

Madhubani Paintings: Its Existence and Possibility

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Abstract- Indian art history has given a rich storage of traditional painting in Indian sub-continent from pre-history to present time. The style of painting differs from region to region and period to period. There is a living tradition in the art field of Bihar that is called Madhubani painting which enlightened about the social structure as well as cultural identity of Bihar and the styles of painting has been changing from generation to generation.

The article deals with the history, subject matter, use of raw materials and styles of Madhubani Paintings in the context of the role of local artisans of Jitwarpur village in it. Article focuses on the paintings of Madhubani with special emphasis to the present scenario of Madhubani painting and how the village painters express their skill through organic colours and free hand brush drawing.

I. Section 1

Painting is generally done by folk artists or classical artists in three ways: wall-painting (*bhitti chitra*), canvas-painting (*pata chitra*) and floor-painting (*aripana*). Among these the wall-painting and the floor-painting are very popular in Mithila region. The Wall-paintings or Mural paintings, popularly known as Mithila painting or Madhubani painting (Thakur: 1982). Madhubani is a district of North Bihar, a place where art and crafts have reached its stage of excellence. This part of the country is renowned for wall paintings, floor paintings, canvas painting and decorative crafts like wooden toys, Pottery toys and papier-mache products (www.madhubaniart.com). The tradition of Madhubani painting of Bihar has continued unbroken to the present day and has yet evolved with the times and changing more. These paintings are practiced by the women folk, which is an exclusively feminine school of folk painting. The lovely canvas paintings seen at every house in Madhubani are very much attractive, whether painted with colours or black ink. Madhubani paintings are practiced till date in the village of Jitwarpur, Ranti, Rasidpur, Bacchi, Rajangarh, etc. Madhubani painting is a rich traditional style, rooted in region of Mithila in Bihar. It is not only limited to the artist of the villages of Madhubani. But also cannoiscisser of art living beyond all over the country as well as abroad. This art is said to date back to the times of the Ramayana when it is believed Janaka who ruled Mithila, commissioned artist make painting on the occasion of his daughter Sita to Rama (www.mithilaart.com). Origin of this continuity may be traced to the continuous spell of Hindu role in Mithila from 1097 AD to c1550AD under the *Karnatas* and the *Oinavaras* which continued uninterruptedly under the *Khandavala* dynasty (Darbhanga raj) till the present day (Thakur: 1882). About the history of Madhubani painting, artist Rajkumar Lal mentioned, “in around 1934 the place Madhubani attacked by a big earthquake. In 1960, few members of the All India Handicrafts Board, Delhi, came to Madhubani for survey. At that time they attracted by the wall painting of Madhubani. They gave suggestions to some local artisans to paint on cloth and paper in their traditional way. They also encouraged the women of Madhubani for commercial sale”. Since then the painting medium has diversified. Wall paintings were transferred to handmade paper (which was of poster size) and gradually it praised for other mediums and motifs like greeting cards, dress materials, etc. It is assumed that this was the turning point of Madhubani folk painting. He also said that his grandmother Jagadamba devi was first artist of Madhubani painting who got national award in 1970 and Padmasree award in 1975 from India government.

II. Section 2

Madhubani is a district of North Bihar situated at a distance of 190 kilometers from Patna city. The village Jitwarpur is around two/three kilometers away from Madhubani Railway station. A big cultural activity of Bihar is traditionally practiced by different community artist like Bramhan, Kayastha and schedule caste in this village. Jitwarpur village is surrounded by lush green fields, long palm trees, and picturesque mango gardens of North Bihar. It is completely flat and free from rock or stone. The inner landscape is characterized small brick huts where maximum walls are decorated with ritual design, well natured date trees and mango trees the village is unique one with exquisite natural and artistic beauty which captures viewer's imagination and an ideal atmosphere for research purpose (especially field work study on Madhubani painting). The artisans of Jitwarpur have eagerness to develop and express their own cultural activities in front of the world. Anybody will be surprise to see their skill full ritual decorations and paintings. Madhubani artists are very simple house wives who do not go to any school to learn this painting. Their tradition is going on from generation to generation. In Mithila the women of all communities are working on these paintings, but the paintings of the women of the Brahmana and Kayastha communities are unique. Their subject matter and technique is different from schedule caste painters because they are educated then the other caste people. Now a days about ninety nine percent people of Madhubani district are working on this field. Some artisans of Jitwarpur who are still working on the field of Madhubani, they are Sibana Paswan, Shanti

