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Madhubani Painting: The Innovations, Collaborations and Dialogues of Folklore in Folk Art

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Abstract: Art provides a crucial connection to our cultures and Indian art is incredibly rich in traditions dating back hundreds of thousands of years. Madhubani paintings are among the most popular art disciplines. It is typically created by women from diverse communities in Bihar's Madhubani district. It's also known as Mithila painting in India and Nepal. It is a type of folk art in which artists make paintings with a range of mediums such as their fingers or twigs, brushes, nib-pens and matchsticks. The painting designs are thought to have started during the Ramayana when king Janaka commissioned artists to portray his daughter Sita's wedding. Madhubani paintings have a minimum of 2500 years of history and these are also related to Buddha and Mahavira. Its primary feature is individuals and their rituals, including Holi, Kali Puja, Surya Shasti, Durga Puja and Upanayana. These paintings are strongly related to landscapes, natural scenes and deities from ancient epics. Natural sources are usually used to make both the colors and the brushes, the kind of simplicity that has made this Madhubani painting very renowned. Religion, social and natural elements are the three major themes of Madhubani painting. It was traditionally done on freshly plastered mud walls and floors of huts but recently developed on fabric, handmade paper and canvas. Some unique styles of Madhubani paintings are Tantrik, Kohbar, Bharni, Godna and Katchni. It beautifully renders scenes from daily rural Indian life. Despite having been practiced for centuries, Madhubani paintings were come to light by British Colonial Officer William G. Archer in 1934. Now, the government of India is also promoting this traditional painting.

Keywords: Madhubani Painting, History, Culture, Epic, Folk Art, Tradition, Style.

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Introduction

India is a differentiated country with regions spanning from the Himalayas in the north to Kanyakumari in the south and from Gujarat in the west to Arunachal Pradesh in the east. Each

Indian state has its own community and cultural practices which include clothing, customs, rituals, beliefs, language and crafts. Madhubani is a traditional painting of the Madhubani district of Bihar state. The painting is practiced in the region of Mithila of India and Nepal, that's why it is also known as Mithila painting. It has gradually influenced the state's social structure, personality and painting styles. They use classic motifs to keep their patterns or topics relevant. Art provides a crucial connection to our cultures and Indian art is incredibly rich in traditions dating back hundreds of thousands of years. India's cultural, traditional and reigns variety create a multicultural society with strong connections between people and culture. Indian arts and crafts showcase the country's rich legacy via stunning designs influenced by monuments, architecture, religion and nature. Indian traditional folk arts and painting are crucial for producing new designs. India is home to a vast array of folk and tribal art, such as the Patachitra paintings from Odisha, Phad and Pichhvai paintings from Rajasthan, Kalamkari from Andhra Pradesh, Warli paintings from Maharashtra, Nirmal paintings from Andhra Pradesh, Aipan from Uttarakhand, Pithoro paintings from Gujarat, Gond and Mandana paintings from Madhya Pradesh, Kalighat paintings from Calcutta and many more. Madhubani paintings are among the most popular art disciplines. Madhubani painting is a different type of folk art in India. It is one of the most recognized pieces of art in Bihar, created by generations of skillful painters. These paintings are both together vivid and significant. Madhubani paintings successfully depict many aspects of tribal life. Essentially, these are visual representations or illustrations of folk art.

