

Madhubani Painting: The Empowerment of Heritage

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Abstract

This paper addresses the folk art of Bihar, Madhubani painting and its journey from being local to global. As India opens up her doors for the multinationals companies, the economy of India has been extended in the global market. With growing economy, cross cultural interaction amongst the countries has also been started. Thus Indian art and folk arts, which are reserved in a very small territory, came into the main stream of contemporary art world. Madhubani painting is also known as a Mithila painting because it is originated in the Mithila region of Bihar. Madhubani painting has been transformed drastically and Madhubani artists are achieving fame in the contemporary art world.

Keywords: Madhubani Painting, mithila, global, contemporary.

Introduction

Mithila is one of the best cultural unit of Bihar and Madhubani is the heartland of Mithila. Two kinds of domestic arts were practiced here from very ancient time, first- drawing on the ground known as Aripa or Ahpan and second- painting on wall or mural painting , popularly known as a Mithila or Madhubani Painting. Ranti and Jitwarpur is the well known village of Madhubani, which is

famous for Madhubani Painting. Madhubani Painting is all about to decorating the ceiling and wall of the house with bright colours by the women folk. Madhubani Painting has a traditional art forms and primitive impulse but on other side it has a tendency to create a new style in contemporary period.

Origin & Antiquity

The origin of Madhubani painting is unknown. No one can say when this wall painting actually began. It is said that in Ramayana period king Janaka invited artists from Bihar to decorate his palace on the occasion of his daughter's wedding. When Lakshmana went to the forest along with Rama and Sita, his wife Urmila painted his image on the wall and worshipped it daily. How far these legends are true, we don't know but from the mention of this art in the ancient literature of Mithila, it can be said that this is a very ancient art.

The mother teaches the art to her daughter who also teaches it to her female child. No one knows when this art began. For generations, the skill has been passed on from mother to daughter. To ensure continuity of this art tradition, paper patterns are made so that she can take with her husband's house. She adds new elements in present style of her husband's house and this cycle goes on endlessly. With the change of generations this art adopts various new elements, which make this art fresh. It is, therefore, difficult to determine the exact period of its origin and growth. There are two types of Madhubani painting, first is done by Brahmana and second by Kayastha, both are different from each other in style and color. They have preserved their qualities and distinctive character from the beginning till date.

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, I 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.” After that Madhubani artist started painting on cloth and paper except on walls. Madhubani became famous in 1970 when Mrs. Jagdamba devi from the village Jitwarpur, got an award from the president of India. Mrs. Sita devi and Mrs. Mahasundari devi, were also national award winner, for their contribution in the field of Madhubani painting.

Madhubani painting is mainly mastered by women only. Brahmana ladies had a very good aesthetic sense, which can be seen in the wall decoration of their houses. They create a world of their own fantasy with unique figures and bright colors on the walls and floors of their houses. There are two main purpose of this art, first, to satisfy deep urge to express their own and get rid off from their monotonous life, second, Madhubani painting has a practical usefulness also. On the occasion of social and religious festivals, Madhubani painting is the medium to convey the message of prosperity and purity. Every ritual is incomplete without Madhubani painting. Madhubani painting is not a classical art, it is the simple folk art with simple expression of women folk, they have no principals and instructions from any art book to follow, their own Idea and imagination is the important factor. All Madhubani artists have their own idea of representation but the style remains the same. Madhubani painting is the integral part of family rituals and transferred from one generation to another generation, that's why this art survived for so long.

Characteristics

Madhubani painting is a folk art of Mithila but it is not limited in small area of Mithila, this art has become very famous not only in India but in foreign countries also. From beginning it has some unique style, which makes this art very special from other folk arts. Madhubani painting is filled with the rhythm of life.

