



# A Study of Savara Tribal Art: Cultural Significance, Artistry, and Challenges in Modern India

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**Abstract:** India is known for its art and culture, which define the country. Expert supervision has cultivated and refined various art forms, passing them down through generations as part of family or caste traditions. The present study aims to identify the cultural and spiritual significance of the Savara tribal paintings and art forms of the state of Andhra Pradesh in India. The main idea behind the Savara paintings is to satisfy the spirits, protect them from natural calamities, promote good health, and also get good yields from their agricultural crops. We have analyzed the elements and philosophy of this art using data collected from primary and secondary sources. Despite facing numerous challenging circumstances, these folk arts persistently strive to preserve their traditional vibrancy.

**Index Terms - Savara paintings, Indian folk arts, Tribal arts**

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The world's largest absorption of tribal populations is in India. The eco-system shapes the culture, arts, and lifestyle of tribes, who are the offspring of nature. Since ancient times, India has been a repository of many traditional art forms—visual, performing, and literary. However, the age of globalization has brought massive social changes in every corner of society. It also goes back to the roots of traditional folk arts and culture. According to the 2011 Census, the ST population in Andhra Pradesh State was 27.39 lakhs, accounting for 5.53% of the state's total population.

### 1.1. STYLE AND ARTISTRY OF SAVARA PAINTING

The original and foremost tribal art we found at cave centers in India, especially at Bhimbetka Caves, The tribal paintings we discovered featured a multitude of simple line drawings and geometric shapes. Artists draw human figures and animals by joining two triangles in mirror reflection and in opposite directions, incorporating simple lines for both hands and legs. This pattern is prevalent in most tribal paintings across India and other countries.

### 1.2. CULTURAL PRACTICES AND BELIEFS SURROUNDING SAVARA PAINTINGS

The main observation in depicting these Savara paintings is that when a member of the Savara family suffers from an ailment, they seek the help of a local tribal man who practices natural medication. However, this method proves to be ineffective. They then approach a senior Savara, who possesses extensive knowledge of local medicinal plants, for treatment, but to no avail. They then instruct the head of the Savara family to create a painting to appease the gods, goddesses, and spirits of their deceased family members. On special festival occasions, the Savaras also paint these images. Today, due to various constraints like urbanization and changes in religion, the younger generation of Savara tribes is not following religious customs and practices. It is an 800-year-old Indian tribal art that should be protected and kept alive.

### 1.3. TRACES OF SAVARA TRIBES IN INDIAN EPICS

The Itereya Brahmana of Rig-Veda mentioned the ancient Adivasi Tribes as Andh Tribes, who lived in and spread throughout the states of India, including Andhra Pradesh. Subsequently, the names of these tribes changed based on their respective areas and customs. The Savara tribe, which lives in the Srikakulam tribal region, is believed to have a mythological connection with Sabari, a devotee of Lord Rama in the epic Ramayana.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

The research employed a case study approach, focusing on studying various monographs and books on tribes in India, particularly the tribes of Andhra Pradesh State and Orissa State. The primary aim was to investigate the differences and similarities in the different tribal arts of India, examining cultural procedures and techniques. We conducted field visits to three villages: Diguva Dharba, Karra Guda, and Yakuva Dhaba, located in Palakonda and Sitampeta Mandalas. Additionally, the Nogada area in Sitampeta

town, where the Akshara Brahma temple was built, was visited. We undertook a comparative study, with a particular focus on rock cave paintings, where we identified similarities in basic shapes and made observations in drawing tribal forms and figures.

Interactions with the Savara tribal people during field visits provided detailed information. We analyzed commonalities in their art forms, signs, symbols, color use, and background structures. We also documented how they collected and prepared the natural colors used in their paintings. We specifically focused on gathering details and actual stories from various Savara icons, which depict scenes commonly found in Savara paintings. Savara Raju, a young Savara artist, was contacted, and discussions were held about their interest in perpetuating age-old Savara tribal art practices.

Personal interviews were conducted with Savara artists, including Savara Raju, Kurma Rao, Savara Mangayya, and village elder Dumbudu Savara, along with other Savara people. Observations were made, and photographs were taken of Savara paintings still available in some Savara houses. Senior artist Savara Mangayya provided detailed explanations of the entire process, including the occasions when these paintings were created, and conveyed the ideas behind the various icons depicted in the paintings and their significance.