Origin and History

According to the oral history of the region of Mithila, Madhubani paintings originated in Mithila which is the birthplace of Sita. The Madhubani paintings are not directly mentioned in the Hindu epic Ramayana. The Ramayana primarily focuses on the epic narrative of Lord Rama and his journey, rather than specific art forms. The people of this region believe that when Sita's father King Janaka, ordered some painters to make Madhubani paintings for his daughter Sita's wedding. It is not mentioned in any versions of the Ramayana. However, the themes and characters from the Ramayana often serve as inspiration for Madhubani artists, who depict scenes from the epic in their intricate and colorful paintings. While there may not be direct references to Madhubani paintings in ancient texts like the Ramayana, the art form has become closely associated with the cultural heritage of the region and draws from the rich mythological and cultural traditions of India. If you're looking for references to art in the Ramayana, it primarily describes the beauty of landscapes, palaces, and the appearance of divine beings and celestial realms, rather than specific artistic styles or techniques. It is usually created by women from numerous communities. Madhubani women have a strong artistic tradition that has been passed down from generation to generation. This classical art can still be found in many Indian art structures today. This art genre is inspired by the cultures and daily lives of various local communities in the Madhubani district. Women have practiced these paintings on the walls of their houses. Their ideas, aspirations, and desires are reflected in these paintings. Madhubani paintings date back at least two millennia. Madhubani painting styles are linked to Buddha and Mahavira. We find some paintings which portray the stories of Buddhism and Jainism. Before 1930, individuals living outside the Madhubani region were unaware of the Madhubani paintings. In 1934, a huge earthquake struck Bihar and

the maximum area of the district of Madhubani was destroyed. A British officer named William G. Archer studied the ruined walls of Madhubani and discovered these unique handicrafts. He appreciated Indian art culture and introduced it to people living outside of Madhubani.



Figure 1: Ram Sita Vivah, Madhubani Painting

Structures

Painting is more than just an art form. It represents hope and dreams for people. It expresses daily experiences and beliefs. Indian folk art has contributed significantly to the development of new painting genres, colors, styles and techniques. Madhubani paintings effectively follow in the

traditions of Indian folklore, art and aesthetics. Madhubani Painting provides livelihood support to around 20000-25000 artisan households in the Madhubani district and other parts of Bihar. Madhubani painting has become synonymous with Bihar's art and skill throughout the world. The structure of Madhubani paintings is similar to folk art. One characteristic of Madhubani paintings that sets them apart is that there is never a blank area. Typically, paintings will have a margin or border, which will be adorned with geometrical patterns, flowers or other themes. Madhubani paintings are usually related to religion and mythology. This famous art form emerged partly from the ancient practice of wall paintings called *Bhitti Chitra* in Bihar and Nepal.

Features

India is a nation with a rich culture and tradition. Madhubani painting is both a part of Bihar's cultural identity and an enlightened living heritage of societal assembly. Madhubani paintings can be miniatures in size or enormous like frescoes. The paintings are divided into sections that are vertical and horizontal to show different times and places. Additionally, some paintings depict social gatherings and follow some rules of the royal court style. In Madhubani paintings Gods and goddesses frequently have shorter and deformed bodies. Paintings of Ganesha and Radha-Krishna are a very common feature of it. The eyes are painted in a frontal position, while the faces are displayed in profile. Usually, the eyes are painted in last. Traditionally, at promising occasions and rituals, this art is painted. The primary feature of Madhubani paintings is their black lines. Throughout the entire picture, the artist practiced double lines. Artists removed the previous painting after a few days and created a new one on top of it. These works are therefore extremely difficult to preserve. These days, the Madhubani district's women paint on various surfaces to start making a good living.

Contents and Characters

A picture speaks louder than a thousand words. The borders of country-time location are widely spread in the painting's timeless language. We can judge a nation or community through her paintings. Madhubani painting is like that, which promotes India all over the world. Madhubani painting is just like that, which promotes India including Bihar state all over the world. Paintings of Madhubani are one type of folk art. Line drawings full of vivid, contrasting colors, patterns and striking geometric shapes define its character. These paintings are the handmade craft of artisans. Madhubani painting is another kind of rural art that means 'Forests of Honey'. *Madhu* means honey and *Ban* means forest or wood. This art genre gets content from certain occasions, like births and marriages, Holi, Kali Puja, Surya Shasti, Durga Puja and Upanayana. The majority of Scenes from everyday life, landscapes and deities of classical epics are the hallmarks of Madhubani paintings. Art enthusiasts love Madhubani paintings because they represent social events, plants, animals and natural objects. Bold colors both manufactured and natural are used in almost all of Madhubani paintings. Artists embellish with intricate floral designs and use two lines. The painting's lines, patterns and symbols support the main idea. Abstract shapes are used to represent human or divine entities.

