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# Indian Folk-Art Paradigm: Phad

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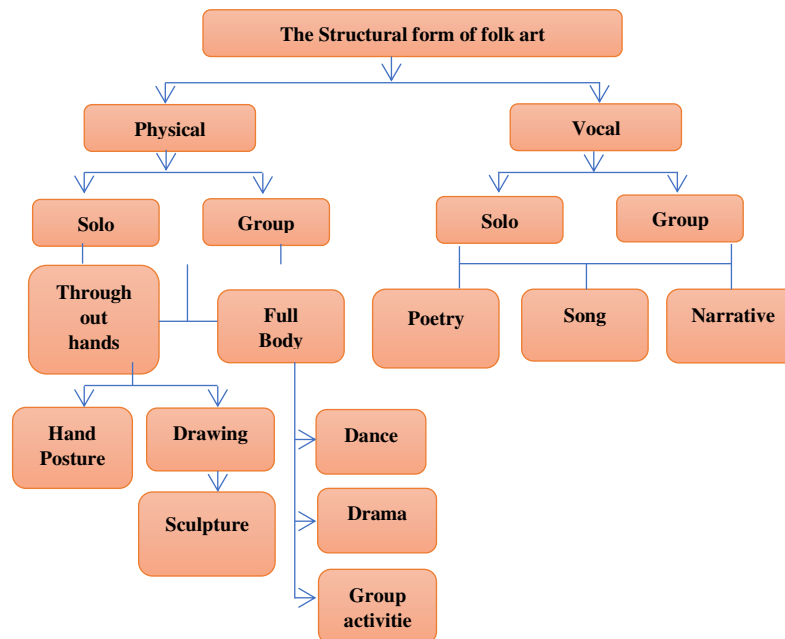
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**ABSTRACT:** Phad painting is a style religious scroll painting and folk painting, practiced in Rajasthan state of India. This style of painting is traditionally done on a long piece of cloth or canvas, known as *phad*. The narratives of the folk deities of Rajasthan, mostly of Pabuji and Devnarayan are depicted on the *phads*. The Bhopas, the priest-singers traditionally carry the painted *phads* along with them and use these as the mobile temples of the folk deities, who are worshipped by the Rebari community of the region. The *phads* of Pabuji are normally about 15 feet in length, while the *phads* of Devnarayan are normally about 30 feet long. Traditionally the *phads* are painted with vegetable colors. The Joshi families of Bhilwara, Shahpura in Bhilwara district of Rajasthan are widely known as the traditional artists of this folk art-form for the last two centuries. The art of Phad painting was exclusively practiced by the Joshi community. However, in 1960, Shree Lal Joshi opened a school called 'Joshi Kala Kendra' for everyone to learn this art style. Presently, the school is called 'Chitrashala'. The idea to create these scrolls, it is believed, came to the members of the Rabari tribe when they realized that there was no one fixed temple that they could visit. So, instead, they created temples that could visit them.

**KEYWORDS:** Phad, Pabuji, Religious, Scroll Painting

## I. HISTORY OF PHAD PAINTING

A 700-year-old legacy passed down over generations within a single family, Phad finds its origins in Shahpura, near Bhilwara, Rajasthan. Phad is a type of scroll painting that narrates elaborate religious stories of local deities and gods. Created as travelling or mobile temples, these traditional paintings were carried by priest-singers of the Rabari tribe, called Bhopas and Bhopis, who would sing and perform stories of their local deities - Devnarayanji (a reincarnation of Vishnu) and Pabuji (a local hero). The Phad painting would be unrolled, or unfolded after sunset, and the performance in front of village members, would last into the night. This is perhaps why the paintings are called 'Phad', which means 'fold' in the local dialect.



Phad paintings are made on cloth or walls and most popularly depict the story of the local hero-gods – Pabuji & Devnarayanji. Each painting depicts a different episode and they are opened or unrolled only after sundown, in

conjunction with an all-night performance. This is possibly why these paintings are called Phad which means folds in local dialect. All Phad paintings have certain common features. Every available inch of the canvas is crowded with figures. Another similarity is flat construction of the pictorial space. While the figures are harmoniously distributed all over the area, the scale of figure depends on the social status of the character they represent and the roles they play in the story.



Map: State of Rajasthan



Phad Performance

While the male priest (Bhopa) would sing and narrate the story depicted in the Phad painting, his wife (Bhopi) would accompany through song and dance, while also putting a spotlight on the corresponding section in the painting, using a lamp. A two-string instrument called the ‘ravanhatta’ would be used in the performance.

