

Study on Mithila Flock Painting Culture.

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Abstract

The paper explores how traditional art can be preserved through social business by studying the case of Mithila. It is a small organization working for preservation and promotion of traditional art of Mithila region commonly known as Mithila paintings. The case brings to the light the concept of governance. This is becoming more and more relevant. The government which framed rules and regulations for preservation of art was not successful in achieving outcomes alone. An entrepreneur shares the same concern and tries to address the need of society through a social business model. It may be a beginning for Mithila but the case provides learning for trying out similar model in different phenomenon. Through this conceptual paper we also present a framework of governance for improving implementation process and social well being developed.

Keywords: Mithila Flock Painting, culture, nature, skilled activity, Madhusravani, binni, sikki, marriage pictures

Introduction

Mithila is Ancient State of Indo Aryan Civilization. Meaning there by Mithila East Koshi River, West Gandki (Sadanira) river, South Ganga River & North Himalaya Mithila are in 25^o to 28^o & 26^o to 52^o latitude, 84^o to 56^o akhans and 86^o to 46^o desanter. 26 district of North India & 16 District of Nepal were under Mithila .This time 28% of Nepal Population and 6% of India Population are under Mithila Maithili is Language of Maithila, about 200 million people speak this language. Maithili is second language of Nepal government and also constituent language of India government. The 6000 years old Indian culture has given successive generations a wonderful mind set tuned in amalgamation of tradition and modernity, and value system, which has been retained with excellent continuity despite the passage of time, repeated foreign invasions, and the enormous growth in population. It gives them a unique personality today, as it has done in the past. In fact, these constitute enduring imprints on Indian consciousness. The 20th century is significant in many fields and art of course is an area to be mentioned. As culture has a curious way of belonging to its times, and yet of being removed from it. Culture has its own agenda and has habitually risen above the conditions prevailing on the ground in every period of human history. The songs, dance-forms, literary activities and works of art produced in the 20th century have found new expressions and have gone to prove that this century has not only been the greatest in human history but has also been a period of new discoveries and radical renewals. While all the art forms have exhibited significant achievements, several entirely new ones have been invented and popularised such as cinema, pop music, and television documentary (Singh B.P.2003 :pp350. Occasional Essays, New Delhi, Saulabh International Social Service Organization. 2003)¹Mithila painting, also known as Madhubani painting, is in its originality an art form practiced by the women of all castes and communities of the region. The women of this country from time immemorial have been involving themselves in the various forms of creativity. The best one can find in their creativity is the relationship between nature, culture and human psyche. Also they use only those raw materials, which are available easily in abundance in the locality they are surrounded with. Through folk paintings and other forms of art they express their desire, dream, and expectation and amuse themselves. It is a parallel literacy by which they communicate their aesthetic expression.

Their art of creativity itself can be treated as a style of writing by which their emotions, expectations, freedom of thoughts, in the maryada, etc. Their background, gender, aspirations, hope, aesthetic sensibility, cultural knowledge, etc., find expression in all possible forms of their art. What one needs is to know the level of their enculturation and mode of learning before talking or writing about their art. Putting women in the center, this article is written on the Mithila painting, folk Capture creators and the state of painting, in the same spirit. No region of this great country is untouched with the creativity of the women. We see the example of phulkari in Punjab, warli in Gujarat, chikan embroidery in Lucknow, weaving in the North-east, kantha in Bengal, miniature paintings in the state of Rajasthan, kethari, sujani and of course mithila paintings in the Mithila region of Bihar and Nepal. The Mithila painting is one of the living creative activities of the women of this region. It is a famous folk painting on paper, cloth, readymade garments, movable object etc., mainly by the village women of Mithila. Originally it is a folk art, practiced by the women of all castes and communities, including the Muslims, on walls and floors using the natural and vegetable colours. Later some people took interest in it and motivated the women to translate their art from walls and floors to the canvas (Dr. Upendra Thakur PP66 Mithilak Itha)² and now the new form has given this a very distinct identity in the art world as well as in the market. This folk art has a history, a cultural background, women's monopoly and distinct regional identification. Where is Mithila? What is the cultural and historical significance of this land? Why is it that this art is that special in Mithila? These are the few questions that deserve an answer before anything can be written about this art form, Far away from Indian big cities and the modern world lies a beautiful region once known as Mithila. It was one of the first kingdoms to be established in eastern India. The region is a vast plain stretching north towards Nepal, south towards the Ganges and west towards Bengal. The present districts of Champaran, Saharsa, Muzaffarpur, Vaishali, Darbhanga, Madhubani, Supaul, Samastipur etc and parts of Munger, Begusarai, Bhagalpur and Purnea of Bihar cover Mithila. It is completely flat and free from rock or stone. Its soil is the alluvial silt deposited by the river Ganges, a rich, smooth clay dotted with thousands of pools replenished by the monsoon, the only reservoirs until the next monsoon.