Symbols

The paintings of Madhubani are a symbol of ordinary experiences. Together symbolism, simplicity and beauty exemplify this traditional art. Madhubani painters use symbols that have particular connotations. The fish is a representation of wealth, fertility and good fortune. It stands for the

existence of the Goddess Laxmi. In Madhubani art, fish pairs are commonly shown. The lotus flower represents spiritual development, enlightenment and purity. It is connected to Lord Vishnu. The peacock is a symbol of grace, beauty and royalty. It represents immortality because, even when the peacock dies its feathers remain intact. The sun and moon stand for the complementary yet conflicting energies of light and dark, masculine and feminine. The elephant is a symbol of luck, power and wisdom. It is revered as a protector and serves as a symbol of royalty. The snake is a symbol of eternity and the circle of life. It also serves as a shield from bad powers as a symbol. The tiger is a sign of fierceness, power, bravery and valor. It is revered as the defender and keeper of Madhubani art. The mango tree is a symbol of wealth, prosperity and fertility. Its fruits are a representation of happiness, health and wealth. The common sight of a crow perched on a mango tree represents knowledge, discernment and attentiveness. The tortoise motif is used to show as a symbol of prosperity and fertility. A large number of regional, religious and epic symbols are also used in Madhubani painting.



Figure 2: Peacock, Madhubani Painting

Process and Themes

Indian ideas and culture have a major influence on Madhubani Printing's topic. The passion for Hindu deities and love of nature always inspired these traditional folk forms. Painters use a range of tools to make Madhubani paintings, such as brushes, nib pens, matchsticks, and their fingers or twigs. One brush is utilized to colorize a single area of the drawing in this painting technique. This operation is called filling or hatching. At the end, larger sections of paintings can be filled

with color by using bamboo sticks that have a ball of fabric. Natural dyes and pigments made from the indigenous flora were traditionally used for painting. The painters have shifted to acrylic paints due to the rise in demand for paintings and the irregularity of natural raw materials. In these paintings, boundaries delineate images or symbols. Evolution is connected to Madhubani art practice. It addressed a wide range of artistic techniques. The painting's primary character is deftly described and brought to life. The remaining areas are occupied by supporting figures, colors and patterns. To finish the painting more decorations are added on golden points. Traditionally, the paintings were done on the floors and walls of huts, but canvas, cloth and handmade paper they are now also used for it. There are three major themes in Madhubani paintings and they are Religious stories, Social scenes and Elements of nature. Religious stories are based on gods-goddesses and mythological characters. The themes found in Madhubani paintings primarily revolve around deities such as Raja Satesh, Buddheshwar, Jutki Malini and Reshma. Respecting the Hindu deities Ganesha, Maa Durga, Shiva-Parvati and Krishna-Radha is a beautiful tradition of this theme. Social scenes follow the elements of social occasions, human daily life, flora and fauna, natural views of villages etc. Elements of nature collect some motives and symbols from nature and apply them to paintings.



Figure 3: Goddess Durga, Madhubani Painting

Colors Guidelines

We have already mentioned that Madhubani paintings are popular and famous for their simplicity since the colors and brushes used are frequently made from natural materials. The colors utilized in Madhubani painting by artisans are straight from nature. Lamp soot provided the black color, rice powder provided the white, apple tree and tilcoat leaves provided the green, *indigo* and *sikkot* seeds provided the blue, *singar* or jasmine flower parts provided the yellow, boiling peepal bark produced a portion of the saffron color and *Kusum* and red sandalwood provided the red. Gum and paint combined to extend lifespan and add brightness to the painting. The artist claims that stiff twigs and bamboo sticks with cotton tips were once used as brushes. But today these are replaced by synthetic colors and contemporary circular brushes. Artists first drew a basic sketch before finishing it up with a thorough drawing that included bold, straight and curved lines. Lastly, as needed, additional colors are added to the drawing. The colors of paintings are painted flatly and the figures are portrayed with outlines. Slanting or thin crosshatchings are gathered to fill in the between spaces. Artists from various social origins incorporated their worldviews and aesthetic understandings into paintings. As a result, the unique styles of Madhubani art gradually developed.

