

# MADHUBANI

rural art reflecting traditionalism in modernity



By: Dr. Madhu Sharan

# **MADHUBANI- rural art reflecting traditionalism in modernity**

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## **Abstract**

Madhubani art is the traditional art of symbolism, simplicity and beauty. Originated in the tiny hamlet of Mithila region, in Bihar state, it is practiced in the villages of the district of Madhubani which has a long association with history. The sacred and divine art was exclusive domain of native women of the house which was practiced on freshly plastered or mud walls in natural dyes during festivals, religious events and other milestones of life-cycle like birth and marriage. The art is passed on from women to women over generations. The images are normally figures of deities, celestial bodies, wedding scenes, excerpts from mythological happenings with intricate floral, animal and bird motifs.

With the changing times and adoption of modern lifestyles there is a big threat of extinction to the various art forms in India. With the view of safeguard the rich Indian culture and heritage, this paper is an endeavor to bring to the fore the ancient practices in the modern world and promote the artistic, aesthetic and technical knowledge, skills and methods of cultural heritage, art and traditions through the popular medium of clothing.

Key words: Heritage, culture, rural art, tradition

## **INTRODUCTION**

People everywhere need and use some sort of a communicative means to depict themselves, their dreams, schemes, hopes, fears and love, which would be impossible without words. Art is the expression of people's sensitivity. The importance of art reside in the fact that it creates a form of artistic expression which reveals the psychology, moral values and customs of the rural society from which it emerges especially for those who have little or no artistic training and use established techniques and styles of a particular region or culture.

Perhaps the best known genre of Indian folk art are the Madhubani Paintings from the Mithila region of the Bihar state. 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.



## ORIGIN

Madhubani paintings is believed to be originated from the town of Madhubani of Mithila in the North Indian state of Bihar. The exact reason or time of the origination of Madhubani art is unknown. However, the legend has it that it came into vogue during the time of Ramayana, when Janak ordered the artists in his own kingdom to make beautiful paintings for the wedding of his daughter Sita, to Lord Rama. This art, with a tradition going back to the centuries, is today an exclusive monopoly of women artists. They paint figures from nature and myth on household and village walls to mark the seasonal festivals of the religious year, for special events of the life-cycle, and when marriages are being arranged they prepare intricately designed wedding proposal. Initially, the women in Madhubani started making the paintings on the walls of their huts. With time, the artists began creating Madhubani art on paper, cloth and canvas also.



## CHARACTERISTIC



This folk art has a history, a cultural background, women's monopoly and distinct regional identification. It depicted mythological personages, deities and flora and fauna of a region, tantric symbols in the basic design, the great life cycle rite of marriage; domesticated and wild animals, Shiva and Parvati, Radha and Krishna and almost all the deities of Hindu pantheon and the rural local religion. The earliest of the recorded painting dates from 1969, had Goddess Durga matted in blue.

In Mithila, this painting is done in three forms: (i) painting on floor (ii) painting on wall and (iii) painting on movable objects.

- (i) Painting on floor: painting is made on the floor with the paste of crude (arva) rice, this paste is called "pithar" in the local language. Apart from the floor it is also made on banana leaves and pidhi (wooden seats). A women 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, this painting is made with dry rice powder in white, yellow and red colours. These are made in different types suiting different occasions.
- (ii) Paintings done on walls: Wall paintings are multicoloured. Three to four colours are usually used to depict the paintings. Pictures include those of carriers of

fish, curd, jackfruit, trees of fruits such as mango and pomegranate and birds like peacock. Attractive floral motifs adorn the wall on four sides of the entrance.

- (iii) Paintings on movable objects: It includes those on clay models of pots, elephants, birds, bamboo structure, mats, fan and objects made of sikkhi (thin wood). Decorative multi coloured designs made on the faces of the brides and sumangalis also fall in this category. Many of these paintings have great tantric significance.

The distinct characteristic of the art form are:

- It is practiced only by the females of the region.
- For centuries it has been done on walls and floor on the occasion of marriages and other domestic rituals.
- Although the images were similar, women of different castes developed distinctive styles of painting. Different castes involved were- Mahapatra Brahmin, Kayastha, Dusadh.
- The paintings are entrusted with energy forms, stuffed with all details. Austerity are profusely maintain in paintings, a relentless energy and a sense of magic which perhaps has its source in Tantaric ritual and worship.
- The painting is an earthen palatte of ochre's and umber browns, dust pinks, dull turmeric and earth reds.
- The outlines are in a fine black line; here the emphasis used to be given on the volume and depth.
- Generally no space is left empty, the gaps are filled by paintings of flowers, animals, birds and even geometric designs.
- Like all the art forms the eyes are the source of Shakti, central part of power..
- Main attributes of all the Madhubani paintings are double line border, ornate floral pattern, abstract like figure of deities and bulging eyes and a jolting nose of the faces of the figures.
- It depicts nature and Hindu religious motifs and the theme generally revolves around Hindi deities like Krishna, Ram, Shiva, Durga, Lakshmi and Saraswati.
- Natural objects like sun, the moon and the religious plants like Tulsi are also widely painted along with scenes from royal court and social events like weddings.