If the monsoon is late or scanty, the harvest is in jeopardy. But if the rain god is kind, the whole plain bursts into green from October to February, dotted with man-made ponds where beasts and peasants bath beneath ancient vatvrikshas (Cultural and social boundaries to regulate life as per the structure of the society)³ Madhubani is the heartland where the paintings are more profuse than elsewhere. "The region's rich vegetation so impressed ancient visitors that they called it Madhubani, 'Forest of Honey' (Vequaud, Yves Women Painters of Mithila, Thames and Hudson, London, 1977)⁴, the name of the most acknowledged district for this painting. In this mythical region, Rama, the handsome prince of Ayodhya and incarnation of the Vishnu, married princess Sita, born of a furrow her father King Janaka had tilled. Mithila is that sacred land where the founders of Buddhism and Jainism, the scholars of all six orthodox branches of Sanskrit learning such as Yajnavalkya, Bridha Vachaspati, Ayachi Mishra, Shankar Mishra, Gautam, Kapil, Sachal Mishra, Kumaril Bhatt and Mandan Mishra were born. Vidyapati, a Vaisnav poet of 14th century was born in Mithila who immortalized a new form of love songs explaining the relationship between Radha and Krishna in the region through his padavalis and therefore the people rightly remember him as the reincarnation of Jaideva (abhinavajaideva). Karnpure, a classical Sanskrit poet of Bengal, in his famous devotional epic, the Parijata harana mahakavya gives an interesting account confirming the scholarship of the people of Mithila.

Krishna tells his beloved Satyabhama, while flying over this land on way to Dwarka from Amravati, "O lotus-eyed one behold! Yonder this is Mithila, the birthplace of Sita. Here in every house Saraswati dances with pride on the tip of the tongue of the learned (Dr. Perm Chandra Thakur Mithila ki Siksha Avam Sanskrit kevikash me Darbhanga raj kaa yogdan (2002) Unpublished thesis L.N.M.U. Darbhanga, PP216-221.)⁵ Mithila flock paintings culture are also popular as Maithili, Chitra and Godhna figure paintings. It is said that Mithila flock paintings culture originated during the Ramayana age when king Janak ruler of Mithila made people paint the floors and walls of their houses on the occasion of his daughter Sita's wedding to Lord Ram. Mithila or Bihar and Nepal is the actual hub of Mithila flock paintings as long years back it all started from this particular humble region only. Eventually this art form spread to the adjacent districts of Madhubani like Rasidpur, Bacchi, Jitwarpur, Raati, Rajnagarh, etc as well Mithila is a wonderful land where art and scholarship, laukika and Vedic traditions flourished together in complete harmony between the two. There was no binary opposition. Like the diversity of India, its folk art also presents a huge canvas and depicts the cultural mosaics of this country in a very colourful style.

This art can rightly be termed as an ocean of the folk art (Lokakala saritasagara)⁶, Which, since earliest times, has been fed by the rivers of popular artistic creativity rivers that have flowed into it from all cultural geographical pockets of the Indian sub-continent. The well-known grammarian, Panini, drew a distinction between artists – the rajshilpi, or craftsman employed by the court – and the gramashilpi, or village craftsman (Mookerjee, R.K. Notes on Early Indian Art, Allahabad, 1962.)⁷ Originally shilpin would seem to have been a term generally applied to the technically trained craftsman, later, however, it came to denote the artisan (Puri, B.N. India in the Time of Patanjali, Bombay, 1968)⁸. Thus the writing concerning the theory of art are referred to collectively as the shilpashastras (Shilpanis as works of art in the Aitareya Brahmana, cf. Kramrisch, The Hindu Temple, Calcutta, p.9, 1946.)⁹