Devi, Rajkumar Lal, Kamolesh Korn, Mahasundari Devi, Biva Lal Das, Rekha Das, Satya Narayan Korn, Joy Narayayn Lal Das. And they already have made their position on the market field in India and abroad. They have been participated so many workshops in Denmark, Dubai, and German. Among them some artists are national awardees and state awardees. Some non living women artists of Madhubani are; Jagadamba Devi, Ganga Devi, Sita Devi, Yoshoda Devi, Bua Devi who has made their contribution in Madhubani art history. After visiting the Jitwarpur village and observing their paintings we can sum up that the villages itself is a Madhubani artist camp.

The attributes characterizing almost all Madhubani paintings are:-

1. Use of bold natural and artificial colours.
2. A double line border with simple geometric designs or with ornate floral patterns on it.
3. Symbols, lines and patterns supporting the main theme.
4. Abstract-like figures, of deities or human.
5. The faces of the figures have large bulging eyes and a jolting nose emerging out of the forehead.

Madhubani painting is an emblematic expression of day-to-day experiences and beliefs. As such, symbolism, simplicity and beauty hold them together in a single school of traditional art. The symbols that these Maithili painters use have their specific meanings as, for instance, fish symbolize fertility, procreation and good luck, peacocks are associated with romantic love and religion, and serpents are the divine protectors. Characterized by vibrant use of colour, underlying symbolism and traditional geometric patterns supporting the main theme, the Indian folk art form of Madhubani succeeded in creating a place for itself in the international house of fame and is now recognized worldwide. The Government of India is also paying its tribute by starting training programs educating people on Madhubani paintings.

Till date the artisan of Madhubani paintings are used colours directly from nature. Lamp soot served as a source of black, White from powdered rice, green was made from the leaves of the apple tree and Tilcoat (Fig.10.c), blue from the seeds of *Sikkot* (Fig.10.d) and *indigo*, yellow was drawn from the parts of *singar* flower (Fig.10.a) or Jasmine flower, bark of peepal was to be boiled to make a part of saffron colour, red was made from *kusum* flower and red sandal wood. To make the painting last long as well as to take brightness they mixed gum with colour. Artist Shanti Devi says that the use of synthetic colour and modern round brushes are replacing the cotton tipped bamboo sticks and stiff twigs that used to serve as brushes still a few years back. A living artist Gouri Shankar interpreted that, at first he made rough sketch then detail drawing of subject matter is completed with bold straight and curve lines. Finally, the drawing is filled with different colours whenever it is required. The colours in the paintings are applied flat and the figures are rendered with double outlines with the space in between filled with thin crosshatchings or slanting lines. Over a period of time distinct style evolved with practitioners from different social background bringing their own word view and aesthetics understanding into their paintings. These styles can broadly be categorized as *geru*, *bharhi*, *kachni*, *gobar* and *godna*.