Vegetable colours made from natural resources used for this paintings are:

- Black (by blending soot and cow dung, burnt jowar or kaja)
- Yellow (from turmeric, pollen, lime, milk of banyan tree)
- Light yellow (turmeric mixed with banyan leaf milk)
- Blue (from Indigo)

- Red (from red sandalwood/kusum flower juice)
- Green (from wood apple tree leaves and bel tree)
- White (rice powder)
- Orange (palash flower)

## DEVELOPMENT DOWN THE LANE



The Madhubani painting is a traditional folk art form which has succeeded in creating a place for itself in the internationally and is recognized worldwide. Modern Madhubani paintings merge tradition with innovation. This mural art has long been done on paper. But the artist have been successful infusing their paintings with modern theme. Sita swayamvar, Kalinga Nardana, stories of Krishna and Ram, the Punctantra and Jataka tales. These old age themes, which adorned the floors and walls of homes, now stand beside paintings about the ecology and the changing face of women, deeply rooted in tradition, this art symbolizes all things auspicious.

Earlier, Madhubani paintings, chiefly depicted mythological personages, deities and flora and fauna of a region. However, now they incorporate tantric symbolism in the basic design. Other figures used in these paintings are those of Shiva and parvati, Radha and Krishna and almost all the deities of the Hindu pantheon and the rural local religions. These figures are places centrally and their consorts, mounts and floral motifs are placed in the background.

Over time, aside from the growing diversity of painting, the subject matter of the paintings has expanded to include ancient epics, domestic, rural and community life ritual, local legends and tales, local national and international politics, as well as paints own life histories.

## SUGGESIONS FOR MODERNIZING THE CRAFT

With changing times and adoption of modern lifestyles there is a big threat of extinction to the various art forms in India. Demand of the time is to bring to the fore ancient practices in the modern world and promote the artistic, aesthetic and technical knowledge, skills and methods of cultural heritage, art and traditions through the popular medium of day to day living like clothing, interior designing etc. Today's consumer likes to invest money in utility bound, gender free, easy to





handle and exquisite articles. The designs here need restructuring and radical changes. To keep pace with the modern world while preserving the essence of the ancient craft multifunctional approach can be adopted for Madhubani paintings.

It can be used to produce different a unique effect at different places. Products on which this art can be applied effectively are given below which will give wider popularity to this craft also. They are:

- Decorative pieces
- Contemporary dresses
- Visual merchandising
- Teaching material
- Waiting lounges of the heritage hotels
- Interior of the house
- Utility items

## CONCLUSION

Madhubani paintings, one of the most celebrated works of art from Bihar are accomplished by generations of skilled artists. Being vibrant and symbolic at the same time, these successfully depict all aspects of tribal life. In other words, these are the arch representative of folk art in visual form. Having no formal or academic training, madhubani painting is pursued with zest for the painting brushes, by one generation after another also these are enriched with the folklore, myth, established epics and its local adaptations.



Madhubani paintings is one dominant artistic expression among its peers of handicrafts made by natural resources like Bamboo and other herbal ingredient, arts like siki-mauni, sujni and sitalpati, godhna, sculptures of mythological sama-chakeva and numerous other folk art forms which are very close to daily life style of Maithali rural peoples are equally vibrant. For many households in the region they are the only medium of earning bread and butter. The continuing market in this art

throughout the world is a tribute to the resourcefulness of the women of Mithila who have successfully transferred their techniques of bhatti chitra or wall painting to the medium of paper, and have resisted the temptation to adopt their traditional designs too freely in pursuit of unpredictable public tastes.

Over time, aside from the growing diversity of people painting, the subject matter of the paintings has expanded to include ancient epics, local legends and tales, domestic, rural and community life, ritual, local and international politics, as well

as the painters own life histories. Artists of different castes and genders are now borrowing theme and styles from one another. Madhubani paintings have established extraordinary vitality and become an effervescent and aesthetically powerful tradition in modernity.

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