Styles

Madhubani Art was once done by numerous groups of people. The new generation of artists has eliminated this class divide by different genres. But to better understand this art, we should understand these five attractive styles of Madhubani painting techniques. The five fabulous styles of Madhubani painting are Tantrik, Kohbar, Bharni, Godna and Katchni.

1. **Tantrik:** Traditional and religious texts are represented in the Tantrik style of Madhubani paintings. Usually, the Hindu population holds these paintings in great honor and this style often depicts mythical Hindu personalities. Tantrik paintings are typically hung in Indian homes for auspicious occasions like prayers.
2. **Kohbar:** One of the most well-known and recognizable forms of Madhubani art is the Kohbar Style. This painting method is customarily applied to the bride and groom's house walls and this tradition is connected to Hindu wedding customs. Kohbar is also known as Tantra Raj, Yog-Yogini and Shiv Shakti, which translates to power with Lord Shiva's blessing.
3. **Bharni:** The Hindi word for Filling is Bharni. This well-known Madhubani painting style always uses vivid and bright colors paintings. The Bharni style combined Hindu deities with historical details from Indian mythology.
4. **Godna:** The Godna style is one of the easiest painting styles of Madhubani painting. This style just requires a bamboo pen and kajal to make the paintings. Gonda style depicts animals, birds, plants, trees and flowers, among other natural creatures. Although it is commonly painted on canvas. This technique is equally popular as a tattoo in India.
5. **Katchni:** The Kayastha group's traditional painting technique is known as the Katchni painting style. This specific art form is characterized by a unique style that is mostly created using just two colors. This painting style charms visitors with a restrained

color scheme that highlights the distinctive qualities of natural elements. Katchni style of Madhubani painting features flowers, animals and other natural elements.

Importance

Madhubani paintings have enormous global significance today. These paintings serve as a cultural identity of the Maithili women of Bihar. They exhibit their vibrant culture and regional traditions. The paintings have been used as a creative tool to communicate myths and stories through images. The styles of Madhubani paintings tell stories, folklore and folk tales with visual communication. They provide evidence of cultural memory and human activities. The symbolism in Madhubani paintings is abundant, featuring a variety of images such as trees, birds, flowers and animals. These symbols are employed to deliver messages and have greater significance, which increases their importance. The majority of Madhubani paintings have a strong spiritual theme. They portray scenes from mythology and Hindu epics that convey spiritual ideas. For many Bihari rural women, it has become a source of economic empowerment and a means of subsistence. Nowadays, they can sell artworks and make a proper living.

