

When Stories Become Art:

How Loksutr Brings Tribal Voices to the Page



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In the forests and villages of Madhya Pradesh, knowledge does not arrive through books. It is learned by watching, listening, and remembering. Stories here are not told for leisure; they instruct when to sow, how to heal, what to eat, and how to live with the land. Passed down through speech, ritual, and everyday practice, these stories form living systems of knowledge, fragile not because they lack value, but because they are rarely written down.

This article explores how Loksutr transforms tribal oral traditions into visual narratives, allowing indigenous knowledge to move from memory to material form. It shows how stories, language, and art come together to preserve cultural wisdom without disconnecting it from everyday life.

As modern life increasingly favors what is documented and digitized, oral traditions risk being seen as informal or outdated. However, in tribal communities, language still serves as memory, science, and a means of survival. Words provide instruction. Idioms contain ecological wisdom. Rituals maintain knowledge refined over generations. When language is lost, it is not just expression that disappears, but also understanding itself.

Loksutr emerges at this intersection of memory and materiality. Conceived by Achyut Siddu and Apoorva Mishra, the project approaches indigenous storytelling through visual narratives, recognising that images often succeed where text falls short. Rather than translating oral traditions into dense documentation, Loksutr allows stories to take form through illustration, pattern, and design, retaining the rhythm and worldview from which they originate.

By transforming lived narratives into visual artefacts, Loksutr does not attempt to fix culture in place. Instead, it offers a way for tribal voices to move beyond the spoken word, while remaining rooted in the knowledge systems that shaped them.

Visual Storytelling as Cultural Memory

For communities whose histories are spoken rather than written, memory is not linear. It is layered, circular, and often visual. Loksutr recognises this by treating illustration not as ornamentation, but as a language in itself. Through motifs, symbols, and patterns drawn from indigenous art forms, the project allows stories to retain their cultural texture rather than flattening them into explanation.

The visual approach matters because oral traditions are rarely abstract. They are tied to landscapes, seasons, and the body. An image of a forest is never just scenery; it signals food, medicine, danger, and



(Source: Loksutr official website)

protection all at once. By working visually, Loksutr preserves this density of meaning, making space for interpretation without forcing translation into rigid categories.

What results is not a record frozen in time, but a living archive—one that invites engagement rather than observation, and understanding rather than consumption.

Language as Lived Knowledge

Within many tribal communities, language operates as a practical guide to everyday life. Muhavaras and kahavatein—everyday idioms and sayings—are not ornamental phrases, and often carry practical instructions about food, farming, and social conduct.

Among Pithora communities, the gradual disappearance of words associated with grains and cereals revealed how closely language and practice are linked. As names were forgotten, so were cultivation methods. The recovery of this knowledge did not come from formal education, but through conversations with elders who still remembered the idioms connected to food and farming. These exchanges restored not only vocabulary, but an understanding of what to grow, how to grow it, and why it mattered. Today, this revived knowledge has returned to the soil itself.



(Source: Loksutr official website)

Here, language functions as a tool of continuity. Loksutr captures such moments with sensitivity, showing how speech carries within its entire systems of living.

Scientific Tribal Knowledge

Tribal knowledge systems are often framed as belief rather than understanding, a distinction that overlooks their scientific foundations. Communities such as the Baiga possess extensive medicinal knowledge shaped by careful observation of forests, seasons, and the human body. Their practices align closely with what modern frameworks recognise as ecological science and Ayurveda.

This knowledge is neither random nor symbolic. It is tested through use, refined through repetition, and preserved through oral instruction. Plants are chosen for specific conditions, seasons dictate treatment, and healing is understood as a balance between body and environment. What differentiates this knowledge from institutional science is not its accuracy, but its mode of transmission.

By presenting such practices through visual narratives, Loksutr allows indigenous science to be seen as systematic and deliberate, without forcing it into unfamiliar terminology. It challenges the assumption that knowledge must be written to be valid.

Revival Through Dialogue, Not Nostalgia

A recurring strength of Loksutr lies in its refusal to romanticise the past. The stories it engages with are not positioned as relics, but as resources. Revival, in this context, is not about returning to an imagined purity, but about reconnecting with relevance.

Intergenerational dialogue becomes central to this process. Elders carry memory, but it is the younger generation that negotiates how that memory survives. Through conversation, questioning, and adaptation, knowledge is reshaped to meet present realities. Culture, then, is not preserved by isolation, but by participation.

The Gonds were seven brothers|They sowed jute in the fields|In a few days, when the jute began to grow, the brothers went to attend to it||



There they saw a young man galloping on his big black bull right through their field|The hooves of his bull were trampling the jute saplings|This enraged six of the seven brothers|This is where the milk begins to curdle||

(Source: Loksutr official website)

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The Responsibility of The Present

The question that Loksutr quietly raises is one of responsibility. Preservation alone is insufficient if it leads only to archives detached from life. The task of the present generation is not merely to document, but to translate. To make ritual knowledge intelligible without diluting it, and visible without appropriating it. Design, illustration, and collaborative storytelling offer one possible bridge. They allow indigenous voices to remain central while opening pathways for understanding beyond the community. When used thoughtfully, contemporary tools do not erase tradition; they extend it.

When stories become art, they do more than endure. They continue to speak across generations. Loksutr demonstrates that tribal knowledge does not need to be rescued, only recognised on its own terms. Patronage here is not charity, but respect. Pride in language and oral tradition is not nostalgia, but continuity. Culture remains alive not when it is archived, but when it is practiced, shared, and allowed to evolve.

(Source: Loksutr official website)

