today is the fourth module and what is very special about this one; the fourth module and the next one fifth modules is that in these two modules, we will be looking at the folk art and the tribal art of India. So, that makes these two modules very different from the earlier three ones because in the first, second and third module of this week, we were mostly looking at the very, very important well known and major artistic monuments insights from the main stream artistry.

Generally known as the high art; Ajanta, Mamallapuram, Ellora, Mughal painting, Rajput painting these are all like art works art traditions patronized by very rich kings, very rich patrons or merchants or very rich religious leaders and religious authorities compared to that or in contrast to that folk art of India is basically self patronized I mean you do not need a rich patron in your village to patronize all these folk arts.

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That you see right on this table in front of you. All these figurines and little sculptures and these pots here, these are very ordinary, these are very common place. I mean you do not need any rich patron, any rich person in your village or in your society to patronize them in order to sustain these traditions. You can do it yourself.

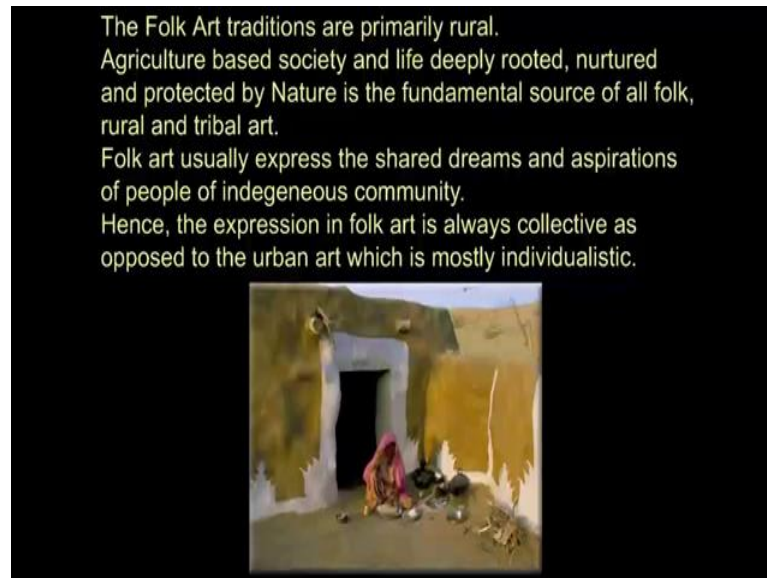
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So, when I picked up this small little and not so impressive really speaking terracotta horse from a village nearby from their weekly market, I was not exactly sure that why they make these things. I mean if they are making it as a decorative object I would expect a little more decorations on the body of this horse, but if you look at it, it is a very simple form with just pair of ears and a pair of eyes and you can see the face and the neck and the body and then four legs, a little tail here, but that is it.

So, I was intrigued and when I asked my teachers I found out that these very, very unassuming terracotta horses or terracotta animals are not really that innocent. I mean they look very innocent, very simple almost like a toy, but these terracotta figures are meant to be used as part of ritual and this is our topic today that how in folk traditions art is an integral part of ritual or there is a very interesting connection relationship between art and ritual. This is what we are going to discuss today.

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Now, before that let me make it very clear once again, though all of you might be know it already, that folk art traditions are primarily rural. Agricultural based society and life deeply rooted nurtured and protected by nature is the fundamental source of all folk rural and tribal art to put it simply. Then you can find out for yourself, what are the various examples of folk art? What are the different examples of rural and tribal art? I mean the range is enormous. We will not be able to do justice in just too small motives, but we can try to focus on these two things. One that the relationship between art and ritual in the context of Indian folk art and secondly which will be the focus of our next module that is the playfulness of folk art, I mean the quality, the visual quality of folk art generally speaking is very playful, very entertaining and very pleasing also. So, folk art usually express this is also important. Folk art, usually express the shared dreams and aspirations of people of indigenous community.

Now, this shared dream and shared aspiration. This phrase needs to be underlined very clearly because as opposed to the modern urban art there you find most of the artists are very individualistic and you can relate to what an artist is expressing that is fine, but when usually speaking; generally speaking when a modern art is an urban art it is producers art he or she is mainly thinking in terms of what he or she wants to express. Generally speaking not thinking collectively, compared to that the expression in folk art is always collective as opposed to the urban art which is mostly individualistic.