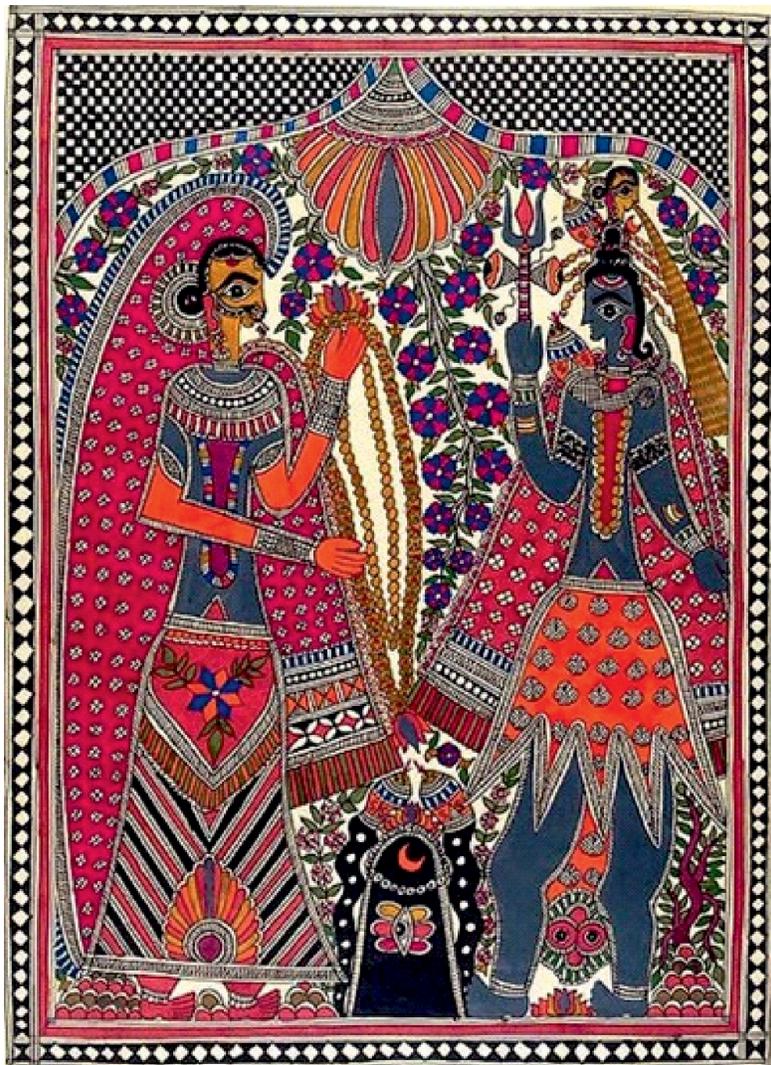


Figure 4: Shiva and Parvati, Madhubani Painting

Modernization

The Madhubani paintings have changed significantly in the contemporary day. Madhubani artists have begun to incorporate current themes in addition to traditional ones. Now their paintings not only cover social themes but also a variety of subjects. There is now a larger theme base of Madhubani painting. These days, painters are experimenting with novel arrangements and styles. Modern Madhubani art has become more experimental. Traditional biological colors have been replaced by new synthetic and commercial colors. The color scheme has grown wide by artists. Artists are embracing new methods, such as painting with brushes and more. However, the traditional methods included pen and thumb painting. The methods have changed and new methods running very well. Newly the conventional flat and two-dimensional style of art has evolved. They have begun producing sculptures and three-dimensional works of Madhubani painting. Every Madhubani artist has created their unique style. A larger public has been exposed to Madhubani painting and more artists are choosing to pursue it as a career. As a result, the range of Madhubani Paintings has expanded.

Conclusion

Madhubani paintings now play a significant role in Indian traditional art. It categorizes mythology and folklore as well. Indian daily life is shown in this genre of paintings. International visitors show a great deal of interest in these paintings. Many countries of the world follow the folk forms and techniques of Madhubani paintings. In 1969 Madhubani painting gained formal recognition when the Bihar government awarded a State Prize to renowned artist Sita Devi. The first Madhubani artist to win a National Award for paintings was Jagdamba Devi. The National Award was also granted to Leela Devi, Yamuna Devi, Baua Devi, Shashi Kala Devi, Shanti Devi, Chano Devi, Chandrakala Devi, Bindeshwari Devi, Bharti Dayal and Godavari Dutta. Many Madhubani painting artists continue to work with it now. However, it is challenging to list every artist's name and accomplishments. Mythology is depicted in the Madhubani painting that's why it has a pure meaning also. The villagers use the paintings as a daily source of prayer. This artistic form has recently been featured in numerous international programs by the Indian state and central governments. We can see many Madhubani paintings on the roadsides, bus stands, railway stations and recently in airports. Madhubani painting has an important influence on Indian art. Therefore, it can be said that Madhubani painting is a folk art with a rich history. It has become well-known in the global art industry. In conclusion, one must acknowledge that without folk painting, human culture would cease to exist. To understand a country's origins, one must follow its art and culture. There is no denying that Madhubani painting is the foundation of Bihar's culture.

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