

# Sohrai and Khovar: A Geographical Study of Jharkhand

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## ABSTRACT

This study explores the intricate relationship between geography, traditional art forms, and social empowerment in Jharkhand, India, focusing on the indigenous mural arts of Sohrai and Khovar. Situated in a state rich in tribal culture and natural resources, these art forms serve as vital expressions of creativity deeply intertwined with the agrarian and social lives of indigenous communities. Utilizing a mixed-methods approach, including fieldwork, interviews, and Geographic Information System (GIS) mapping, the research highlights how the unique geographical features of Jharkhand shape the materials, motifs, and meanings of these art forms. Findings reveal that Sohrai and Khovar art not only reflect the region's ecological diversity but also play a crucial role in preserving cultural heritage, fostering community identity, and promoting sustainable practices. Additionally, the study emphasizes the social empowerment of tribal artisans, particularly women, through the commercialization of these art forms. By showcasing the profound connections between geography, culture, and social dynamics, this research underscores the importance of preserving traditional practices as a means to maintain cultural integrity and advance social resilience within Jharkhand's indigenous communities.

**Keywords:** Sohrai Art, Khovar Art, Social Empowerment, Sustainable and Indigenous Communities.

## Introduction

Jharkhand, a state in eastern India, bordered by the states of Bihar to the north, West Bengal to the east, Odisha to the south, and Chhattisgarh to the west. The geographical coordinates of Jharkhand are approximately 23.6102° N to 25.2052° N Latitude and 84.6019° E to 87.1736° E Longitude, is rich in tribal culture and traditions that have been passed down through generations. Among these traditions, the art forms of *Sohrai* and *Khovar* hold special significance. These mural<sup>1</sup> art are not only expressions of creativity but also closely tied to the agrarian and social lives of indigenous communities. With motifs deeply connected to nature and religious rituals, these art forms are reflective of the indigenous knowledge systems that have historically empowered tribal communities by preserving cultural heritage, fostering social cohesion, and promoting sustainable practices. This study examines the geographical context of Sohrai and Khovar art in Jharkhand and explores how their preservation can contribute to social empowerment.

<sup>1</sup> A mural is a piece of artwork that is painted or applied directly to a wall, ceiling, or other permanent surface. Murals are one of the oldest forms of art, dating back to cave paintings created by humans over 30,000 years ago.

