



Arts

## MITHILA- A GLOBALIZED ART FORM

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### Abstract

India has long been a focal point of art. From the traditional to the contemporary, India is fast developing itself as a key destination for those who love art. India is marked by its rich traditional heritage of Tribal/Folk Arts and Culture. Since the days of remote past, the diversified art and cultural forms generated by the tribal and rural people of India have continued to evince their creative magnificence. Apart from their outstanding brilliance from the perspective of aesthetics, the tribal/folk art and culture forms have played an instrumental role in reinforcing national integrity, crystallizing social solidarity, fortifying communal harmony, intensifying value-system and promoting the elements of humanism among the people of the country. Folk and tribal arts are relatively less exposed forms of narrative Indian art and contain within them a gamut of styles originating from various geographical regions in India.

Women in the Mithila region of Bihar in north India have painted colorful auspicious images on the interior walls of their homes on the occasion of domestic rituals since at least the 14th century. This ancient tradition, especially elaborated for marriages, continues today. Madhubani painting or Mithila is a style of Indian painting, practiced in the Mithila region of Bihar state, India, and the adjoining parts of Terai in Nepal. Painting on paper for sale has changed this dramatically. Aside from generating important new family income, individual women have gained local, national, and even international recognition. Artists are being invited to exhibitions across India, and to Europe, the United States, and Japan - no longer as "folk artists," but now as "contemporary artists." Mithila's contemporary arts offer astonishingly vital -- and long overlooked -- depth and diversity, ranging from wondrous elaborations of traditional themes and styles to more experimental depictions of new, topical subject matter.

**Keywords:** Tribal/Folk Arts; Communal Harmony; Paintings in Mithila Region; Madhubani Painting.

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## 1. Introduction

India has long been a focal point of art. From the traditional to the contemporary, India is fast developing itself as a key destination for those who love art. India is marked by its rich traditional heritage of Tribal/Folk Arts and Culture. Since the days of remote past, the diversified art and cultural forms generated by the tribal and rural people of India have continued to evince their creative magnificence. Apart from their outstanding brilliance from the perspective of aesthetics, the tribal/folk art and culture forms have played an instrumental role in reinforcing national integrity, crystallizing social solidarity, fortifying communal harmony, intensifying value-system and promoting the elements of humanism among the people of the country.



Figure1: traditional Mithila painting depicting religious theme (Krishna leela)

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 Mithila 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. This paper focuses on the paintings of Mithila with emphasis to the present scenario of Mithila painting and how the village painters express their creative skill through organic colours and free hand brush drawing and making it as a Globalized art form.

Women in the Mithila region of Bihar in north India have painted colorful auspicious images on the interior walls of their homes on the occasion of domestic rituals since at least the 14th century. Madhubani painting or Mithila is a style of Indian painting, practiced in the Mithila



region of Bihar state, India, and the adjoining parts of Terai in Nepal are characterized by line drawings based on mythological themes, in bright colours and decorative borders. They are so called because they originated in and around a large agricultural town in Bihar, Madhubani or 'Forest of Honey'. Originally, Mithila Paintings were executed on freshly plastered mud walls, on religious occasions or weddings. Each painting was a prayer and an accompaniment to meditation. Well executed paintings were believed to be inhabited by the deities depicted in them. The colours used in these paintings were made from natural dyes. The tradition of Mithila 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. Mithila paintings are practiced till date in the village of Jitwarpur, Ranti, Rasidpur, Bacchi, Rajangarh, etc. This art is said to date back to the times of the Ramayana when it is believed Janaka who ruled.



Figure 1: A traditional Mithila painting on wall depicting religious theme (God and goddess)

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Figure 2: A Contemporary Mithila paintings depicting symbolic themes

The attributes characterizing almost all Mithila or 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.

These paintings are known for their use of bright, vibrant colors, are full of creative skill, simplicity and rawness of these creations is also what makes them it most appealing to the general masses.

These paintings lack refinement and richness, so elitist groups who supposedly associated with sophisticated pure art did not bother to give them much exposure. Only in the start of the twentieth century did scholars begin their research on the subject and begin to realize the true value of Indian folk paintings. What makes these paintings special is that each of these types of paintings uniquely reflects the cultural and socioeconomic milieu in that territory of India, giving us a clear idea about the life and work in that region.

Though these women carried on with their paintings for centuries, this art was known and acknowledged only as late as the 1960s, when the area was affected by severe drought. Looking for a different, non-agricultural way of earning money, they began to bring their paintings out into the open in a bid to sell them and earn a livelihood. Painting on paper for sale has changed this dramatically. Aside from generating important new family income, individual women have gained local, national, and even international recognition. The women and young girls today are going outside the state. Horizons have widened and perspectives have changed from mere existence to recognition and empowerment as artists.



Figure 5: A Contemporary Mithila paintings on textile and lamp shade (functional and utility products)

Also, prey to cyclic development and fast changing market demand. Majority of the Mithila Madhubani painting artists find it extremely difficult to consider painting as their primary source of livelihood due to prevailing uncertain market. There are not able to earn even minimum daily

wage rate. Since they do not have any other livelihood option such as farmland, hence continue making paintings as subsidiary means of livelihood for survival. The Mithila or Madhubani painting art form has basically two components- first the traditional style of painting and second application of the art form on a material. The traditional skilled and master painters are comfortable doing something which they have traditionally continued doing so long and that worked well for them. Nowadays the new generation of artists are gradually improvising on the themes, narratives, size, color palette etc. mostly on two dimensional surfaces and are encouraged to develop innovative, functional and utility products range for the large contemporary market segment.

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 Mithila 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 color, underlying symbolism and traditional geometric patterns supporting the main theme, the Indian folk art form of Mithila 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 Mithila paintings. Many foreigners come to the village of Madhubani for research purpose and they purchase these painting and give commercial order to the artisans. Artists are being invited to exhibitions across India, and to Europe, the United States, and Japan - no longer as "folk artists," but now as "contemporary artists." Today, Mithila Paintings are made on silk, handmade paper, cloth, canvas etc. for commercial purposes. The uses of chemical dyes and paints have resulted in brighter multi coloured paintings.

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