2. Details Experimental

2.1. Materials and Procedures

Being for the most part of a highly schematic character, these manuals of artistic instruction could not, of course, be expected to include a description of folk art or of amateur art practised by women at home. By and large they form part of orthodox ecclesiastical literature with art as the handmaiden of the courts of Brahmanic orthodoxy (From the English translation in Coomaraswamy, A.K., The Arts and Crafts of India and Ceylon, New York, 1964.)¹⁰. But that did not cause any disturbance for the women and the commoners of India to practice various forms of creativity through various mediums on the occasion of rituals, altars, and festivals and also during the leisure period. The fellow villagers and locals always appreciated their creativity and innovation. As a result, in Sanskrit, as well as in the folk tradition, an artist is treated as a person with a magnetic ability to create a world of imagination. Metaphorically, an artist is always compared with the Gods. “ In Hinduism, Vishnu has a thousand names, many of which refer to works of art. In Islam, one of the hundred names of Allah is Musawwer, the artist. The Sanskrit word kala (art) means the divine attributes which direct human acts and thoughts. Man, God and art are inseparable. Art is not removed from everyday life, it reflects a world view (Saraswati, Baidyanath, VILLAGE INDIA: Identification and Enhancement of Cultural Heritage – An Internal Necessity in the Management of Development (Interim Report), New Delhi, UNESCO Chair in the Field of Cultural Development; Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts, 1999)¹¹. No distinction is made between fine and decorative, free or servile arts. The eighteen or more professional arts (silpa) and the sixty-four vocational arts (kala) embrace all kinds of skilled activity.

There is no difference between a painter and a sculptor. Both are known as silpi or karigar. The term silpa designates ceremonial act in the Asvalayana Srautasutra, and in this sense it is close to karu, which in the Vedic context stands for a maker or an artist, a singer of hymns, or a poet. In a reference in the Rgveda, Visvakarma, a god of creation, is mentioned as dhatu-karmara, while karmara alone refers to artisans and artificers (Rgveda X.72.2; Atharveda III 5-6; Manu IV 215)¹². Visvakarma is supposed to create things out of dhatu, raw material”, an act known as sanghamana (Rgveda X.72.2; Atharveda III 5-6; Manu IV 215)¹³. The process of cutting, shaping and painting has been often explained in the text by the taks (Rgveda: rathakas who used wood for joining and making chariot, is called taksaka in the Maitrayani Samhita, IV. 3.8.)¹⁴. In Mithila a woman does painting on the wall, surface, movable objects, and canvas; makes images of gods, goddesses, animals and mythological characters from the lump of clay; prepares objects such as baskets, small containers, and play items from sikki grass; does embroidery on quilt – popularly known as kethari and sujani; sings varieties of ritual and work songs (The Unshackled Spirit from Bihar (An Exhibition of Artists from Erstwhile Bihar), Patna, RHYTHM Centre for Art and Culture 2003.)¹⁵. These artistic activities are done by a lady as a routine work that makes her a complete creative personality: a singer, a sculptor, a painter, an embroidery design maker and what not! Without knowing these primary details one may not understand the aesthetic wonder of Mithila paintings. From generation to generation the women of Mithila have produced a vigorous distinctive painting. That this traditional art has survived the innumerable vicissitudes of history is due, first of all, to the social organization of Mithila, one based on the village community, in whose corporate life the women have clearly understood roles. Beyond their extended families, the women artists work for a rural society with whose requirements they are perfectly acquainted. It is within this framework that the women continue to reproduce age-old forms; indeed countless recapitulations have resulted in an attitude of mind in which they can produce the most abstract designs without conscious effort. The possibility of any radical assertion of individuality in the modern sense is extremely limited (Mookerjee Ajit In the Preface of Ve`quaud, Yves’, Women Painters of Mithila, London, Thames and Hudson, 1977)¹⁶.