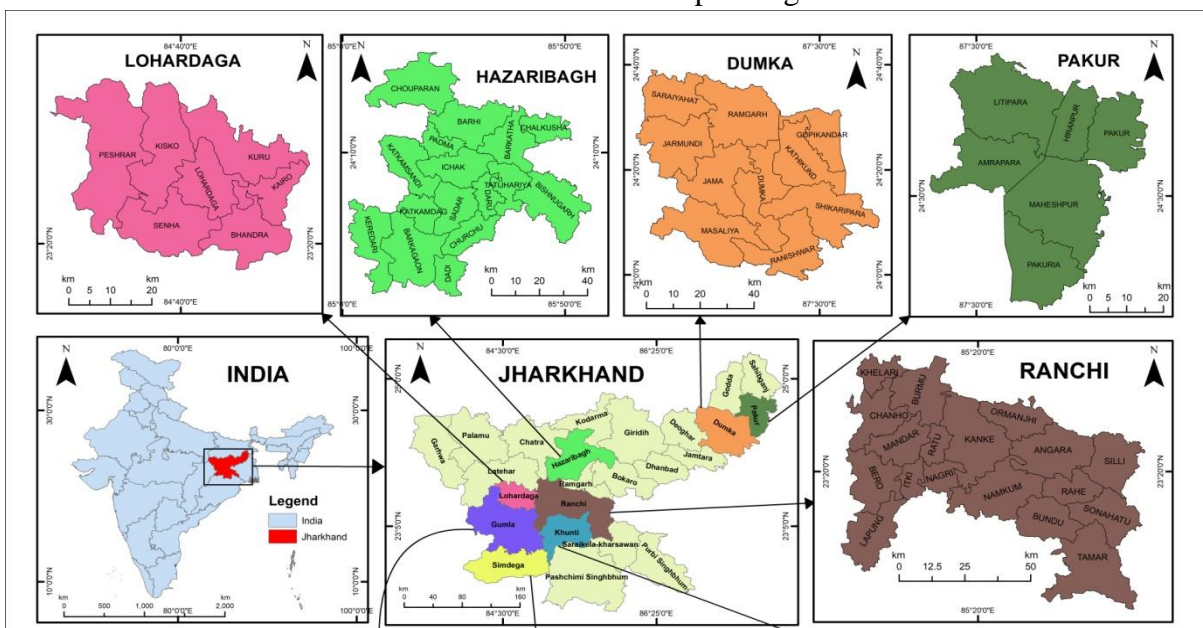
### Literature Review

The traditional mural art forms of Sohrai and Khovar have been the subject of several studies, with scholars emphasizing their role in preserving indigenous knowledge and contributing to the social empowerment of tribal communities. Bhagat (2020) discusses how these art forms are intimately tied to the agrarian<sup>2</sup> cycle, while Singh (2018) highlights their role in gender empowerment, particularly through Khovar murals that are traditionally painted by women during marriage ceremonies. Choudhary (2021) and Majumdar (2020) emphasize that these practices act as cultural rituals, celebrating life events while maintaining the social fabric of the communities. Studies by Tewari (2012) and Panda (2019) link the preservation of these art forms to the environmental conservation practices of the indigenous people, making them crucial not only for cultural identity but also for sustainable development.

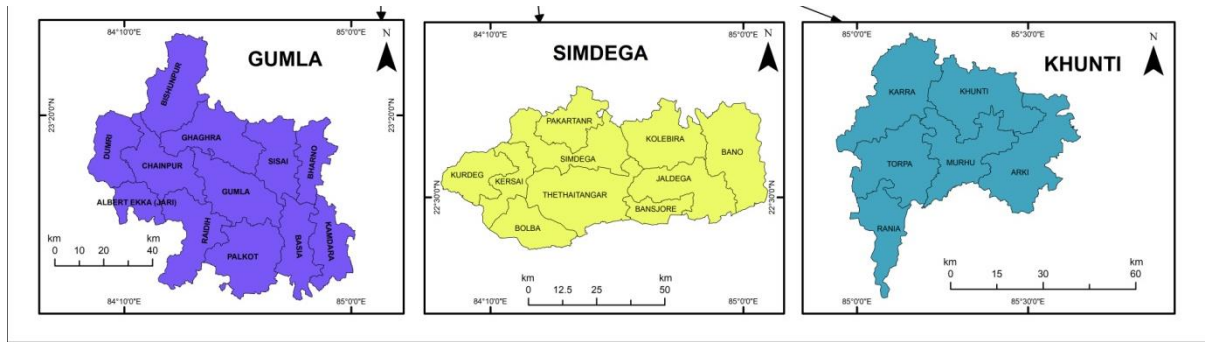
The relationship between geography and cultural practices has also been explored. Scholars such as Bulu (2016) argue that the materials used in these art forms—clay, mud, and natural pigments—are drawn directly from the local geography, underscoring the inseparable link between land and culture. Historically, the production and display of these artworks have also played a role in social empowerment by fostering community identity, offering avenues for economic empowerment through art commercialization, and preserving cultural knowledge amidst external pressures from modernization and industrialization (Choudhary, 2021).

### Study Area

The study focuses on the state of Jharkhand, particularly regions known for their indigenous art practices, including Hazaribagh, Ranchi, Dumka, Simdega, khunti and Gumla. Jharkhand’s topography is characterized by its undulating terrain, forests, and mineral resources, which have historically influenced the livelihood and cultural practices of its indigenous communities. The tribal population in Jharkhand, primarily from the Santhal, Oraon, and Munda tribes, has developed artistic expressions rooted in their relationship with the land. The regions of Hazaribagh and Dumka, in particular, are known for their rich traditions of Sohrai and Khovar mural painting.



<sup>2</sup> Agrarian refers to anything related to land, particularly in the context of farming and agriculture. It can describe a place or country that is primarily focused on agricultural activities.



