India is a big country in terms of its cultural diversity and racial character. “More than 3000 castes, 432 communities have been living together since centuries. Over 1650 dialects are spoken by the people of India.” It has been maintaining its traditional acquaintance on one side and going further with the exploration, invention, modernization and research in the other side. Indians have developed and formed the various art shapes, techniques and admiration for thousands of years. Prehistoric, Indus Valley, Harappa and Mohen Jo-Daro witnessed this long history of Indian art and crafts. “Every state in India shows a variety of art forms. Most of these works are produced by certain communities.” These art works signify rituals, practices, customs, habits and ceremonies continued in a society from generation to generation. It can be passed on through written materials, art forms, shapes or through an oral narration. “The nomadic primitive people sharing a common cultural heritage based on oral tradition are generally said to have folk culture. Folk imply the people’s participation and spontaneity.” This art expresses the significant and enriching environment as well as the unique observation of the folks. Folk art is an adornment of our cultural and artistic legacy. Each part of the country has its own typical quality and characteristics. “India has a great treasure of folk art

2 Lehri, R., Folk Designs from India, A Pepin Press Design Book.
3 Indian Folk Art, Alpine Fine Arts Collection Ltd., New York, London.
forms from Kanyakumari to Kashmir and Maharashtra to North East.”

These paintings are a part of tribal beliefs and also reflected their life and customs. Among these some are very well accepted and are popular due to their exclusivity and universal appeal. Some of them are Kalighat paintings of Bengal, Pats of Orissa, Kolam art and Tanjore paintings of South India, Madhubani of Bihar, and Warli of Maharashtra.

Indian paintings have always been renowned for imagination, inventiveness and creativity. “Art represents an artistic relationship with life and everything that is the part of it- religion, rituals, livelihood, family, relationships, death………….. It is in this context alone that the true essence of Warli Paintings can be appreciated.”

Warli paintings are the ancient Indian folk art tradition of Warli tribe in Maharashtra. The Warlis are largely concentrated in the Dahanu and Talaseri Talukas of Thane District of Maharashtra. The region lies in the Sahyadri Hills north of Western Ghats. Warli or Vari tribe is an ancient East Indian Tribe of India. They are mostly dependent on natural resources for their livelihood. The Warlis are simple in nature, include life around them in their drawings, what they see, feel and believe in life. When looked closely they have a swirling like movement describing their daily activities. Warli painting is one of the simple and oldest art forms of Maharashtra. There are no records of the exact origin of this art. Historians and Scholars believe that the tradition of Warli may be traced as early as the 10th century A.D. This art was first discovered in the early seventies. These paintings are very close to pre historic cave

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5 www.sanesociety.org/en/Jyoti/data/xtra1045097.doc
paintings as these are also painted on mud walls with white. In her book *Painted World of Warlis*, Yashodhara Dalmiya claimed that the Warlis carry on a tradition sketching back to 2500 or 3000 BCE. Their mural paintings are similar to those done between 500 and 10,000 BCE in the rock shelters of Bhimbetka, in Madhya Pradesh. Warli paintings have various subjects or themes, which presents a picture of their daily life. This old tribal art is two dimensional with no perspective or proportion. Each painting has various elements giving a huge outlook. These paintings are different from any other folk paintings because there is no depiction of mythological figures and religious icons. It obtains its motivation from the rituals and festivities of the tribe, with the main focus on the occasions like birth, death, and marriage. Their life is closely linked with nature so one of their themes also depicts the forms of nature i.e. sun and moon, rain, wind, lightening, and god of thunder. At all occasions they draw circles, which have neither an end nor a beginning. They believe that death is not the end but just another beginning and also that the circular patterns give never ending joy.

- **Circle**: represents sun and moon
- **Triangle**: depicts trees and pointed mountains
- **Square**: depicts a sacred enclosure or a piece of land

Beautiful patterns are created by joining these figures. Generally the Warli paintings depict the scene from rural India, with women at their daily household chores, men at respective vocations, babies in their cradles, animals

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such as peacocks, hens, cows and birds all from an integral life and all are created in a loose rhythmic pattern.

Along with the domestic duties women are also involved in earning a livelihood for the whole family. Normally the enriching life symbolizes the smooth gentle natural flow of life. Triangles, dots and lines in white make the complete world of Warli Tribe alive.

Symbols used in the paintings represent the whole world of Warlis. Most of them emphasize fertility, productivity in nature. Of all the paintings it is those made on the occasion of the marriage that symbolizes the existence of Warlis and wedding cannot take place in the absence of these paintings. These drawings are called Chowks. All the elements in the chowk are replete with symbolism. These are designed around large ornate squares with elaborate concentric patterns, the grooms precision is often depicted in a corner. The chowk is executed in the houses of both the bride as well as the groom. The most significant symbol painted in the centre of the chowk is of mother goddess, Palghat. The other important symbol is the horse, usually shown carrying newlyweds to personify sex and vivacity.

Besides marriage paintings Warli women decorate the walls of their huts on important festivals like harvest festival.

The attractive and simple colors of Warli Paintings, their vivid designs were the main reasons to work on this topic. Compositions with the use of simple basic

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7 Dalmiya, Yashodhara, The Painted World of Warlis: Art and Rituals of Warli Tribe of Maharashtra, Lalit Kala Academy, New Delhi, India.

elements made an appeal to go in for deep study of these tribal folk paintings.

Contrary to other folk paintings of India as of mythological characters or themes, these paintings are created with the images of daily life, manifesting in its true artistic sense. Warli Paintings employ a very basic graphic vocabulary— a circle, a triangle, or a square, and with these basic elements, variety of vivid expressions are created, which certainly are treat to our eyes.

The communicative language of Warli Paintings counts for one more reason to study this art form as it represents the feeling of hope and optimism, which is an essential attitude to exist in today’s modern times.

Warli’s simple yet vivid expressions create an urge to go for experimental study with different background colors along with creative mind and artistic flair.

The urge for knowing more about this art’s significance and its magical popularity attracted me to go for deep study on this project. I felt that while working on this topic I might achieve something new of this unique folk art with expressive element.

The Warli paintings are executed inside the hut. Walls are first smeared with cowdung. Red mud is then applied to provide the base texture. The colours used by Warlis are not permanent but the paintings are made again and again on different occasions. Colours of the Warli painting background are Henna, indigo, ochre, black, earthy mud, brick red and white made of rice paste to paint, occasionally yellow and red dots accompany white colour. They use a bamboo stick chewed at one end to make it as flexible as paintbrush.
> Paintings are mostly done by Savasinis, during wedding rituals. Savasinis are married women, whose husbands are alive.  

> Warli paintings are simple but expressive.

> Warli people share their stories and arts with children. In this way their culture is preserved for the next generation.

> They depict scenes from daily social life, hunting scenes, dance, harvesting, birth and death etc. which portray their culture,

> The themes are highly repetitive and symbolic. They believe that these paintings invoke powers of God.

> These paintings portray the Human-Nature interaction.

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