All figures and elements of this art related with each other. There is a lack of interest in showing symmetry in Madhubani painting, the whole wall is full with designs. Painting of Brahmana and the painting of Kayastha has some unique characteristics which make them different from each other. In Brahmana's painting color is the most important thing but in Kayastha painting, lines are given more importance than colors. Brahmana's paintings have a very thin and weak line but Kayastha paintings have a firm and vigorous line. Madhubani painting has a several styles on the bases of different caste. 'Bharni' is the style of Madhubani practiced by Brahmanas, they filled the bright color in mythological figures and outlined the figures with bold black color. 'Kachni' is the style of Kayastha, in their painting lines are more dominating than colors. 'Geru and Godhna' is the style of lower caste. They belong to lower caste so they are restricted to depict the religious designs.

The subject matter of Madhubani painting is religious and related with nature. In India religion has a great impact on art, Madhubani painting is not the exception. It is very religious and has an influence of Shiva, Vishnu and Shakti. Durga and Kali are the important goddesses of Mithila Brahmana and Kayastha artisans. Religious Madhubani painting contains various gods and goddesses like Rama and Sita, Radha and Krishna, Shiva and Parvati, Gauri and Ganesha, Durga and Kali, Ravana, the ten avataras, the sun and the moon.

Madhubani painting is very much inspired by the nature. It takes the motifs from nature and represents them in a decorative manner. Decorative painting contains various symbols of prosperity and fertility such as elephant, lion, fish, horse, turtle, parrot, bamboo, flowers, lotus, swastika, series of circles, spirals, series of short lines and foot prints. While the human figures are mostly abstract and linear in form but animals are usually naturalistic.

Symbolic Art

In Madhubani painting, there are so many symbols, which have very deep meaning. In the depiction of animals they want to represent the energy and character of God. In Indian context, the parrots symbolize the love birds. Turtle is the symbol of lover's union. Fishes are the symbol of fertility and the sun and the moon are depicted in painting because of their life giving qualities. Lotus and bamboo is the symbol of female and male.

Colors

Color is the most important factor in Madhubani painting and plays a vital role in the creation of these simple images. Color creates the emotion, atmosphere and mood, they also divide the space, beautify the background. Only pure colors or generally two or five colors – green, yellow, red, black and blue are applied flat with no shading in Madhubani painting, but the colors are used in the same tone and simplified the images. Madhubani painting does not bear the realistic colors of figures, they have used the colors in a symbolic way. There is normally a double line drawn for the outlines with the gap, between the lines filled by cross or straight tiny lines. Colors have the religious influences, for example, the figure of Krishna is black. But sometimes, in many cases we come across a normal color. Colors are distorted, not used for realistic description. To paint, artist uses fingers, matchsticks and pen nibs and don't leave any blank space in painting.

Geometrical distortion

Geometrical distortion in figures, develop the geometric energy in Madhubani painting, "Which is vividly manifest in the bust of Parvati and the thighs and legs of Shiva resulting in a system of rigid triangles." In another example, a tiger and a bamboo reduced to curling spirals and in a third the waists of two figures depicted as opposing semi circles and Durga has been shown as a set of semi circles, triangles and rounded squares.

Strange Figures

Distorted, strange figures are the main characteristic of Madhubani painting. Distortion gives the figures, a fantastic strangeness. There are some strange features in Madhubani paintings, such as, nose in the forehead, eye in the profile, receding brows and staring eyes. In the painting of Bua Devi, some kind of strangeness can be seen. In the flat background, figures are floating aimlessly and the whole composition is distorted and unrealistic.

Madhubani artists

Ganga devi, a Madhubani artist from Mithila region of Bihar, was very innovative artist. Her works are the great fusion of Madhubani art forms and visuals from a western society. She was awarded with Padmashri in 1984. Acclaimed Indian artist of Madhubani art, **Mahasundari Devi** was from Ranti village located in Madhubani, Bihar. She learnt this art from her aunt. She was a founder of 'Mithila hastashilp kalakar audyogaki sahyog samiti'. This samiti supported the growth and development of various handicrafts and artists. She received the national award in 1982 and Padmashree in 2011 for her contributions in the field of Madhubani art. She also received the Tulsi Samman by the Govt. of MP in 1995. She died in 4th July 2013 at the age of 92. She was an epitome of women empowerment and her paintings are now at various museums such as, National museum of Delhi, Craft museum of Delhi, Mithila museum of Japan and Asian art museum of San Francisco. **Baua Devi** is one of the pioneers of Madhubani painting. This inspiration of her is personal and mythological references but with time various social issues took place in her art. She painted on the 9/11 attack on the world trade centre and exhibited her paintings in Spain, Paris and Japan. There were so many women Madhubani artists, who got an award from Govt. of India. **Sita Devi** received the state award in 1969 and National award in 1975. **Jagdamba Devi** received Padma Shri in 1975. **Bharti Dayal** is another