This communal village life is strengthened and sustained by the universal prevalence of social gatherings, traditional storytelling, dancing and singing festivities and ceremonies, processions and rituals. In Mithila, painting is normally done by women folk in three forms painting on floor, painting on wall and painting on movable objects. Aripan, under the first category, is made on the floor with the paste of arva (crude) rice. This rice paste is called pithar in the local language. Apart from the floor it is also made on banana and maina (A local plant)¹⁷ leaves and pidhi (wooden seats). A woman or a girl does it using her right hand's fingertips. In tusari puja, a festival celebrated by the unmarried girls in order to please Gauri and Shiva to have a suitable husband; an aripan is made with dry rice powder in white, yellow and red colours. Aripan is of different types suiting different occasions. Astadala, sarvato bhadra, dasapata and swastika are its main varieties. Wall paintings are multicolored. Three to four colors are usually used to depict the wall paintings. Pictures include those of nayana-jogini, purain (Plant as well as flower of lotus)¹⁸, carrier of fish, curd, jackfruit, trees of fruits such as mango and pomegranate and birds like peacock. Attractive floral motifs adorn the wall on three sides of the entrance. Paintings on movable objects include those on clay models of pots, elephants, birds like Sama and chakeba; Raja Salhesa, bamboo structure, mat, fan and objects made of sikki (A regional variety of indigenous grass)¹⁹. Decorative multicolored designs made on the faces of brides and the sumangalis (Newly married auspicious women whose husbands are alive)²⁰ also fall in this category. Many of these paintings have great tantrik significance. Certain non-Vedic rites during the marriage ceremony, practiced exclusively by the women, like thakka-bakka, nayana-jogini etc., are directly related to the Mithila tantra. The tradition of wall paintings as well as surface paintings for beautification of dwellings and ritual purposes in Mithila is believed to have survived from the epic period. Tulsidasa in his magnum opus the Ramcharitmanasa gives a vivid account of Mithila painting decorated for the marriage of Sita and Rama. Influenced with the wonderful pair – Rama and Sita – Gauri, the Consort of Siva, desired to participate in the actual marriage ritual and wanted to paint the kohabar (Bridal chamber where the union between the groom and the bride takes place and several rites are solemnized).²¹ where the sumangalis had to perform songs and related rituals for this divine ideal couple. These decorations are mythological murals, added with deities of Hindu pantheon, besides regional flora and fauna.

The women artists, according to the old age tradition, are the sole custodians who practice this folk painting passing down for generations from mother to her daughter. They have been retaining this great art form in the region since time immemorial. The girl learns to play with the brush and colors at an early age that finally culminates in the kohabar, which acquires great sanctity in the social life. All religious ceremonies relating to the marriage are performed in the kohabar. The ahibaatak patil (An earthen lamp - a symbol of happy conjugal life)²² is kept burning in all through for four days. The present forms of Mithila paintings, also called Madhubani paintings, are the translation of the wall paintings, floor paintings and terracotta idols onto paper or canvas (Paper, cloth, dress materials, readymade garments, movable objects, etc).²³ This experiment is not very old. In the late sixties, twentieth century, in order to create the job opportunity for the women to face the cruel challenge of the terrible drought, some women were approached to translate their art from walls, floors and other form of creativity to the paper or canvas. They did and it worked miraculously. At first when the ritual was fixed on paper it had a very small audience at the receiver's end but it certainly opened a new world of art appreciators and also potential buyers of their artworks in the world. This was a great success and a ticket to trade. Since then the painting medium has diversified. Wall paintings were transferred to hand made paper (which was of poster size) and gradually it laid the way for other mediums and motifs like greeting cards, dress materials, sun-mica etc. The stylized figures, fierce lions with electrified manes, the human profiles reminiscent of ancient Cretan pottery, the bright native colours and all possible indigenous experiments appealed to the audience of the world. In the beginning only a few Brahman women were given the opportunity to practice this art but after ten years some women of the Kayasthas also came forward with a new style.

Till now, the women of the Harijans were not given the opportunity to experiment in this art with their hands. On careful examination I found an interesting story behind this. The women of higher castes were not allowed in the region to cross the boundary of their houses, however they wanted to do some work for generating finance to run their family smoothly mainly during the natural calamities. One folk poet, Faturilal of present Shahpur village of Madhubani had described the pathetic condition of the people during famine in late nineteenth century in his famous poetry known as the Akalkavitta (Famine poetry)²⁴. Influenced with his poetic description the then Maharaja of Darbhanga, Maharaja Laxmeshwar Singh decided to create job opportunities with the help of the British ruler for the people. The women of lower castes however were helping their husbands or male counterparts by working in the agricultural fields of better off people and also as maid servant in the houses of higher castes.

