

CUET · FINE ARTS · CLASS XII · CODE 312

The Living Art Traditions of India

CUET unit: The Living Art Traditions of India (Folk, Tribal and Living Painting & Sculptural Traditions)

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Snapshot

- Chapter surveys India's continuing folk, tribal and ritual art forms practised in villages, deserts, forests and mountains by community artists outside the formal art-school stream (NCERT pp. 127–128).
- It divides the living traditions into two big buckets — **Painting Traditions** (Mithila, Warli, Gond, Pithoro, Pata/Patachitra, Phads) and **Sculptural Traditions** (Dhokra metal casting and Terracotta) (pp. 128, 140).
- Each tradition is rooted in ritual, festival, ancestor/deity worship or storytelling, and uses local materials — phalsa and kusum flowers, bilwa leaves, rice flour, haritali and hingal stones, conch-shell white, lost-wax bronze, riverbank clay.
- Post-Independence, with the formation of States and Union Territories, these crafts were organised commercially and showcased in State emporia (p. 128).
- CUET regularly tests state-art-form pairings, materials, motifs, signature deities (Palaghat, Kansari, Khetrapal, Pithoro) and processes (especially Dhokra cire-perdue and Mithila kohbar ghar).
- This is the final unit of Class XII Fine Arts and brings the syllabus full circle, returning to the village-and-tribal end of the Indian art spectrum that opened the Class XI topic on prehistoric rock paintings.

Detailed Notes

2.1 Core concepts

India has a timeless tradition of art forms practised by common people far from the urban courts; scholars have variously labelled these forms as the minor arts, utility art, folk art, tribal art, people's art, ritual art and crafts. These labels are used more or less interchangeably. These traditions are continuous from prehistoric cave paintings and from Indus-period pottery, terracotta, bronze and ivory — they were never broken (NCERT §Intro, p. 127). Post-Independence, with the formation of States and Union Territories and a renewed concern for indigenous identity, the handicraft industry was revived, organised for commercial production, and each State/UT now showcases its art in its State emporium. The traditions retain a religious or ritualistic overtone but also serve utilitarian, decorative and symbolic functions.

The Painting Traditions section opens with Mithila or Madhubani painting from the Mithila region of Bihar — the ancient Videha, traditionally regarded as Sita's birthplace.

Women have for centuries painted figures on mud walls for ceremonial occasions, especially weddings; tradition traces the origin of the art to Sita's marriage to Rama (NCERT §Mithila, p. 128). Mithila paintings are made in three distinct zones of the traditional house. The central or outer courtyards carry armed gods, animals, women carrying waterpots or winnowing grain — public ritual imagery. The eastern part of the house contains the room of the Kuladevi (usually Kali), the family deity. A southern room holds the most significant images of the household. Above all these, the **kohbar ghar** — the inner room — carries the most extraordinary painting: the **kohbar** itself, a lotus on a stalk in full bloom with metaphoric and tantric meaning, plus gods and goddesses on freshly plastered walls (NCERT §Mithila, pp. 128–130).

Mithila themes include the **Bhagvata Purana**, the **Ramayana**, Shiva-Parvati, Durga, Kali and Rasa-Lila. Artists fill the painted field with birds, flowers, animals, fish, snakes, Sun and moon — each motif signifying love, passion, fertility, eternity or prosperity. The technique is distinctive: women paint with bamboo twigs tipped with cotton swabs, rice straw or fibre. The colours come from natural sources — phalsa and kusum flowers, bilwa leaves, kajal, turmeric and mineral stones — making the entire painting an ecological extension of the household and its environment (NCERT §Mithila, p. 130).

Warli painting is by the Warli community of the west coast of northern Maharashtra around the north Sahyadri range, with the present-day concentration in Thane district. Married women create the central ritual painting called the **Chowk** for marriage, fertility, harvest and sowing rites. The Chowk is dominated by the mother goddess Palaghat — the goddess of fertility, who represents the corn goddess Kansari — and is enclosed in a small square frame edged with pointed chevrons symbolising Hariyali Deva, the god of plants. Her escort is a headless warrior with five corn shoots springing from his neck, called the Panch Sirya Devata (five-headed god), who also represents Khetrapal, the guardian of the fields (NCERT §Warli, pp. 130–132). Warli paintings are made with rice flour on earth-coloured walls, using a bamboo stick chewed at one end as a paintbrush. The paintings promote fertility, avert disease and propitiate the dead.