What adds to the uniqueness of Phad art, is that historically, it was only members of the Joshi family, belonging to the Chipa caste, that created these paintings. The Bhopas (priests) would commission the Joshis to

make a Phad to use in their performances. The traditional paintings used to be large, with “Pabuji ki phad”, or Phad paintings of Pabuji being 13 armlengths long, and those of Devnarayan being nearly 30 feet long.

Today, while the storytelling tradition of the Bhopas is still alive in some villages, the significance of Phad paintings has moved much beyond, with efforts made by several members of the Joshi family, including Shree Lal Joshi, Nand Kishor Joshi, Shanti Lal Joshi, Kalyan Joshi, Gopal Joshi, Prakash Joshi, and Vijay Joshi, to increase appreciation for Phad as an art form

**Making Process:**

The phad is painted on thick canvas that is about 30 feet long and five feet wide and is prepared by members of the Joshi clan. The colour palette consists of bright orange, red, yellow, black, blue, green and brown, derived from stones and minerals. The colours are prepared by the women artisans while the preparation of the canvas through applications of starch and kheriya gond (indigenous glue) and ghotana (burnishing) is done by men.



Starch Making



Applying Starch



Dry Process



Rubbing Process



Colour Process



Line Drawing



Colour Filling



Outlining

Typical colours seen in a Phad painting are yellow, orange, green, brown, red, blue and black. Each colour is used for specific purposes – yellow for creating the initial outline and in ornaments and clothing, orange for limbs and the torso, green for trees and vegetation, brown for architectural structures, red for royal clothing and flags as well as a thick border, and blue for water or curtains. Black is applied at the end as outlines.



End Process



Phad Painting Ramdala

The most important detail in the paintings is added last – the eyes. Once the main deity's eyes are painted, the artwork comes alive, and is ready for worship. After this, the artist cannot sit on the artwork (which they would otherwise do, owing to the size of the paintings). The artist signs the artwork close to the image of the main deity, which is typically placed in the centre of the painting.

While figures are harmoniously distributed throughout the canvas in a Phad painting, the scale of each figure is determined by their social status, and the role they play in the story that is being narrated. A unique aspect of Phad paintings is that the construction of the figures is flat, and they all face each other, instead of facing the audience (viewer) of the painting.



Phad Painting Durga Shakti



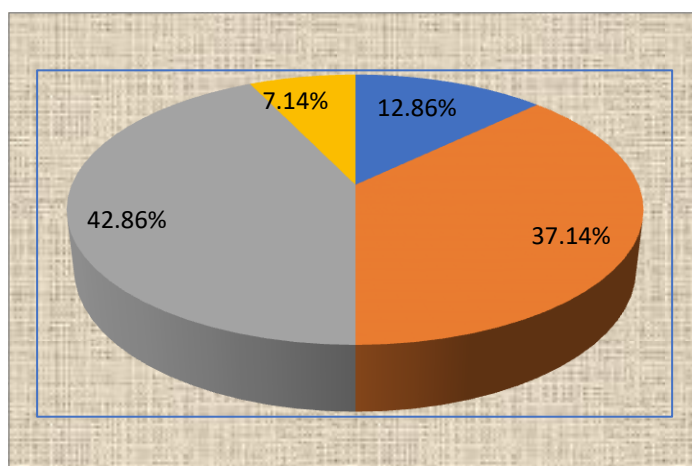
Phad Painting Wedding Celebration



Attempts by different members of the Joshi family, as well as other renowned Phad artists such as Pradeep Mukherjee, have helped sustain and revive this incredible artform to some extent, enhancing its commercial value, and generating employment for Phad artists. But despite these efforts, there are less than twenty artists who practice the art of Phad painting full time today.

**Survey  
Appreciation area for folk artist**

S.No.	Creative aspect	Counting of Ans.	Percentile
1.	Through Privet Institute	18	12.86%
2.	Through Central and State Gov.	52	37.14%
3.	Through Personal academy	60	42.86%
4.	Through charity	10	7.14%
	<b>Total</b>	<b>140</b>	<b>100%</b>



In the modern world, there is a need to promote such rich artistic traditions from the past. Their visual appeal aside, art forms like Phad preserve folklore and stories that have travelled through centuries and reflect India’s glorious culture.

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