Old photographs of both Savara and Saura wall paintings were collected, along with photographs showcasing the use of Savara art in modern contexts, such as paintings on flyover bridge columns and railway stations.

### 3. FINDINGS

Wall painting is the simplest art in any tribal society. In the Indian tribal scenario, it is common to make designs on walls and floors for festivals or other religious purposes. Every year, when they repair or whitewash their surroundings, they either recreate a fresh design or recreate the previous one with fresh colours.

There are few families who draw paintings of Savara motifs, especially on the occasions of Remembering Forefather's once every 12 years. Two artists from this family visit the homes of those who have invited them to perform pujas. The artists made paintings as they went through generations, with the same objects and motifs drawn on the walls of houses they visited. Every year, the tribe celebrates Mamidi Panduga (Ugadi), marriages, and Aagam Panduga (the death anniversary of forefathers). Artists draw specific images for each festival and worship them as their gods and goddesses. For white sketches, flour of a particular rice is used; charcoal paste extracted from burnt coconut shell and bottle gourd is used to paint borders in black; and red clay is used to paint the canvas in red.

The motif illustrates the interconnectedness of human society with all forms of life and nature. The majority of Icons developed the concept of a "house," a square, circle, or rectangle, incorporating and encircling figures representing daily activities, rituals, and animals that have been a part of their ancestors' lives. Only male artists have the authority to paint. Women were not allowed to draw, as was the case with other tribal arts in India.