Gond painting is practised by the Gonds of Madhya Pradesh, particularly the Mandla region. Gond ritual painting consists of geometric drawings on hut walls portraying Krishna with cows and gopis; the community worships nature and treats votive paintings as a form of communion with the natural world (NCERT §Gond, p. 132).

Pithoro painting is by the Rathva Bhils of the Panchmahal region of Gujarat and the Jhabua region of neighbouring Madhya Pradesh. Pithoro paintings are large murals on house walls created in fulfilment of vows and thanksgivings; they show rows of horse-rider deities representing the Rathva cosmography. An ornate wavy line separates the upper section — the world of gods, heavenly bodies and mythical creatures — from the lower section, which depicts the wedding procession of Pithoro, the minor deities, the kings, the goddess of destiny, the archetypal farmer and domestic animals, all representing earth (NCERT §Pithoro, p. 134).

Pata painting is the generic term for scroll painting done on fabric, palm leaf or paper, and is variously called Pata, Pachedi or Phad. The major centres are Gujarat and Rajasthan in the west, and Odisha and West Bengal in the east. Bengal patas are vertical scrolls used by the patua (also called chitrakar) — itinerant performers from Midnapore, Birbhum, Bankura and adjoining parts of Bihar and Jharkhand — who travel from village to village singing three or four stories per performance and receiving alms in return. Puri patas of Odisha include several specialised types: the **veshas** of Jagannath, Balabhadra and Subhadra (such as Bada Shringar, Raghunath, Padma, Krishna-Balaram and Hariharan Vesha), Rasa paintings, **Ansara patti** (substitute icons used during the Snanayatra cleaning), **Jatri patti** (devotional icons for pilgrims to take home), **Kanchi Kaveri Pata** (depictions of Jagannath myths) and **Thia-badhia pata** (combined aerial-and-lateral views of the temple) (NCERT §Pata, pp. 136–138).

Patachitra colours are organic and locally procured. Black comes from lamp black; yellow and red from haritali and hingal stones respectively; white from powdered conch shells. The cloth support is first coated with a fine paste of soft white stone powder and tamarind-seed glue, giving a smooth ground for the brush; palm-leaf manuscripts on **Khar-taad** leaves are incised with a steel stylus rather than painted with a brush and are then tinted with the same vegetable colours (NCERT §Pata, p. 138).

Phads of Rajasthan are long horizontal cloth scrolls produced around Bhilwara to honour folk deities or **bhomias** — defied cattle heroes such as Gogaji, Jejaji, Dev Narayan, Ramdevji and Pabhuji — venerated by Rabari, Gujjar, Meghwal and Regar pastoral communities. Phads are carried by **bhopas** — itinerant bards — in night-long storytelling performances; a lamp illuminates the painted images while the bhopa sings the heroic narrative accompanied by the **ravanahattha** and the **veena** in the Khyal style of singing. NCERT then makes the crucial point that the phads themselves are NOT painted by the bhopas: they are painted by the Joshi caste, a community of court miniaturists, who execute them on commission for the bhopa families. This division of labour between performer and painter is a classic CUET trap (NCERT §Phads, pp. 138–140).

The Sculptural Traditions section covers terracotta, metal and popular stone sculpture. Dhokra casting — the lost-wax or **cire perdue** technique — is prominent in Bastar in Chhattisgarh, in parts of Madhya Pradesh, Odisha and Midnapore in West Bengal. The metal craftsmen of Bastar are called **ghadwa**; in popular etymology the term **ghadwa** means the act of shaping and creating. The Dhokra process is elaborate: a black riverbank-soil core is mixed with rice husk and shaped into a model; a second layer of cow-dung-and-clay is applied; **saal** tree resin is heated with mustard oil and strained, and the solidified resin is rolled into coils that are overlaid on the dried clay form to model the surface; further layers of fine clay, clay mixed with cow dung, and ant-hill clay mixed with rice husk are added as the mould wall. **Saal** wood is the furnace fuel; the furnace is fired for two to three hours until the metal becomes molten. The mould is then inverted and the molten metal is poured to replace the evaporated resin, taking on the shape of the original model (NCERT §Dhokra, pp. 140–142).