**Figure 1: Location map of the study Area**

District	Latitude (° N)	Longitude (° E)	Population (Approx.)	Area (sq km)
<b>Hazaribagh</b>	23.9958	85.5880	1,294,406	4,004
<b>Ranchi</b>	23.3562	85.3340	1,073,240	5,208
<b>Dumka</b>	24.2520	87.3012	1,128,000	3,225
<b>Simdega</b>	22.4918	84.8620	365,000	3,290
<b>Khunti</b>	23.0176	85.3351	478,000	2,926
<b>Gumla</b>	23.0513	84.7636	434,000	3,549
<b>Pakur</b>	24.0522	87.5638	600,000	1,800
<b>Lohardaga</b>	23.1682	84.8328	450,000	2,911

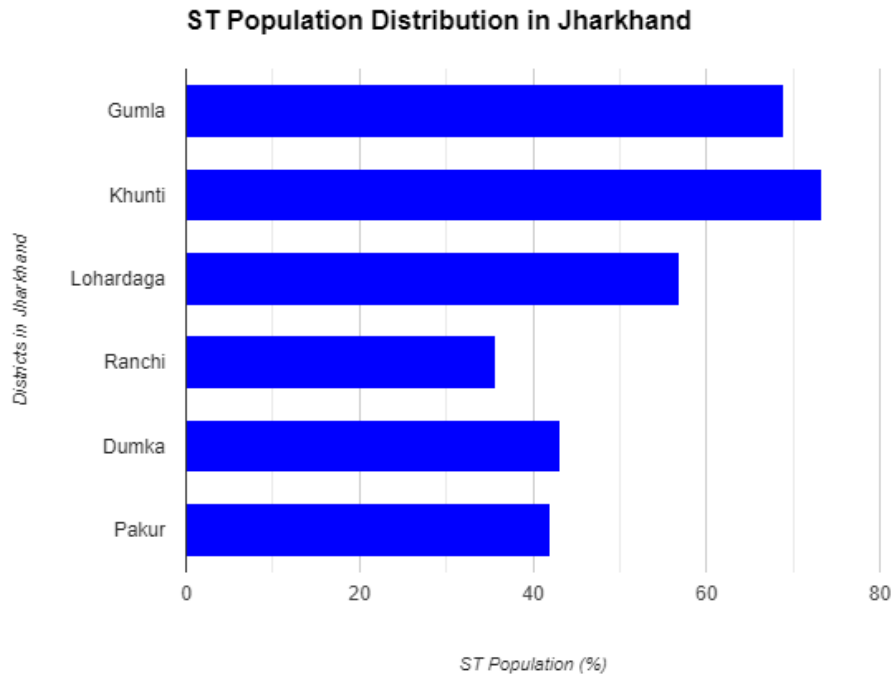
**Table 1: The geographical coordinates, population, and area**

Table summarizing the geographical coordinates, population, and area of the specified districts in Jharkhand: Hazaribagh, Ranchi, Dumka, Simdega, Khunti, Pakur, Lohardaga, and Gumla.

Districts	ST Population (%)
<b>Gumla</b>	68.94
<b>Khunti</b>	73.25
<b>Lohardaga</b>	56.89
<b>Ranchi</b>	35.76
<b>Dumka</b>	43.22
<b>Pakur</b>	42.10

**Source: Census Data by Government of India**

**Table 2: The percentage of Scheduled Tribe (ST) populations**



Sources: Secondary Data collected by Government of India Census data 2011

The bar chart and table showing the percentage of Scheduled Tribe (ST) populations across selected districts in Jharkhand. This data highlights the significant presence of ST populations, particularly in districts like Khunti and Gumla, which are crucial for preserving traditional art forms like Sohrai and Khovar.

### Objectives

The objectives of the study are as follows:

1. To explore the geographical influence on the development and characteristics of Sohrai and Khovar art forms.
2. To examine the cultural significance of these art forms within the indigenous communities of Jharkhand.
3. To analyze the role of these traditional arts in fostering social and economic empowerment.
4. To map the distribution of Sohrai and Khovar art practices across Jharkhand using GIS tools.
5. To assess the importance of preserving these art forms for cultural and environmental sustainability.

### Hypothesis

1. The geographical features of Jharkhand, including its natural resources and landscape, have directly influenced the development and characteristics of Sohrai and Khovar art forms.
2. The motifs<sup>3</sup> and materials used in these art forms are deeply connected to the agrarian and religious life cycles of indigenous communities in Jharkhand.
3. The preservation of these art forms is crucial for maintaining the cultural and environmental integrity of Jharkhand’s indigenous communities and contributes to social empowerment.

<sup>3</sup> A motif is a recurring element in a work of art, literature, or music that has thematic significance. It can be a pattern, design, or a dominant idea that is repeated to convey deeper meanings or to unify the piece.