This time also some people thought of involving the women of higher castes in some creative business. Mahatma Gandhi's experiment with charkha (Spinning wheel)²⁵ came as a wonder for all the women of Maithil Brahmins. They found it very easy as earlier they were preparing cotton thread on tekuli for preparing the janeu or jagyopaveeta (Sacred thread)²⁶. The khadi workers used to give raw cotton to them in every house and collect their prepared yarns. Very delicate and costly khadi clothes are woven from these yarns today and they are in great demand everywhere in the country. Some women prepare such very fine thread that at times the length of a sacred thread is contained in the case of a piece of cardamom. Anyway, this created a space for women. Khadi centres used to give money as well as clothes for their labour. This was a respectful job mainly for destitute, widows and poor women of higher castes in the locality. And the second experiment was Mithila paintings. As a result some women of the Brahmin caste such as Sita Devi contributed to promote the Brahmin style of Mithila paintings. This art, characterised by bright colours and an absence of shade, is mainly concerned with the khobars (Symbolic marriage paintings)²⁷ and gods and goddesses. Bawa Devi and her daughter, Sarita Devi later made important personal contributions. Another social group, the women of the Kayasthas, was also facing the similar problem. They were landless community and their women also got attracted towards this art form to gain some finance. They worked hard on the art and also in the entrepreneurship and finally achieved recognition in the seventies. The Kayastha women earned their name for their elaborate line paintings. Most of the Kayastha women do outline paintings only. They cover their sheets of paper or cloth or any object with the care of cartographers, producing finished pictures where exquisite execution is more impressive in view of the difficult conditions in which they work. They depict village or religious scenes to the finest details such as the late Ganga Devi, Pushpa Kumari, Karpoori Devi, Mahasundari Devi and Godawari Dutta. These two forms of Mithila expression, both due to women from the higher castes, embody traditional Mithila art.

The third group, the Harijan women, came forward in the 1980s. The women of the Dusadh and the Chamar were doing all forms of traditional paintings and art forms for ritual purposes and also for decorating their dwellings. Influenced by the entrepreneurship and experiment of the Brahmins and the Kayasthas they experimented the godna²⁸ and other bright colour in their depiction of paintings. Their pictorial alphabet began to include lines, waves, circles, sticks and snails, opening the way to stylization and more abstraction. That also worked. Jamuna Devi and Lalita Devi are famous Harijan female painters. Lalita Devi sews faces of deities like fruits, profusion of motives seems to rightly counterbalance the precariousness of existence, they transcend their daily lives to harvest new creations. And now women of all castes have been practicing this art as a job earning profession. Being the folk of the villages, these artists rely on the kindness of nature for colors. It provides them with a wonderful range of natural hues derived from clay, bark, flowers and berries. The colors are usually deep red, green, blue, black, light yellow, pink and lemon. They create mood and hence played an important role. For instance, energy and passion find expression through the use of red and yellow, as monochrome crashed over large surfaces of the painting. Concentration of energy and the binding force is best reflected in red while green governs (Tattooing)²⁸ the natural leaves and vegetation. The Brahmins prefer the very bright hues while the Kayasthas opt for muted ones. For the Harijan style of paintings, hand made papers is washed in cow dung. Once the paints are ready, two kinds of brushes are used - one for the tiny details made out of bamboo twigs and the other for filling in or space is prepared from a small piece of cloth attached to a twig. In the beginning homemade natural colours were obtained from plant extracts like henna leaves, flower, bougainvillea, neem, etc.

These natural juices were mixed with resin from banana leaves and ordinary gum in order to make the paint stick to the painting medium. Home made paints, though cheap, was time consuming and produced less than the requirement. The solution was at hand to switch to the synthetic colors available aplenty in the market. Now colours come in powdered form, which are then mixed with goat's milk. Black was obtained from the soot deposits by the flame of dibia (Kerosene lamp)²⁹ dissolved in gum. The kohabar is replete with paintings based on mythological, folk themes, and tantric symbolism. The paintings in this chamber are designed to bless the couple. The central theme of all paintings is love and fertility, though the approach may vary. It can commence with the story of Sita's marriage or Krishna - Radha episode with the ecstatic circle in which he leads the gopis. The people of Mithila, also known as Maithils, are Sakti worshippers with the influence of tantric rituals and so Siva-Sakti, Kali, Durga, Ravana and Hanuman also appear in their murals. Symbols of fertility and prosperity like fish, parrot, elephant, turtle, sun, moon, bamboo tree, lotus, etc., are more prominent. The divine beings are positioned centrally in the frame while their consorts or mounts or simply their symbols and floral motifs form the background. The human figures are mostly abstract and linear in form; the animals are usually naturalistic and are invariably depicted in profile. It begins with the flow of the brush without any preliminary sketching.