Terracotta is the most ubiquitous Indian medium of all. Terracotta objects are made by potters from local riverbank or pond clay and baked for durability. The tradition is found in Manipur, Assam, Kuchchha (Kutch), the hills of the North, Tamil Nadu, the Gangetic plains and Central India. Forms include gods and goddesses (Ganesh, Durga, local village deities), animals, birds and insects — every category of household ritual life translated into the cheapest, most accessible material available across the subcontinent (NCERT §Terracotta, p. 142).

2.2 Definitions to memorise

Term	Definition	Page
Kohbar ghar	Mithila inner room with the lotus kohbar painting	130
Kohbar	Lotus on a stalk in full bloom; central Mithila motif	130
Kuladevi	Family deity (usually Kali) in the eastern Mithila room	130
Chowk	Central Warli ritual painting by married women	130
Palaghat	Warli mother goddess of fertility (= Kansari)	130
Kansari	Warli corn goddess	130
Hariyali Deva	God of plants symbolised by chevrons on Palaghat's frame	132
Panch Sirya Devata	Five-headed god, headless escort of Palaghat	132
Khetrapal	Guardian of fields = Panch Sirya Devata	132
Pithoro	Rathva Bhil thanksgiving mural	134
Patua / Chitrakar	Bengal scroll-bearing performer	136
Khar-taad	Palm-leaf used for Odisha manuscript painting	138
Ansara patti	Substitute icon during Snanayatra cleaning	136
Jatri patti	Pata for pilgrims to take home	136
Kanchi Kaveri Pata	Pata depicting Jagannath myths	136
Thia-badhia pata	Combined aerial-lateral view of the Puri temple	136
Bhomia	Defied cattle hero (Gogaji, Pabhuji, Ramdevji)	138
Bhopa	Itinerant Rajasthani bard performing the phad	138
Joshi	Court-miniaturist caste who actually paint the phads	140
Ravanahattha	Stringed instrument accompanying the bhopa	140
Khyal	Vocal style used by the bhopa during phad performance	140
Dhokra	Lost-wax (cire-perdue) metal casting of Bastar	140
Ghadwa	Bastar metal craftsmen (= "shaping/creating")	140
Saal	Tree whose resin and wood are used in Dhokra casting	140
Haritali	Yellow pigment stone (Patachitra)	138

Term	Definition	Page
Hingal	Red pigment stone (Patachitra)	138

2.3 Diagrams / processes to remember

Mithila house-zone diagram (p. 130): outer/central courtyard (armed gods, animals, women working) → eastern room of Kuladevi/Kali → southern room (most significant images) → kohbar ghar (inner room — lotus kohbar) → inner verandah devasthan/gosain ghar (griha and kula devatas). Warli Chowk composition (p. 132): central Palaghat in a square chevron frame (Hariyali Deva) + headless five-corn warrior Panch Sirya Devata, surrounded by scenes of hunting, fishing, farming, dancing, tigers and (in modern Warli paintings) Mumbai buses. Pithoro panel layout (p. 134): uppermost rows of horse-rider gods (heavenly), wavy line separator, lower rows showing the wedding procession of Pithoro, minor deities, the farmer and domestic animals (earth).

Dhokra (cire-perdue) process flow (pp. 140–142): (1) core clay + rice husk; (2) cow-dung-clay coat; (3) resin coils on dried form; (4) fine clay layer; (5) ant-hill clay + rice husk outer layer; (6) metal cup sealed at base for the molten metal; (7) saal-wood-fired furnace for 2–3 hours; (8) invert mould, pour molten metal to replace evaporated resin; (9) cool, break clay shell, chisel finish. Patachitra preparation (p. 138): cloth coated with white stone powder + tamarind-seed glue → borders first → brush sketch + flat colours (black = lampblack; yellow = haritali; red = hingal; white = conch) → held over charcoal fire → lacquer finish.