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Now, keeping this in mind when we venture into let us say any rural bell when we go to any villages, I mean many of us might be having our native places in some remote village in some part of India. So, we know very well that when you enter any village, you find lots of things. I mean which we usually would keep it apart under the category of functional art or utility art what is so arty about it? These are just simple daily life objects, but it is very interesting that the way art and ritual are inseparably connected to each other in the context of Indian folk art.

Similarly art and functionality is also very deeply connected to each other in the context of Indian folk art. So, what is purely functional? I mean like this small little Clayca, this is purely functional, but that does not make us write it off as something very known art even a very, very simple functional clay cup which of course, these days this may not be so easily available because paper cups and unfortunately plastic cups have replaced these clay cups, but I mean until very recently we used to get them at every railway station and it was easier those days to keep and collect them, but now you do not find them. So, these clay cups have become really very precious objects for us.

Now, this simple clay cups become for us very interesting art object also because though the function is same to sip tea from this clay cups though the material is same, it is clay everywhere, but just these four, 1, 2, 3 and 4. These three I mean these four clay cups of different shapes.

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And sizes also different, slightly different colors can tell you that perhaps if you count the entire India there would be hundreds and thousands of different kinds of clay cups from which you are supposed to sip tree a tea. Now why is that variation? Why it is not that all over India you get the same clay cups? Why it is so that you are supposed to get different clay cups in different shapes and forms?

I mean this is where functionality gets connected to the society the kind of clay that is available, the environment you live in and perhaps some kind of esthetic taste. I mean we cannot simply write it off. We cannot rule out the rule that esthetics play in the formation of a certain idea, whether it is a clay cup or a simple votive terracotta object on a horse.



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So, when we are talking about folk art, we should keep our minds absolutely open. Open to the idea that in the context of folk traditions everything can claim to be looked at, to be appreciated as an art object whether it is a simple daily used kind of clay pots or gorgeously colored icon to be worshiped very soon.

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Or all these very simple terracotta figure is tied up with a trunk of a tree and the idea is basically a wish fulfillment idea, that you tie up these clay figures along the trunk of a tree and then you keep a wish and probably when your wish gets fulfilled you come back

and take it away or you can immerse it in the water whatever. So, even I mean ritual in the sense that there are some belief systems, may be superstitions and to follow the superstitions you need small little terracotta figures, small little terracotta horses which for us are beautiful art objects.

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So, not that we are going to ignore the original function or the requirement of these objects of this art works, but definitely we have the privilege really speaking to appreciate these objects made for an entirely different purpose as esthetic object. I mean this is what we can do.

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And these objects definitely deserve to be treated as esthetic objects. I mean keeping this beautifully painted either terracotta figures or.

For example, this one is not terracotta, it is a wooden almost it is looks like a doll, but a wooden image of lord Shiva, nicely painted and kept right under the tree. I mean though it looks little funny not as serious as a very classically drawn painted and carved out image of Shiva, but yet it is very close, very intimate and it demands certain kind of intimacy and for people who have made it they do not have any issue to worship it also.

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So, you find art here, you find here the way a Gujarati tribal person is carving out a figure which, he is going to put deep inside the forest beside their community icon.

Now, look at the figure the turban that this may be painted, may not be painted, but at least it is a wooden figure is wearing is the same turban that the artist is wearing. So, I mean.

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There is also very close relationship between the artist and the image that he is producing. The image of the figure in this case does not look like somebody from a different planet or a different state or a different community. The image is from the community that he belongs to. I mean there are various kinds of relationships that we may discover between art and ritual, between art and society, between art and environment, between art and the community, between art and the material and very importantly, between art and the functionality, the utility of certain objects.

And interestingly in most of the cases, I would say folk art is not made with an idea of art for art sake; no. I mean look at the way finally, these beautiful terracotta horses will be kept I mean this is not the way we would keep the things that we make at for hours we will keep it properly you know, but they have just left it inside the forest because it is meant to be there they are made as offerings to god they are not meant to be kept with you inside your home in a showcase no.