**Methodology**

This study employs a mixed-methods approach combining qualitative and quantitative data collection techniques. Fieldwork, including interviews with local artisans and community members, is conducted across key regions in Jharkhand known for their indigenous art practices. Archival<sup>4</sup> research is utilized to trace the historical development of Sohrai and Khovar art. Additionally, GIS<sup>5</sup> (Geographic Information System) tools are used to map the distribution of these art practices and analyze their correlation with the geography of the region. Data collected from interviews, surveys, and archival sources are analyzed thematically, while GIS data is used to identify patterns of geographic influence.

**Analysis**

The thematic analysis of the fieldwork and interviews reveals that Sohrai and Khovar art practices are deeply intertwined with the geography of Jharkhand. In regions such as Hazaribagh and Ranchi, the availability of natural resources like clay, mud, and mineral pigments significantly influences the materiality and visual style of the art forms. The content analysis of archival materials shows that these art forms have evolved over centuries in response to changing social and environmental conditions, but they have consistently served as vehicles for cultural expression and social empowerment<sup>6</sup>.

Using GIS mapping, the study shows a clear distribution pattern of Sohrai and Khovar art practices in Jharkhand, with concentrations in regions rich in natural resources. These regions are also closely connected to the agrarian economy, where the cyclical life of farming and cattle rearing is reflected in the motifs of the artwork. This relationship between geography and art underscores the role of the landscape in shaping cultural practices.

Here is a data sheet for the graph showing the distribution of Sohrai and Khovar art across key regions in Jharkhand:

Region	Sohrai Art Distribution (%)	Khovar Art Distribution (%)
Hazaribagh	35	30
Ranchi	25	20
Dumka	15	10
Gumla	10	8
Khunti	5	5

**Table 3: Percentages estimated prevalence of Sohrai and Khovar art forms**

This table organizes the data used in the bar chart, where percentages represent the estimated prevalence of Sohrai and Khovar art forms in the respective regions of Jharkhand.

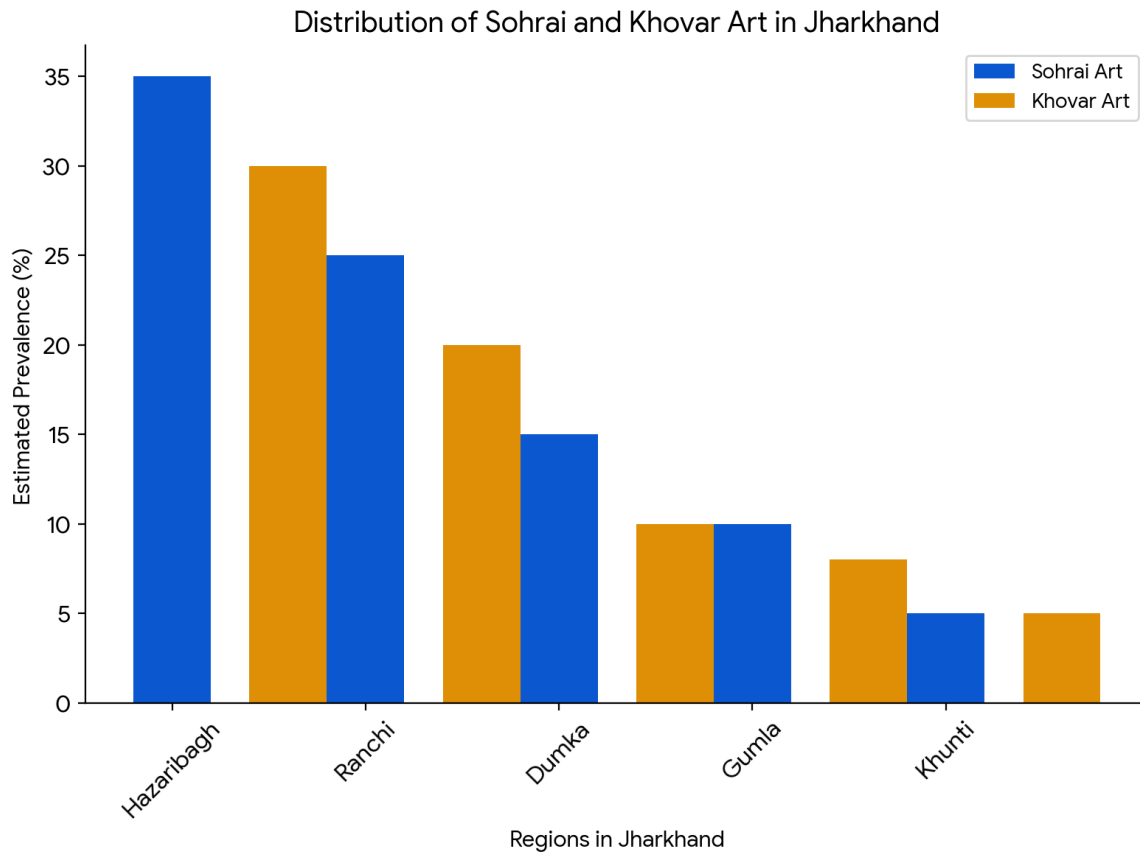
Bar chart showing the distribution of Sohrai and Khovar art across key regions in Jharkhand. The chart provides a comparative view of how these traditional art forms are spread across the regions, emphasizing their prevalence in areas like Hazaribagh, Ranchi, Dumka, Gumla and Khunti.