Though natural colours and twigs have given way to brushes and artificial paints, the subject of Mithila paintings has changed enormously. The commercialization has caused serious harm to this art. The women and men are learning this art from the markets in towns and metropolitan cities. The trainers themselves do not know the essence and aesthetic beauty of this folk art and they teach their students in utter ignorance. Some of them do not know the colour combination, obtaining the colour from the nature, preparing the background, relationship between rhythm, colour, songs, rituals, dance and the art of painting. The themes and designs of the paintings are, now, in most of the cases decided by the buyers. The buyer-centric approach has caused serious threat to the originality of colour, design, motif, and sensitivity of this great art form. In the name of the tantric painting, we see the women have painted something very different from the tradition of Mithila. Commercialization of this art has created the interest of several males in it. They have been now also painting without knowing the significance of women in it. For them it is an industry that can easily provide a job opportunity for them. They are willing to paint anything as per the requirement of the buyers in the name of Mithila painting. But when we talk about the Mithila painting as folk or traditional painting, which is painted on a ritual occasion or any ritual painting of India we see many activities are combined. This combination, in fact gives special significance to the art. “ Viewed at the level of perception and experience, all these local, regional, macro pan Indian, and beyond Indian expression of art emerge and are held together by an integral vision that makes life an art, part and parcel of a single totality where life functions and creative art are inseparably intertwined. Painting, music, dance, poetry, and other functional objects are inseparable from myths, rituals, festivals and ceremonies. There is no dichotomy between the sacred and profane, life and art.

The human and the divine are in a continuum, in a constant movement of interpretation and transformation (Vatsyayan Kapila, in the Preface Fisher Eberhard & Dinanath Pathy’ s *Muralas of Goddesses and Gods: The Tradition of Osakothi Ritual Painting of Orissa, India*, New Delhi: Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts, Zurich; Museum Reitberg, 1996)³⁰.” When a painter paints a wall or a floor, she is supported by other women by way of singing songs and helping tunes. The lesson drawn from the folk stories and narratives also help her in painting the themes of various requirements. The tantric paintings for instance, are influenced by the famous narratives of the Madhusravani katha. This katha is narrated before a newly married bride on the occasion of Madhusravani for 13-15 continuous days by an elderly and experienced lady who is usually well versed in the art of narrative. She dramatises the stories in a very lively manner and narrates the origin of earth and various tantric stories. This festival is celebrated with songs, dance, ritual paintings; spell of mantras, etc. One such complete folk-cum-tantric story of Manasa Debi is given below: Manasa Debi was a mind-born daughter (Manasaputri)³¹ of Siva. She was born of Siva’ s semen left on a chikanipata (A leaf of lotus)³². She is known as Bisahari (Snake goddess)³³ and said to have extraordinary supernatural power to bless her devotees. She can also ruin and kill those who do not believe in her existence and offer their prayer to her. There was a very rich ship merchant, named Chanrakar. He was also known to the people as Chandu Saudagar (Merchant)³⁴. He was a great devotee of Siva. He had six sons and a happy family. He did not consider Manasa as a Goddess. Manasa Debi did not like this attitude of Chandu Saudagar and killed all his six sons by sending black snakes. However Chandu Saudagar did not relent. One day pleased with the devotion of Chandu Siva appeared in his dream and expressed his willingness to bless him with some great things as per the desire of Chandu. Chandu Saudagar asked him for a son. Siva agreed to bless him with a son but put a condition before him. “

If you want to have a son who will have long life, he would be a fool, lethargic and an idiot. Instead if you want to have an ideal, intelligent and handsome son he will die at the early age of 20” , said Siva, “ now you tell me what exactly you want.” After a serious thought Chandu Saudagar opted for an intelligent son who would have a short life. Later, Chandu’ s wife gave birth to a male child whose name was Bala Lakshendra or Lakhinder. Lakhinder was bright, intelligent and a very cultured child. Everybody was happy with his behaviour. When he reached the marriageable age his father wanted to solemnise his marriage ceremony with an equally qualified and highly cultured girl. After a great search, Chandu Saudagar saw Bihula. She was very beautiful, meritorious, highly cultured and a homely girl. Chandu also came to know that according to her family tradition every woman dies as a sumangali and none of them would become a widow at any point of time. In this family tradition of Bihula, Chandu Saudagar saw a ray of hope for his dear and affectionate son Lakhinder and as a result he immediately decided to choose her as his daughter-in-law. The marriage was solemnised in a happy atmosphere. Lakhinder was bitten by a dangerous cobra at the behest of Manasa Debi on his first night of the bridal-bed in the bridal chamber itself. Lakhinder cried in helplessness and breathed his last. The innocent but firm Bihula decided to remain with his dead body on a raft in the river Ganges.