Figure – 1 Savara Painting



Figure – 2 Savara Painting



Figure – 3 Svara Artist



Figure – 4 Present colony of savara tribes



## 3.1 A detailed explanation of the different icons found in Savara paintings

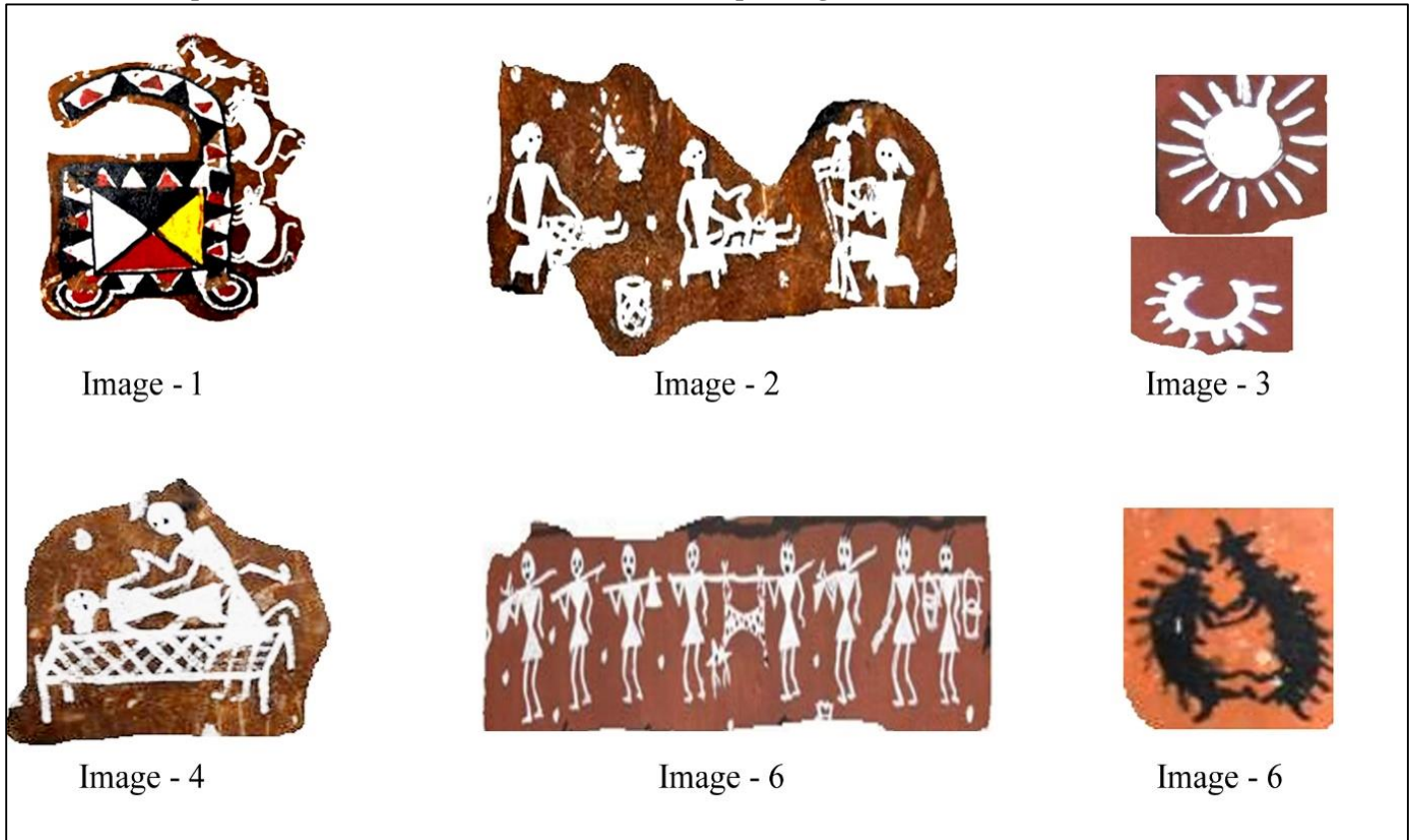


Figure – 5; Icons of Savara paintings  
Photographer: Uday Sankar Challa, Date: 18-12-2023, Location: Diguva Dharba

### 3.1.1 Image 1: A square and arch with two wheels, called a house or Sudhi Rayi (pointed stones)

This is the main symbol we find in each and every Savara painting. This symbol represents the custom of gathering three to four large pointed stones from the forest, placing them around a tree such as Vepachettu, Ravi Chettu, or Mamidi Chettu, and then burying their belongings in the designated burial ground. To represent this activity, they drew this symbol on each Savara wall painting. They also adorned the outer line with climbing monkeys and a peacock perched on top. It is also considered a home for the gods, goddesses, or spirits of their diseased family members.

### 3.1.2 Image 2: depicts Yeddhulodu playing a musical instrument (KUDAN PUR PUR MARAN).

It is also a must-depict scene in every Savara painting. The scene features four figures, one of whom is a man playing a long tambura musical instrument. Three women sit in a line behind each other, with the first woman sitting on the ground opposite the musician, her diseased son resting on her legs. Behind her, another woman, Poojarini, holds a rice bowl (Biyapu Cheta) in her lap, rubbing it with both hands in a clockwise direction to invoke their goddess to inhabit her body and heal the boy. The third woman is also praying to the goddess. The main idea behind depicting this scene is to cure a boy who is suffering from an ailment. After the goddess enters the body of Poojarini, she will tell Yeddulayya to bring medicine for the boy, and then he will contact the tribal medicinal man for medicine. This is the earlier procedure followed by Savara Community elders; later on, due to some social freedom, the procedure is not the same as earlier.

### 3.1.3 Image 3: Symbols of the Sun and Moon

Every Savara painting depicts these two symbols in the top corners and on the right and left sides, respectively. These two symbols together represent the perfect balance of opposites. The sun is associated with warmth, life, and growth. The moon is associated with coolness, mystery, and death. Together, they represent the cycle of life.

### 3.1.4 Image 4: A man and woman on a bed

It is a representation of human reproduction. Human production is essential for the human species' continued existence.

### 3.1.5 Image 5: The Hunting Scene

In this scene, five hunters, having successfully hunted a deer, return to their house. Two of them tie the deer's legs and carry it on their shoulders using a long bamboo log. The remaining three hunters follow behind, carrying their weapons.

### 3.1.6 Image 6: depicts a scene of two bears engaged in a fight (Kuma Rinji)

The depiction showed the two bears fighting each other in their black attire. The Savara people, who were hunting in the forest, exposed the jungle scene.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

Globalization brought about drastic changes in the lives of the tribal people. It imposes heavy constraints on the lives of tribal artists and their art forms. The growth of global culture is an alarming threat to our indigenous cultural diversity. Therefore, we must take appropriate measures to safeguard our unique art forms. Today, the Government of India is providing funds to various museums to save the vanishing traditional arts. It is imperative for the government to link the products of traditional art and crafts practitioners with professional enterprises that can procure the products at a reasonable price so as to project this field as a viable avenue for profession. Globalization and its allied policies and programs have led to the extinction of indigenous knowledge, especially the unique life expressions in their tribal art. To protect our cultural diversity and heritage, we must meet the challenges faced by tribal art. The Savara Ikons can be drawn and printed on various gift items or made into gift packs like souvenirs by approaching multinational brands for their publicity.

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