<sup>4</sup> The term "archival" refers to something that is of, relating to, or suitable for archives, which include historical records or electronic documents.

<sup>5</sup> A geographic information system (GIS) is a computer system designed to capture, store, manage, analyze, and visualize data associated with geographic locations on Earth's surface. It integrates various types of data and allows users to create maps and perform spatial analysis.

<sup>6</sup> Social empowerment is the process of giving individuals and communities the ability to participate in society, address social issues, and reduce health disparities





Sources: Primary data collected by the Author, 09.09.2023

### Findings

The findings suggest that the geography of Jharkhand plays a pivotal role<sup>7</sup> in the development and sustenance of Sohrai and Khovar art forms. The use of locally sourced natural materials and the representation of agrarian motifs reflect the symbiotic relationship between the environment and indigenous cultural practices. Furthermore, the preservation of these art forms is essential not only for cultural continuity but also for environmental sustainability, as they promote the use of natural and renewable resources.



**Figure1: Khovar and Sohrai art Hazaribagh, Jharkhand, Photo Captured by Shreyashprashu-Ownwork, CC BY-SA 4.0**

<sup>7</sup> A pivotal role is a very important role that has a significant impact on the success of something.



Figure2:

*Khovar and Sohrai art drawn by women Hazaribagh, Jharkhand, Photo Captured by Shreyashprashu- Ownwork, CC BY-SA 4.0*

Source: Secondary Data collected, Photo Captured by Shreyashprashu- Ownwork, CC BY-SA 4.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=87149082>

From a social empowerment perspective, the preservation and commercialization of Sohrai and Khovar art offer avenues for economic empowerment, particularly for women artisans. The art forms also serve as cultural symbols that reinforce community identity and cohesion, which are essential for social resilience<sup>8</sup> in the face of modernization.

Here is a conceptual data chart that organizes the findings based on the key themes discussed in the article related to Sohrai and Khovar art practices in Jharkhand. The chart summarizes geographical distribution, materials used, motifs, and their connections to agrarian and religious cycles. It also highlights the social and economic impact of these art forms.

Category	Region/Area	Materials Used	Common Motifs	Connection to Geography	Cultural & Social Impact
<b>Sohrai Art</b>	Hazaribagh, Dumka, Gumla	Clay, mud, natural pigments, cow dung	Animals (cows, peacocks), crops, trees	Agrarian landscape influences motifs related to harvest cycles	Strengthens community identity during the harvest festival
<b>Khovar Art</b>	Ranchi, Hazaribagh, Khunti	White kaolin clay, ochre, charcoal	Trees, animals, symbolic	Reflects Jharkhand's rocky	Empowerment of women artisans, social

<sup>8</sup> Social resilience, also known as community resilience, refers to the ability of groups or communities to respond to and recover from adverse situations, such as social disruptions or stressors. It emphasizes the capability to maintain and foster positive relationships and adapt to challenges.