Chandu and neighbouring people made futile attempts to dissuade her. But she was determined. Finding no other alternative, Chandu gave permission to Bihula. She started her voyage on a raft along with her husband's dead body. The current slowly carried the raft. She had to face various difficulties in her journey, but she overcame them all. Ultimately she found a washerwoman washing the clothes by the side of the river Ganges. Her small child was disturbing her. Getting irritated with the behaviour of her girl child, the washerwoman killed her baby and started washing her clothes. Once she had washed all her clothes, she sprinkled some drops of water on the face of her baby and the dead baby became alive. Bihula took no time to understand the supernatural power of this lady and took shelter at her feet and narrated her the sad story. In accordance with the advice of washerwoman, Bihula reached the Mahadeoloka (Realm of gods in the kingdom of Shiva, Mahadeo)³⁵ with her. On the instruction of the washerwoman, Bihula performed a wonderful dance to please the Lord. The Lord was very impressed by her graceful performance and was moved by the story of her tragic life on earth and heaven. He called Manasa and asked her to give the reasons of her tragedy. Manasa vehemently denied that she was responsible for the tragedy of Bihula. However, Bihula succeeded in producing definite evidence. But Manasa insisted that she was not responsible for the sad plight of Bihula, and it was Chandu Saudagar, her father-in-law, who was solely responsible, because he always abused and disrespected Manasa Debi and did not consider her to be a goddess worthy of worship. Manasa then told Bihula that if Chandu Saudagar were to worship her, she would bring Lakhinder back to life. Bihula felt the hope of restoration of life for the corpse of her husband in the statement of Manasa and agreed to her proposal. Manasa then brought Lakhinder and other six sons of Chandu Saudagar back to life by chanting spells. At the humble request of Bihula, Manasa recovered all the boats of Chandu Saudagar along with the cargo and crew that had been submerged by the wrath of Manasa Debi.

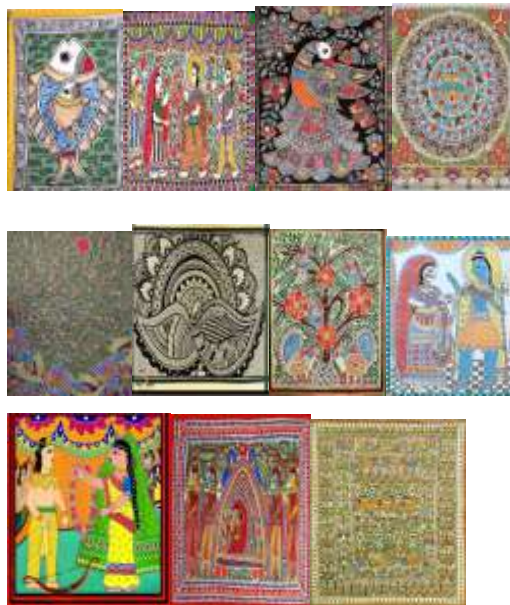
She thus fulfilled the desire of Bihula. With all the seven sons and lost property of Chandu Saudagar, Bihula came down to the city in the earth where the old eyes of Chandu Saudagar and his wife were counting the days to breathe their last. All of a sudden they received all their lost sons along with the cargo and crew. Now Chandu Saudagar realized the power of Bihula and gave his consent to worship the deity Manasa Debi. The goddess blessed him. He realized that there was none except Manasa Debi in these three worlds. Finally, he worshipped Manasa with offerings of various fruits and animals. Thus, Chandu Saudagar, a devout follower of Siva, changed his religious ideas and became one of the staunch followers of the Manasa-cult, which was originally a tantric-cum-folk cult. The other stories narrated during the Madhusravani are Satik Katha; Pativrata Sunaynak Katha; Bala-Basantak Katha; Gosaunik Katha; Chanai Bairsi Katha and Raja Srikarak Katha. The Madhusravani is celebrated in the rainy month of the Savan. Everywhere snakes and other poisonous insects are found in abundance. People try to please the deities and these serpent deities by way of offering puja, singing songs, celebrating festivals, invoking mantras etc, the place where the Madhusravani katha is narrated, is decorated with the ritual paintings. Some women sing some tantric songs (One such song called bini)³⁶ during the decoration in a falsetto tone. Through the song the snake deity is being worshipped in order to bless the people, mainly the groom of the newly married bride. The purpose behind giving the summary of one folk narrative, narrated on the occasion of the Madhusravani is to explain the interconnectivity amongst various activities in the creation of a ritual art. This interconnectedness gets lost when the art is experimented as a commodity and sold in the market in huge quantum.