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That is not the idea hence, there is a deep relationship a connection an intimate relationship between the artist and what he is making, but at the same time there is a detachment and without this detachment these tribal artist will not be able to live there. So, dear objects this wonderful object that they are making somewhere, deep inside the forest in a remote place far away from their home.

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And at the same time it is also true that since I just mentioned detachment, but at the same time I must say that there is also, what we call coexistence art coexists happily with

the normal daily life, as far as the folk traditions are concerned. In order to see folk art today of course, we have some galleries, some museums where we go pay a visit. So, see folk art, but if you want to see folk art in their original real context, if you go to hundreds and thousands of beautiful villages in India you will still see that folk art is there where, they live, where they dwell, where they spend their daily life. For them it is like living with art and for art it is like living with life that is why.

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I mean this is how you find beautiful paintings on the wall then Alpanas or floor decorations are been done on certain occasions by whom? By men and women and in this case a woman who has never been to any art collage, who never needed any training. It is absolutely spontaneous, something that is gifted, something that comes from within the tradition. This is another very important issue that you may take note of.

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That most of the folk artist like these women, they really do not have a formal practice or training, yet they are able to do. So, beautiful pieces of floor decorations in front of their homes everywhere in their life I mean on the wall, on the floors, in front of the Pooja room, in front of the Mandir on any occasion.

But remember, who are the artists who are doing it? Not this so called formally, trained artists. They are just anybody in the family; anybody from the village can pick up and do it.



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So, not only that the thoughts with which do this art practice is shared and collected at the same time there is no such thing called the artist, that he or she is artist, everybody is an artist; in the context of folk art. Yes, everybody is an artist and this is fantastic. This gives a kind of freedom to everybody to engage with the art practice to engage with any kind of art making that is going on in our village.

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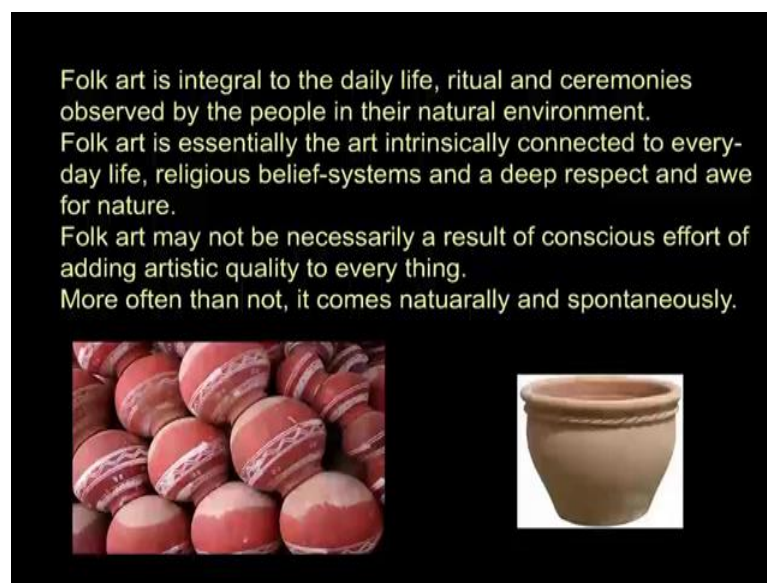
This also gives people the a sense of attachment to, what the people in the village are doing, even if he or she is not doing because tomorrow who knows he will be picking up



your fingers and some paint and doing something right on that same wall. So, everybody in a village, in the context of a folk tradition is a potential artist. This is how they look at it.

Now, this tradition of decorating our own place making it look a little sacred, beautiful giving it a touch of beauty and esthetics is not only confined within the rural area, rural life, but you can see that we keep practicing that even in your campus, in your universities.

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On different kinds of occasions, so folk art is integral to the daily life and ceremonies observed by the people in the natural environment. Folk art is essentially the art intrinsically connected to everyday life religious, belief systems and a deep respect and awe or nature. This also is a subject that, if you are interested you can explore.

