

# MADHUBANI- THE EXOTIC ART OF MITHILA

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## ABSTRACT

*The aim of this paper is to preserve the originality of the art form. The recent trends of consumerism, market and selling attitude have made this art a maidservant of the moneyed people. The selling of art and modifying it is not bad but it should not affect the creativity of the people. Due to the contemporary styles the real essence of this folk art is disappearing which in turn is also depleting the values associated with it. A serious thought is urgently required before the traditional creativity and values are drained out to nothing. NGO professionals, researchers, folk artists, and people concerned all should take concrete steps and the appropriate measures to retain this art in its originality because it's a legacy being passed down from generations.*

**Keywords: Mithila, Nature, Kachni , Bharni, Sita , Deforestation, Originality**

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## INTRODUCTION

Mithila painting, popularly known as Madhubani painting, is a folk art of Bihar region in northern India. It is primarily practiced by women in the villages of Mithila, Bihar, who have inherited this art from their ancestors and has passed it on to their daughters and next generations. The women of villages usually make use of those raw materials, which are easily available in abundance locally in the area they are surrounded with. These paintings were made on the walls and floors of the village houses but with the advent of new mediums and demand for this art, these are now being made on paper, canvas, cloth and other moving objects also.

Through these paintings they express their imagination, desire, dream and expectations. It is a source of entertainment and venting out their creativity. As art and creativity have no connection with the person's literacy, their art can be treated as a style of writing by which

their aspirations, emotions, expectations, freedom of thoughts find expression. As these paintings are traditionally made by women, one can understand the psyche of women by deeply analyzing these paintings. In every corner of our great nation India, one can see the creativity of women. We see the example of *Kashidakari* in Kashmir, double sided Chamba embroidery, *Phulkari* in Punjab, *Warli* painting in Maharashtra, *Chikan* embroidery in Lucknow, weaving in the North-east, *Kantha* in Bengal, miniature paintings in the state of Rajasthan and in the city of Tanjore, *Kethari*, *Sujani* and of course *Mithila* paintings in the Mithila region of Bihar.

## **BACKGROUND**

Initially pictures from nature, mythology and various life events like birth, marriage etc. were depicted in the paintings but with the changing time and new generation the budding artists are experimenting and adapting the styles of modern life. In Bihar region, this folk art has been practiced for centuries but it started gaining popularity and recognition in the last few decades. A few years ago not many people had heard about this style of painting but with the development of technology and people's awareness about the art & culture of India many people know about it. There are many Madhubani artists in big cities of India now.

Mithila region is situated on the border of India and Nepal and has a rich cultural legacy in art and literature. Its heritage goes back at least 2,500 years. Sita, the central character in Ramayana was daughter of the king of Mithila. Hence, Ramayana and her life stories are prominently depicted in this art form.

The paintings traditionally depict mythological, folk themes and rural symbols. The basic themes of most paintings are love, valour, devotion and fertility, though the approach may be different. So it is common to see scenes of courtship and marriages and symbols of fertility and prosperity like fish, parrot, elephant, turtle, sun, moon, bamboo tree, lotus, etc. in the paintings. The divine characters are placed centrally in the frame while consorts and floral designs form the background. The human figures are usually abstract and linear.

Even though this art is age old, it has been preserved in its original style and content with excellent continuity despite the passage of time, repeated foreign invasions, and the enormous growth in population in its land of origin i.e. Mithila. Traditionally only natural colours are used in Madhubani painting but in modern times synthetic colors are also being used. Some passionate artists still make natural colors by extracting them from plants. The natural colours are derived from clay, leaves and barks of trees, flowers, berries, metals and vegetables. Plant resin was used with the colours, primarily as a binder, to make the paint

stick. The colors used are usually deep red, green, blue, black, light yellow, pink and lemon although some painting styles used colours more boldly while others made use of muted shades and lines to fill up the painting.

The painting has two styles – Kachni (hatching) and Bharni (shading.) Kachni uses delicate fine lines to fill the painting and not much color is used. Bharni (shading) uses solid colors to shade and fill the pictures. The painting is made with double black outlines filled with vibrant colors. Numerous patterns are drawn with hatching and stippling. Even now during important occasions of birth and marriage paintings are made on walls with auspicious symbols like lotus, bamboo and fish. The designs depict the occasion of the celebration and attract good fortune and blessings for the family.

### **FACTS ABOUT MITHILA PAINTINGS**



#### **1. When Rama and Sita tied knot, Madhubani style of painting was born**

Mithila paintings; you hear the name and right away you know there is a connection between this style of painting and Ramayana, right? And yes, there is.

The origin of this style of painting is related to the famous ‘Sita Kalyan’. It’s said that King Janaka, father of Sita, arranged quite a number of artists to create paintings of the marriage. According to history, this is when Madhubani style of painting was born.

## **2. Believe it or not, Madhubani paintings prevent deforestation**

Artists from Bihar are using Madhubani paintings as a way to prevent trees from being cut down. The artists of this region are drawing Madhubani paintings on the trees and since the paintings mostly depict Hindu deities, people restrain from cutting them down.

According to a report from BBC, “The Madhubani artists believe that they are showing the world how an art form can be used to convey a strong social message in an effective way.”

## **3. Once on mud walls, today- on canvas to bangles**

It is the women who live in rural areas of Bihar do the traditional ‘Madhubani art’. But today, things have changed and now this style is popular not only among the people of India, but also among the people of other countries, especially US and Japan.

During the traditional times, this type of painting used to be done on mud walls of houses that were freshly plastered. Now, you would find Madhubani paintings on canvas, cushions, paper or even cloths. People are also doing Madhubani artwork on utensils and even bangles.

## **4. It isn't just Gods you can see in Madhubani paintings**

Hindu mythologies and deities has always been a prolific presence in the Madhubani paintings and it still is. These paintings are mostly about Hindu deities like Krishna, Ram, Shiva, Lakshmi, Durga etc. At times, events like weddings have also made it to the canvas of Madhubani paintings. Whatever space is left on the surface is never left alone and the space is filled with some simple paintings of flowers or even geometric designs.

## **5. There are Exclusive Madhubani Painting Art Galleries around the World**

Today, many exclusive art galleries for Madhubani paintings can be found in India and even overseas. The MITHILAsmita is an organization formed by some entrepreneurs for carrying on the tradition of Mithila paintings. This art gallery is located in Bengaluru, India. Apart from the art gallery, they also organize exhibitions for these paintings time to time.

In Japan, there is one 'Mithila Museum', which has over 850 Madhubani paintings. The museum also conducts research and also works for the publicity of these paintings. Also, in the town of Madhubani, there is also a 'Mithila Art Institute', which stands for the development of Madhubani paintings and also for the training of young artists.

## **CONCLUSION**

If the *Bharat Natyam*, *Manipuri*, *Kuchipuri*, *Odissi* and the *Satria* dance forms can be retained in their originality (not of course in the water tight compartment) and get popularized day by day, why cannot this great folk painting be also retained in its originality in harmony with the nature, people and the tradition! The recent trends of consumerism, market and selling attitude have made this art a maidservant of the moneyed people. Selling art objects is not a bad practice but surrendering the entire traditional creativity and values before buyers at the cost of originality is something that disturbs a commoner or an insider where such art is done. A serious thought is urgently needed in order to retain the original flavour and smells of the Mithila paintings. Researchers, NGO professionals, folk artists, and people concerned all should come together to adopt the appropriate measures to retain this art in its originality.

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