famous Madhubani artist , Bharti was born in December, 1961 in Samastipur, Bihar. She learnt this art from her family members and inspired from the Alpana design, which her mother and grandmother used to make with raw wet crushed rice on the floor. She combined the traditional Madhubani art form with modern art medium and became the ambassador of Madhubani painting. Her works are exhibited in various collections, such as, the Ministry of External Affairs, India, Ministry of Commerce, US Embassy, Parvez Musharraf's wife Seba Musharraf and Museum of Eminence, Norway. Bharti Dayal got the National award in 2006 and the Indira Gandhi Priyadarshini award 2013. She displayed her art works at 'Craft Exchange Program of SAARC countries meet' at Delhi Hatt, in 2008, Indiart Gallery, Belgium in 2013 and at the Nehru Centre, London in February 2011. French Television made a documentary on Bharti's paintings in March 1995. N.K. Singh and Nicholas Stern the author of "The New Bihar" included seven Madhubani paintings of Bharti Dayal in their book and the cover of the book symbolizing the 'empowerment of women and the quest for education'. Bharti Dayal is contributing in the revival of Madhubani art with contemporary themes. Bharti taught nearly 200 students, including some Japanese and French students in Skill development program organized by the Industries development of Delhi.

Madhubani painting : in a present scenario

Madhubani painting has a very long journey in the history of folk art and practiced till date in the village of Jitwarpur, Ranti, Rasidpur, Bacchi, Rajangarh, etc. Ninety nine percent people of Madhubani district use to do Madhubani painting. Some artisans of Jitwarpur, who are still contributing in Madhubani painting, are Sibaprasad, Shanti devi, Rajkumar Lal, Mahasundari devi, Bivlal Das, Rekha Das, Narayan Lal Das. All these Madhubani artists have achieved the fame all over the world and have been participated in various workshops in

Denmark, Dubai, Germany, France, Poland and Canada. People appreciated Madhubani painting immensely. There is a huge demand of different house hold goods like bags, cushion covers, coasters, mugs, crockery and mouse pads with Madhubani art motifs. Madhubani painting was all about for decoration of walls and floors, in present time Madhubani painting is still popular in home decoration, like prints for table linens, napkin rings, lamps and wall hangings, etc. In present time Madhubani painting is not only famous for murals, canvas painting, home decoration materials, house hold articles but in textile field also. Madhubani art motifs can be found on silk sari borders, dupattas, kurtis and many more.

There are so many art galleries for Madhubani paintings in India and overseas countries. An organization MITHILA smita, formed in Bengaluru, to promote this art form. This art gallery organizes various art exhibitions for Madhubani painting.

In Madhubani town there is a “Mithila Art Institute” which works for the development of Madhubani paintings and organizes workshops to train the young Madhubani artists.

“Mithila Museum” in Japan, has the collection of more than 850 Madhubani paintings. This museum has not only, the collection of Madhubani paintings but also conducts research in this field and promote the publicity in this regard. The painting of Karpuri Devi, sister in law of well known artist Mahasundari Devi, Dulari and Mahalaxmi found a place in Mithila Museum of Japan.

Madhubani paintings are not only for aesthetic purpose but also spreading social awareness. Madhubani women artists have a goal to empower other women folk and make them aware towards the fundamental rights of women and social issues. They are not only depicting the mythological stories, which they have heard in their childhood but also expressing their emotions and the condition of women

in the present society. They are raising their voice against the social issues through their paintings.