Thematically, Madhubani paintings are mostly based on religion and mythology. In the paintings of little tradition, Gods like Raja Salesh, Buddheshwar, Jutki Malini, Reshma, and the likes occurs in abundance. Great tradition is a tribute to the Hindu Gods like Krishna-Radha, Shiva-Parvati, Ganesha, Maa Durga, and the likes (Thakur:1982). Nevertheless, natural scenes of villages, everyday life, flora and fauna which are so much a part of life of this school of painters also entered the domain of *Godhna* paintings. A visit to the Jitwarpur village of Madhubani district enlightened about the Madhubani painting. The effort of the artists makes one realize about the time they give for their painting and how their lives are completely involved around their painting as this is the any source while fetches then bread and butter. Everybody knows that Mithila is the birthplace of Sita and that is why the artisan visualized several scene of Ramayana. According to them fish is symbol of goodluck and holyness. Fish also symbolize water with which it is associated. Besides abstract human figure the motifs and design are seen in Madhubani painting such as; flora and fauna, curve linear devices, circle in series, series of short lines ,peacock, fish, flower, birds, animal and other natural life. The central theme the Madhubani paintings is the Hindu Gods and Goddesses. The outline is usually left uncolored, in order to create a visual depth and aesthetical taste. while religious painting include various god and goddesses, secular and decorative paintings contain various symbol and prosperity and fertility such as elephant horse, lion parrot, turtle, bamboo, lotus, flower, *purania* leaves, *pana* flower, creepers, swastika, *samka* etc. forms on the background. The human figures are mostly abstract and linear in forms and the animals are usually naturalistic and are invariably depicted in profile. Border of Madhubani painting has equal important as like as theme and style. To make border attractive the artists are applied strong linear design of geometrical symbols and other flora and fauna. Madhubani painting has become major part of their daily life and it is easily understood when anybody visits their house then he/she will be found somebody is working on this painting like sharee, bad cover, mural painting, paper painting etc. Artist Komolesh Korn express his view, at first he made line drawing of different image with water proof ink on handmade paper where these two products are available in the market. And this way they made several line drawing painting near about 100/150 of different size (small size). Many foreigners come to the village of Madhubani for research purpose and they purchase these painting and also give commercial order to the artisans and then they apply colours on these black and white linear paintings on the spot and sale. All the artists of Madhubani are used natural and synthetic colours and no doubt they are enjoying their tradition but now days they make painting according to customers demand. Some artists are expert in free hand drawing. *Kohober* is one of the important type of Madhubani painting which made at the time of marriage. Marriage of *Bihari* people and *kohober* painting is synonymous to each other. *Kohober* indicates a specially

decorated room with elaborate paintings on the walls where married couple enters for their first meeting after marriage. These particular wall paintings are done only by some expert women artist. They used only red colour on *kohobar* painting, no other colour is allowed to be used except red which is traditionally supposed to be very auspicious.

Madhubani artist has a sufficient demand in foreign country and it is proved by the experience of some eminent artist of Jitwarpur village of Madhubani. According to Rajkumar Lal, on his second visit to Mauritius had a very positive response by the audience about the workshop, he said *"I was surprised to receive New Year card this year (2010) on madhubani painting in Mauritius style"*. The principal of the college of art and crafts (patna) Anunoy Choubey said, *"The world of Madhubani painting continues to evolve and influence other forms of contemporary art today"*. About contemporary field of Madhubani painting, Choubey express her view *"I was invited to Mauritius to set up the department, there was tremendous enthusiasm. It was a new journey for Madhubani painting crossing over boundaries and culture"*. *Now painting are done on jute bags, sarees, other apparel, pen holders, file covers, mobile cover etc. It had picked up fast to provide a full of Bihar far away from our shores. What is however distinct is the innovations in the Madhubani painting to depict Mauritius culture and history. It has become quite popular, with the blending of regional colours and theme giving it an entirely new dimension. Madhubani art has been introduced in a new place and a new context and its relevance and meaning tasted by non Madhubani artist, so successfully, to be a testimony to the greatness of this art form from Bihar* (Hindustan Times, Saturday 2010). This proved that Madhubani is amalgamated with other foreign style and this type of workshop will help to continue the tradition of Mithila or Madhubani painting.

