



# The Edisinge Art Of The Savara Tribe: A Cultural And Artistic Legacy On The Verge Of Extinction

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**Abstract:** The Edisinge art form, also known as Ideesung or Tongseng, is a traditional wall mural practice of the Savara tribe, primarily residing in the Eastern Ghats of Andhra Pradesh and Odisha, India. This intricate art, characterized by its vivid depiction of nature, wildlife, and tribal life, holds profound cultural and spiritual significance for the Savara community. However, modernization, changes in religious practices, and the replacement of traditional mud houses with concrete structures threaten its survival. This paper explores the historical roots, artistic techniques, cultural importance, and contemporary challenges of Edisinge art, drawing on ethnographic accounts and recent initiatives to revive this endangered tradition. It argues for the urgent need to preserve Edisinge as a vital expression of Savara identity and heritage.

**Key words – Edisinge, Savara, Tribe, Art, Mural.**

## 1. Introduction

The Savara tribe, one of the indigenous communities of eastern India, is renowned for its rich cultural heritage, including the Edisinge art form. Predominantly located in Srikakulam and Parvathipuram Manyam districts of Andhra Pradesh, as well as parts of Odisha, the Savara population exceeds 1.1 lakh in Andhra Pradesh alone, with 84,585 residing in the erstwhile Srikakulam district (2011 Census). Edisinge, a form of wall painting, is a visual narrative of the tribe's deep connection with nature, spirituality, and communal life. Despite its historical prominence, the art is now practiced by fewer than 15 artists in Srikakulam district, signaling its near extinction. This paper examines the origins, techniques, and socio-cultural roles of Edisinge art, while highlighting efforts to revive it and the challenges impeding its preservation.

## 2. Historical and Cultural Context

### 2.1 The Savara Tribe

The Savara, also known as Saora or Sora, belong to the Austro-Asiatic linguistic family and are part of the Kol Munda group. They are primarily agrarian, with some dependence on forest produce, and their cultural practices reflect a symbiotic relationship with their environment. The Savara are divided into subtribes based on occupation, such as the Jati Savara (cultivators) and Arsi Savara (weavers), but their artistic traditions, including Edisinge, unify their identity.

## 2.2 Origins of Edisinge Art

Edisinge, locally known as Tongseng, is an ancient art form with roots in the Savara's animistic beliefs and rituals. The term "Ideesung" translates to "what is written in the house," reflecting its domestic and sacred function. Historically, Edisinge was integral to festivals like Mamidi Panduga (harvest festival), Aagam Panduga (commemoration of ancestors), and marriage ceremonies, where specific motifs were painted to honor deities or commemorate events. These paintings, executed on the mud walls of Savara homes, served as both aesthetic expressions and spiritual offerings.

## 2. Artistic Techniques and Themes

### 3.1 Materials and Methods

Edisinge art employs eco-friendly materials sourced from the natural environment. Artists use vermilion, rice powder, charcoal, and ash from coconut shells to create a palette of earthy tones. The canvas is typically the mud walls of traditional homes, though modern adaptations include cloth, bark, or paper. Brushes are crafted from bamboo or animal hair, enabling intricate dotting and line work that characterize the art's detailed patterns. The paintings are periodically replaced, every two to five years, aligning with ritual cycles.

### 3.2 Themes and Symbolism

The motifs of Edisinge art are deeply symbolic, reflecting the Savara's worldview. Common themes include:

- **Nature and Wildlife:** Depictions of animals, birds, trees, and flowers underscore the tribe's reverence for biodiversity.
- **Agriculture and Hunting:** Scenes of farming and hunting practices highlight the Savara's livelihood.
- **Festivals and Rituals:** Paintings for Aagam Panduga or Mamidi Panduga feature specific deities or ancestors, embodying spiritual narratives.
- **Social Life:** Motifs of communal activities, such as dances or marriages, celebrate tribal cohesion.

These themes not only beautify homes but also serve as a visual archive of Savara history and values.

## 3. Cultural and Spiritual Significance

Edisinge is more than an artistic practice; it is a sacred ritual that reinforces Savara identity. The paintings are offerings to deities and ancestors, believed to bring prosperity and protection. For instance, during Aagam Panduga, a decadal festival, entire communities collaborate to create murals that honor the departed, fostering social bonds. The art also functions as a cultural archive, preserving oral traditions and historical narratives in a visual form.

The introduction of the Akshara Brahma script by Mangei Gomango in 1936, which represents Savara deities, has influenced cultural practices but has not yet been integrated into Edisinge preservation efforts. This script underscores the tribe's reverence for language and art as divine expressions, further highlighting Edisinge's spiritual role.

## 5. Contemporary Challenges

### 5.1 Modernization and Lifestyle Changes

The primary threat to Edisinge is the shift from traditional mud houses to concrete structures, which are unsuitable for wall murals. As Savara villages adopt modern architecture, the physical space for Edisinge has diminished, with artists like Savara Lakshmana Rao reporting no houses to paint in recent years.

### 5.2 Religious Shifts

Conversion to Christianity and Hinduization among some Savara has reduced the patronage of traditional rituals, diminishing the demand for Edisinge. Festivals like Chukka (seed festival) and Aagam, once central to the art, are less frequently celebrated, further eroding its practice.

### 5.3 Generational Disinterest

Younger generations show limited interest in learning Edisinge, preferring urban employment opportunities over traditional crafts. Despite training initiatives, such as those by the Savara Art Society (SAS), only a handful of trainees continue the practice.

## 6. Revival Efforts

### 6.1 Savara Art Society

In 2011, Savara Raju and his father, Chinna Sumburu, founded the SAS in Addakulaguda village to revive Edisinge. The society trained 45 youths in collaboration with the Integrated Tribal Development Agency (ITDA) and Lepakshi, though only 15 remain active. Raju's efforts earned him a nomination for the YSR Lifetime Achievement Award, recognizing his commitment to cultural preservation.

### 6.2 Government and NGO Initiatives

The ITDA-Seetampeta has commissioned Edisinge artists for public projects, such as murals on railway stations (e.g., Bramhapur, Odisha) and flyovers in Visakhapatnam. NGOs like Sanjeevani and Jana Chethana have supported exhibitions and workshops to promote the art. The Tribal Cultural Research and Training Mission (TCRTM) in Visakhapatnam also showcases Edisinge for the upcoming Tribal Freedom Fighters Museum.

### 6.3 Academic and Cultural Advocacy

Scholars like Sattupati Prasanna Sree, who is compiling a Telugu-Savara dictionary, advocate for the academic integration of Savara culture, including Edisinge. The Indira Gandhi Rashtriya Manava Sangrahalaya (IGRMS) has encouraged documentation and revival efforts.

## 7. Discussion

The decline of Edisinge art reflects broader challenges faced by indigenous cultures in the face of globalization and modernization. While revival initiatives show promise, their impact is limited by structural issues, such as inadequate funding and lack of sustained community engagement. The art's survival hinges on integrating it into contemporary contexts—such as public art or commercial products—without compromising its cultural integrity. Additionally, educational programs that teach Edisinge alongside the Akshara Brahma script could foster pride among Savara youth, encouraging their participation.

## 8. Conclusion

Edisinge art is a testament to the Savara tribe's rich cultural heritage, embodying their spiritual, social, and environmental values. Its intricate techniques and symbolic motifs offer a window into a way of life that is rapidly disappearing. While efforts by individuals, NGOs, and government bodies provide hope, the art's preservation requires a multifaceted approach, including community-driven initiatives, policy support, and global awareness. By safeguarding Edisinge, we not only preserve a tribal art form but also honor the resilience and creativity of the Savara people.

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