There was a very extra ordinary incident in 2012, when shashthi Nath, who runs the “Gram Vikas Parishad “ an NGO, protected more than 100 trees to be cut down for the sake of development and construction of roads. They decorated trees with Madhubani paintings such as Radha- Krishna, Ram- Sita, scenes from Ramayana, Mahabharata and other religious, spiritual symbols, which saved the trees being cut down.

Madhubani painting and Madhubani artists are so much in demand in foreign countries. Eminent Madhubani artist Rajkumar Lal was overwhelmed by the positive response of Mauritius’s audience. He said about the workshop “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”. Choubey express her views on the scope of Madhubani painting in contemporary period “I was invited to Mauritius to set up the department, there was tremendous enthusiasm. It was a new journey of Madhubani painting crossing over boundaries and culture”. In present days Madhubani artists are also being global. They are experimenting with different Ideas and composing new form of Madhubani painting with traditional and modern motifs.

Ministry of Textile, Government of India is working and starting various schemes to encourage the Madhubani painting and cultural art heritage of Bihar and state govt. of Bihar is cooperating very well with central Govt. They are providing exposure to Madhubani artists in different places and organizing training

programs, workshops and seminars for artisans. There are various training centers in Bihar to train and develop the skill of artisans.

‘Baba Saheb Ambedkar Hastashilpa Vikas Yojana’ is also working in this field to develop new designs and upgrade the skills of artisans. A training center ‘Upendra Maharathi handicrafts institute’ of Patna, conduct a six months course of Madhubani painting under the scheme of Indian Government. This institute appointed some expert Madhubani artists to teach, Kishore Das from Jitwar is one of the trainers in this institute.

Hundreds of local Madhubani artists decorated the wall of the railway station in Bihar with Madhubani paintings. The painting work was undertaken as a Swachh Bharat mission and has been Shramdaan in an attempt to promote the traditional art form.

In April 2015 Prime Minister Narendra Modi presented a Madhubani painting to Hannover mayor Steven Schostok in his Germany tour. The painting has been painted on canvas by a 70 year old national award winning artist, Bua Devi and depicts various stages of life, association with nature as also the interconnected nature of life on earth.

Conclusion

Thus we can say that Mithila or Madhubani painting is the mirror of the social life of Mithila and reflects the religious beliefs, aesthetic sense and rituals of common people of Bihar. In the beginning Madhubani painting was mastered by women folk only but with the time men are also taking part in this practice. The main motto of Madhubani painting was to decorate the walls and floors of the house but in the present time Madhubani painting has a different meaning. It is not just a decorative art of Madhubani, it has become a part of Contemporary art world and achieved a fame for itself.

Like other folk arts Madhubani painting did not vanish with the time because it did not remain orthodox but gained a fresh and modern look with every changing time period. Its traditional motifs and symbols remained the same but adopted new motifs and subjects of contemporary world. Now Madhubani painting is not limited in the house, paper or canvas but expanding its wings and has become very much global in approach and presentation.

There are so many sites on Internet, which have the collection of Madhubani paintings and other articles with Madhubani motifs. In Textile world Madhubani designs are very popular, silk saree, dupatta, bed sheet and other accessories with Madhubani prints are very much in demand.

There is a blind craze for this art in all over the world and has been commercialized very well but on the other hand there is a big disadvantage of this commercialization. Traditional motifs and symbols of Madhubani painting, which is the authentic identity of this art is in danger. To preserve its pristine qualities, artists should not forget its ancient and traditional values and motifs.

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Plates



Karpuri Devi with her painting



Madhubani painting on trees



Modi presented Madhubani painting by Bua Devi to Mayor of Hannover



Madhubani motifs on silk saree and dupatta



Stool with Madhubani motifs



Madhubani motifs on Pots



Madhubani motifs on lamp



Mirror frame with Madhubani motifs



Madhubani design on plate



Madhubani print on cushion