A lady when painting the wall does not expect any financial return from anywhere but when she paints in order to sell her painting as a commercial production, she becomes a sales girl. Her entire attention shifts from culture to consumerism and she puts herself in the mercy of her buyers. She paints not to retain tradition but to earn better livelihood. In the last twenty years, in order to get job opportunities, a very huge population of Mithila has migrated to the cities and mega-cities of India and abroad. This is a continuous trend. Many of them have settled in those cities. They are emotionally attached with their ritual and tradition. Marriages are solemnized in these cities in the banquets and hotels. And no traditional marriage can take place without kohbara painting. These paper and cloth paintings therefore solve their purpose. Now they decorate the banquets, hotels or any other venues with the Mithila paintings and feel very much rooted in their tradition. Such development has given a new and potential group of buyers to the painters. These painters paint landscapes, rivers, and any other things their customers want them to paint. In the villages of Jitwarpur and Ratni the Mithila paintings have emerged as a commercial activity where children can be seen engaged in arranging the hand crafted paper or fetching the colours. In my recent visit to Jitwarpur, I saw Jamuna Devi teaching her more than 15 students ranging from the Brahmins to the Harijan girls. On my enquiry she said, "I teach them as their mother. They feel they are at their home. I do not charge any money from the trainees. If I charge, my art will be polluted. The best reward that I get is when a Brahmin girl after successful completion of her training touches my feet to get my blessings.

I then bless her from the innermost core of my hearts and also issue a perfection certificate.” Mithila painting is more than an art. Through this creative ability a group of women express their desires, dreams, expectations, hopes and aspirations to the people. If you ask them what they are doing they would respond, “ We are writing this kohabar or gahwar”. For them their style is a kind of script through which they communicate with the male folk or with the people of the rest of the world. They are the creative writers who write their feelings through the medium of paintings. They are the creators and close to the god in the perfection. Because of money culture some men have also jumped into this creativity but in its essence and nature even today it is a womens creativity.

3. Results and Discussion

This can be concluded that Mithila folk paintings culture especially painting has rich heritage. It has achieved eminence in the international art market. To conclude one must consider or agree that in the absence of Mithila folk painting culture there is no identity of culture in human life as well as occasion will be incomplete. If any body wants to know the nation at first he has to know the roots. There is no doubt that the cultural roots of Mithila (India) as well as Nepal basically based on Mithila Painting. The media of pictorial expression of painting are basically colour and line. Mithila Folk paintings culture give aesthetical feelings and remind us about the native life through their colourful line drawings. The repetition of same kind of line confers a harmonious unification of elements. The big attraction at Jitwarpur is that the whole village community is involved in making this painting. Everyone in Bihar's Mithila is an artist. According to time and people medium has changed. Now most of the artists use watercolors and handmade papers. But they maintain the traditional characteristics and style and themes of paintings although the medium has changed. In order to create a new source of non-agricultural income, different organizations encourage the artists to produce their traditional paintings on handmade paper for commercial sale. This way now it also widely spread.



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- 17.A local plant
- 18.Plant as well as flower of lotus
- 19.A regional variety of indigenous grass
- 20.Newly married auspicious women whose husbands are alive.
- 21.Bridal chamber where the union between the groom and the bride takes place and several rites are solemnized.
- 22.An earthen lamp a symbol of happy conjugal life.
- 23.Paper, cloth, dress materials, readymade garments, movable objects, etc.,
- 24.Famine poetry.
- 25.Spining wheel.
- 26.Sacred thread.
- 27.Symbolic marriage paintings.
- 28.Tattooing.
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