2.4 Common confusions / NTA trap points

- Phads are painted by JOSHIS, NOT by Bhopas. Bhopas only carry and perform; Joshis (court miniaturists) paint them — classic distractor.
- Pithoro is by the RATHVA BHILS of Panchmahal Gujarat & Jhabua MP — not by Gonds and not by Warlis. Gonds are of MP (Mandla); Warlis are of Maharashtra (Thane).
- Kohbar = LOTUS on a stalk in full bloom (Mithila inner room), NOT a deity. Kuladevi (usually Kali) lives in the EASTERN room.
- Palaghat = corn goddess Kansari; her escort with five corn shoots = Panch Sirya Devata = Khetrapal. Don't swap.
- Dhokra craftsmen of Bastar are GHADWA, not patua (Bengal) or bhopa (Rajasthan).
- Bengal patua are also called CHITRAKARS — settled around Midnapore, Birbhum, Bankura — not in Odisha; Odisha = Puri patas.
- White in patachitra comes from CONCH-SHELL POWDER, not lime; red and yellow from HINGAL and HARITALI stones respectively.
- Bhopa accompanies himself with RAVANAHATTHA and VEENA, in KHYAL style.
- Dhokra uses SAAL tree resin (not pine or rubber); SAAL wood for furnace.

- Mithila colour sources include PHALSA and KUSUM FLOWERS, BILWA LEAVES, KAJAL, TURMERIC.
- Jatri patti is the pilgrim souvenir; Ansara patti is the temporary substitute icon. Do not confuse.
- Pithoro's upper world and lower world are separated by a WAVY LINE.

2.5 Key artworks / artists

Artwork or Artist	Period	Significance	NCERT page
Mithila painting	Continuing tradition, Bihar	Wedding rituals, kohbar ghar	128–130
Kohbar (lotus motif)	Mithila	Tantric central motif	130
Kuladevi (Kali) shrine painting	Mithila	Eastern-room family deity	130
Warli Chowk	Continuing tradition, Maharashtra	Marriage/fertility ritual	130
Palaghat	Warli	Fertility goddess at chowk centre	130
Kansari	Warli	Corn goddess	130
Hariyali Deva	Warli	God of plants	132
Panch Sirya Devata / Khetrapal	Warli	Five-corn warrior	132
Gond geometric Krishna painting	MP (Mandla)	Hut-wall votive	132
Pithoro mural	Rathva Bhils, Gujarat/MP	Horse-rider thanksgiving	134
Bengal Pata	Midnapore, Birbhum, Bankura	Vertical scroll storytelling	136
Puri Pata (Bada Shringar vasha)	Odisha	Jagannath cult painting	136
Krishna-Balaram Vasha pata	Puri	Triad vasha icon	136
Ansara patti	Puri	Substitute icon during Snanayatra	136
Jatri patti	Puri	Pilgrim souvenir	136
Kanchi Kaveri Pata	Puri	Jagannath narrative	136
Thia-badhia pata	Puri	Combined aerial-lateral temple view	136

Artwork or Artist	Period	Significance	NCERT page
Khar-taad palm leaf manuscript	Odisha	Steel-stylus incised painting	138
Phad of Pabhuji	Bhilwara, Rajasthan	Bhomia cattle-hero scroll	138
Phad of Dev Narayan	Bhilwara	Bhomia cattle-hero scroll	138
Gogaji, Jejaji, Ramdevji bhomias	Rajasthan	Defied cattle heroes	138
Bhopa performance	Rajasthan	Itinerant night-long storytelling	138
Joshi painters	Bhilwara	Caste of phad miniaturists	140
Dhokra Bastar bronze	Chhattisgarh	Cire-perdue tribal metal casting	140
Ghadwa craftsmen	Bastar	"Shaping/creating" metal smiths	140
Saal tree resin & wood	Bastar	Dhokra modelling and fuel	140
Terracotta Ganesh / Durga	Pan-Indian	Cheapest accessible ritual sculpture	142
Manipur terracotta	NE India	Regional terracotta tradition	142
Tamil Nadu Ayyanar terracotta horses	South India	Village-deity sentinel sculpture	142

Practice MCQs

PYQ Alignment

This chapter is a near-certain feature of the CUET Fine Arts paper — recent papers (2023–2025) have drawn 8–12 MCQs from it, especially on state-art-form pairings (Mithila/Bihar, Warli/Maharashtra, Pithoro/Gujarat-MP, Phads/Rajasthan, Patachitra/Odisha), signature motifs (kohbar, Chowk, Palaghat, Panch Sirya Devata), materials (rice flour, conch white, haritali/hingal, lost wax) and the Dhokra/ghadwa process. Trap-style questions on the Bhopa-vs-Joshi distinction and on identifying the correct community for



Pithoro are recurring. CUET 2024 set a four-statement question on phad performance; CUET 2025 set a Patachitra material identification.



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