Beside this, some centers are playing vital role to develop the cultural scenario of Bihar. Amongst them Office of Development Commissioner (Handicrafts) Ministry of Textile, Government of India is working under Government in Bihar state and this give chances to express their (Madhubani artisans) own cultural activity in the deferent places. Carpet training officer Bipin Kr Das says that 38 training centers in Bihar state are running on. 21 centers in North Bihar and 17 in South Bihar are located. The main objective of these kinds of centers are to develop the skill of artisans of different places of state, to give a financial assistant for capacity building and to conduct awareness-cum-training workshops/seminar for artisans, NGOs etc. office of development commissioner (handicrafts) ministry of textile, government of India has different type of schemes like design and technology up gradation, training and extension ,financial assistance SHDC/Apex societies, marketing support and service, Babashaheb Ambedkar Hastashilp Vikash Yojana etc. up gradation of artisan skill, improvement and diversification of product, development of new design and prototypes, supply of improved/modern equipment to the craft persons revival of rare crafts to preserve the traditional heritage, preservation of traditional art and crafts of high aesthetics value, etc. A training center Upendra Maharathi handicrafts institute of Patna, bearing a six months course of Madhubani painting under the scheme of Indian government. There some selected teachers are employed to train Madhubani paintings to students. Some rare collectionsof painting and decorative crafts are well preserved in this institution. Sri Nagar Kishore Das a Madhubani based artists of Jitwarpur is one of the trainers in this institute. The materials which are used for the paintings are; hardboards, papers, fabric colours and enamel colours. As it is a short term course so organic colours which takes a long process and time are replaced with readymade colours.

III SECTION 3

Thus, it can be concluded that folk culture of Mithila as 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 folk painting there is no identity of culture in human life as well as occasion will be incomplete. If anybody wants to know the nation at first he has to know the roots. There is no doubt that the cultural roots of Mithila as well as Bihar basically based on Madhubani painting. The media of pictorial expression of painting are basically colour and line. . Folk paintings 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 Madhubani 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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3. Contact person-

a. We got maximum necessary information for this documentation from Sri Vinay Kumar, BAS, Director (Cultural Affairs). Youth Art and culture Dept. Government of Bihar

b. We had interviews with some artisans of Jitwarpur village (Madhubani). They are:

- I. *Sri. Rajkumar Lal,*
- II. *Komolesh Korn,*
- III. *GouriShankor Lal Das,*
- IV. *SibanPaswan and*
- V. *Shanti Dev*

PLATES



Fig.1:Madhubani Painter Komollesh Korn.



Fig.2 Artist Rajkumar Lal is doing his painting



Fig.3: Mithila folk Art workshop, Patna.
Organized by, Bihar Lalit Kala Academy.



Fig.4: Upendra Maharathi Crafts Institute (Patna).



Fig.5 Biva Devi with her painting

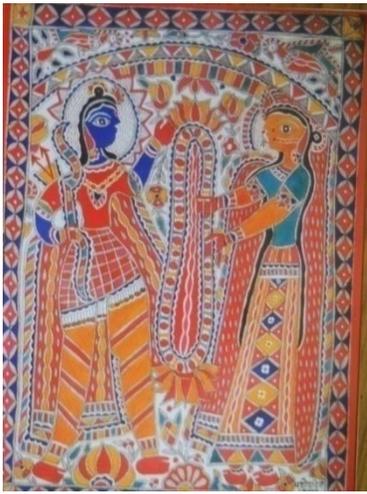


Fig.6 Madhubani painting by Rajkumar Lal (Ram- Sita)



Fig.7 Work of Gouri Shankar (Saree pallu)



Fig.8 Work of Kamolesh Korn (paper painting)



Fig.9 Line Drawing by Komolesh Korn



Fig. a: Singhar



Fig. b: Singhar with water (yellow colour)



Fig.c: Tilcoat leaves (green colour)



Fig. d: Sikkot (blue colour)

Fig.10: Natural sources of colours which are used by Madhubani painters.