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Today Her Art Sells In Milan & Paris!

## ANTHROPOLOGY SNIPPET-201



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## **80-YO Tribal Woman Learnt Painting At 70. Today Her Art Sells In Milan & Paris!**

“Painting takes me to another world where I am as free as a bird,” says Judhaiya Baiga. She says this is her way of putting her village on the global map and keeping her traditions alive.

Judhaiya Bai Baiga’s painting recently travelled all the way to a Milan exhibition in Italy and was sold instantly. This was not the first time Baiga’s painting was displayed in an exhibition along with paintings of other talented artists.

A resident of Lorha village in Madhya Pradesh, 80-year-old Baiga, who belongs to a tribal community, has the distinction of seeing her art travelling to several art galleries in India and abroad.

If, at her advanced age, her paintings are appreciated by people, it’s because she knows

that an artist can never claim perfection, but always aspire to better their art." Age or fame has nothing to do with the errors. Perfecting any art is a myth as there is always scope for improvement," Baiga repeats the sentence from the other end of the phone in case the message was not heard.

Despite being a Diwali week, Baiga is kind enough to oblige for an interview. The excitement to share tales of her village and paintings is clearly evident in her voice.

When asked how she feels about getting international recognition, she says, "It has not changed my life as such. But yes, a change can be seen as more and more women, including my daughter-in-law, are taking an interest in painting. Some of these women always wanted to paint but did not have avenues back then."

### **How Age Worked In Baiga's Favour**

Baiga belongs to a tribal community heavily dependent on forest resources for their livelihood and some engage in menial jobs. Education, roads and employment are still to reach the interiors of the region. She lost her husband when she turned 40 and now lives with her two sons. Her only daughter is now married.

Baiga decided to start her second innings with a colourful attitude, literally.



Happy in their world, her community loves to dress in the brightest and most colourful

clothes and lead life with the belief that there is no substitute to hard work. This is probably the reason why Baiga took up painting at 70, an age when most people retire and indulge in rest.

But Baiga, who worked in the fields for most of her life, finds relaxation in painting.

“Painting takes me to another world where I am as free as a bird. When I learnt about a teacher who is willing to teach for free in our village, I decided to give painting a try, something I was never interested in. Yet, on the very first day, I found my passion,” says Baiga.

She joined Ashish Swami, a well-known art teacher and an alumnus of Shantiniketan, West Bengal. He runs his studio ‘Jangan Tasweerkhana’ in several tribal belts of Madhya Pradesh to prevent local cultures and traditions from becoming extinct.

“We have such rich cultures across India that are on the verge of dying. Painting is an effective means to save them. By articulating the local practices or customs in paintings, we can also tell other people about local traditions,” Swami tells TBI.

Almost a decade ago, Swami opened a studio in a small room in Baiga’s village. He teaches painting here for free and also helps the artists get fair monetary value through art dealings. Close to 15 local women have been a part of Swami’s classes for the past ten years. Swami, particularly enjoys teaching people from Lorha village because of their peculiar imagination that colours the canvas.

“Even if they draw something as basic as a tree, their outlook is so different from the rest. They manage to capture innocence in wild animals and serenity in clouds. Their definition of perfect nature lies in the harmony and co-existence between trees,

birds, animals, water bodies and humans,” he explains.

Initially, Baiga and Swami would be happy with whatever amount her painting fetched. But soon, they realised the value of the paintings and stood firm on their quotations.

“Paintings are sold on craft and not on how creative they are. We are trying to change that and promote creativity by taking the painters to exhibitions that take place across India. Currently, paintings by Baiga are valued anything between Rs 300 to Rs 8,000,” he says.

While Baiga is content with the money her paintings are making, it is not the motivating factor behind her passion. For Baiga, it's her way of putting her village on the global map and keeping traditions alive. People like Baiga prove that there is no age to learning, and even nature can educate, one only has to be receptive.

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