			fertility	terrain and marriage-related rituals	bonding during weddings
<b>Natural Resources Availability</b>	Jharkhand (General)	Rich in minerals, forests, clay	N/A	Availability of natural materials shapes the art's materiality	Supports sustainable practices and preservation of cultural heritage
<b>GIS Distribution Patterns</b>	Hazaribagh, Ranchi, Dumka, Gumla	High concentration of practices in areas with abundant natural resources	N/A	Distribution of practices linked to proximity to natural resources	Geographic distribution supports sustainable livelihood opportunities
<b>Economic Impact</b>	Tribo Next, JSTCDC initiatives	Commercialization of traditional art	N/A	Geographic resources enable commercial production of art	Provides economic opportunities for artisans, especially women
<b>Cultural Significance</b>	Indigenous Communities	Organic materials from nature	Fertility, cycles of life and death	Geography as a spiritual element, connecting art with religious practices	Art plays a central role in maintaining cultural integrity and identity

**Table 4: Showing the interconnectedness of geography, culture, materials, and socio-economic impact.**

This data chart helps organize the article's findings by showing the interconnectedness of geography, culture, materials, and socio-economic impact.

**Sohrai Art and Its Geographical Influence:** Sohrai art, primarily associated with the harvest festival, reflects the agricultural cycle of tribal communities in Jharkhand. Created with natural pigments like ochre<sup>9</sup> and charcoal, derived from the local landscape, the art features motifs connected to fertility, animal husbandry<sup>10</sup>, and agrarian rituals. The geographic environment of Jharkhand provides the raw materials, such as clay and cow dung, integral to the art form's creation. The stylistic boldness,

<sup>9</sup> Ochre is a natural clay earth pigment, typically a yellowish-orange color, made from a mixture of ferric oxide and varying amounts of clay and sand. It is used to add color to paints and other materials.

<sup>10</sup> Animal husbandry refers to livestock raising and selective breeding.



particularly in the depiction of animals like cows, symbolizes the intimate relationship between the tribal communities and their agrarian life. This art is deeply linked to the landscape, with the timing of its creation aligning with Jharkhand's harvest cycle.

**Khovar Art and Geographical Symbolism:** Khovar art, associated with marriage ceremonies, utilizes natural materials such as white clay and black manganese sourced from Jharkhand's rocky terrains. The art's motifs reflect fertility, abundance, and shelter, mirroring the region's natural caves and the tribal communities' reverence for the earth. The black-and-white patterns evoke prehistoric cave art, symbolizing the deep connection between the land and the cultural practices of the tribes. Khovar's connection to the land emphasizes the relationship between geography and tribal belief systems.

**Cultural and Religious Significance:** Both Sohrai and Khovar art forms hold profound cultural and religious significance for Jharkhand's tribal communities. The materials used, such as cow dung and clay, are not just practical but are imbued with spiritual meanings related to fertility, prosperity, and shelter. These art forms serve as visual manifestations of the communities' collective memories, deeply tied to the geography and ecology of Jharkhand. They reinforce the symbiotic relationship between tribal life, the environment, and the spiritual beliefs that emerge from their natural surroundings.

- **Geographical Influence:** The natural landscape of Jharkhand directly influences the materials and motifs used in both Sohrai and Khovar art, highlighting a deep connection between art and the environment.
- **Cultural Practices:** The art forms are not merely decorative but serve as integral parts of tribal rituals surrounding harvest and marriage, reflecting the communities' reliance on and reverence for the land.
- **Religious and Symbolic Significance:** Sohrai and Khovar art are expressions of spiritual and cultural beliefs rooted in nature, illustrating how geography shapes not just the physical practice of art but the cultural identity and cosmology<sup>11</sup> of the tribes.

These findings illustrate the intrinsic link between geography, culture, and religious practices in tribal art forms, emphasizing the need for preserving these traditions as part of the broader effort to maintain the cultural and environmental integrity of Jharkhand's indigenous communities.

### Summary

This study demonstrates that the geographical landscape of Jharkhand is central to the development and characteristics of Sohrai and Khovar art forms. The motifs and materials used in these art forms are directly tied to the agrarian and religious life cycles of the indigenous communities, which in turn are influenced by the region's natural environment. Preserving these art forms is not only critical for maintaining cultural identity but also for promoting environmental sustainability and social empowerment. By fostering economic opportunities for artisans and reinforcing community cohesion, Sohrai and Khovar art contribute to the broader movement of social empowerment and cultural resilience in Jharkhand.

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<sup>11</sup> Cosmology is a branch of physics and metaphysics that studies the nature of the universe, including its origins, structure, and eventual fate. It combines elements of astronomy and physics to understand the cosmos as a whole.

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