But how, what is the relationship between folk art and the nature, the natural setting, the geographical environment in which living? And why any kind of damage inflicted on that nature will eventually inflict deep and irreparable damage to the folk art. So, it is a very important subject to know, explore. So, folk art may not be necessarily a result of a conscious effort of adding artistic quality to everything and more often than not it comes naturally and spontaneously.

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So, you see I mean this is how folk art, certain folk art practices like doing Rangoli, Alpana, Kolam, Muggulu all these floor decoration traditions actually they have kind of spillover from its own original folk rural environment and many urban people, urban places are also witness to this practice.

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And that is why today even on a mosaic or a marble floor you can find a Rangoli being done, which is fantastic. So, I mean this is an art form that can engage the so called non

artists. So, that is why we need to sustain we need to put all efforts. So, that this kind of art practices are sustained.

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And even in front of an urban posh bungalow you can have a Kolam like this one. So, this is significant to know that, while on the one hand we have a huge and very rich tradition of folk art; almost all over India at the same time certain kind of let us say not every kind of practice, but some of its practices can be seen also being continued in the rural set ups as well not as a remembrance or not as a ritual, but also it is like something



that you carry in your blood. It is very difficult to give it up even if you are living in a skyscraper.

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Now, the last one and this one are two very important examples of folk or tribal wall painting. The previous one was from a wall painting from Worli in Maharashtra. Worli is very famous for its folk I mean tribal wall painting and this one is Pithora wall painting of Gujarat.

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This from Jharkhand, this is from Orissa. I mean all if you run through these various examples of wall painting all of them may have similar objectives, in terms of its ritualistic functions, but what I am trying to draw your attention to is the fact that despite they have more or less similar ritualistic agendas the style, the color, the shapes, the forms of this wall paintings they differ greatly one from the other. I mean this is again very interesting that not the entire India is united by one singular kind of wall painting. They are all different and these variety, this plurality, this multiplicity is the, a life force of Indian culture.



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Now, this is also true that in many of these rural households, when you enter into any rural household into a rural home and hut you see that, the art that you have seen outside on the outer wall can also be seen inside on the inner wall. That is why I mean living with art is a wonderful phrase. This signifies how art and life not only coexists happily; they are inseparably integrated with each other.

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So, examples after examples can prove that I mean in folk life even when people are hungry, people are really toiling and struggling to meet their ends, their needs, yet

usually they would never stop their art activities. It is so much a part of their existence, that hunger, natural disaster nothing can tether them nothing can (Refer Time: 22:57) them from doing their art practice and here I am not just simply talking about visual art. I am listen to folk song, watch folk performances and folk dance look at folk weaving, textile, everything. Yes it has a lot of functional value.

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These things come out of their daily requirement, but at the same time, we cannot deny the esthetic urge as well to live with art, to wake art apart of their life. So, the ritualistic value of folk art does not only lie in the religious structure or in the religious system or the religious ritual. It also lies in the way you have ritualized art in your daily life.

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So, here we talk about a larger ritual, not just religious ritual. In fact, when you look at various kinds of masks; for example, this one it is a Theyyam mask. Theyyam is a dance form, that is very popular in Kerala and during the performance they use this huge kind of masks. So, and it is art I mean you need artists to decorate this masks, to make these masks, to color these masks. So, here art assumes per formative ritual. It is for the sake of performance that you need artists and if the performance tradition stops this particular art form will also simply disappear.

So, you see how in folk art, art is also related to other art forms and we have for example, in Bengal this beautiful example of Bengal Patachitra where, a scroll Pata painting is shown and while the Pata painter, who is known as Patua is showing that scroll. He also sings it a loud. I mean he sings he shows. So, it is a kind of audio visual program, if one stops the other will automatically die out.

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Anyway let us come back to Theyyam it is a full figure of a Theyyam with the mask and the body and everything we need it is art everywhere. Visual art that is required to sustain



Theyyam dance, this is Chhau; Chhau dance from Purulia Bengal. Again you need artists to do the costume, to prepare the jewelry and of course, to make the mask.

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So, art is very much a part of your daily life your habitat, your cultural life, your environment, your ritual. This is what makes and the stylistic variation very important and stylistic variations in folk traditions basically is a result of this, I mean the way folk art is connected to various aspects of life including nature.

Thank you.