

Folk and Minor Art in India
Prof. Shatarupa Thakurta Roy
Department of Humanities and Social Sciences
Indian Institute of Technology, Kanpur

Lecture - 21
Art as a Feminine Preserve vs. the Male Painters of Madhubani

We begin our 3rd lecture from the 4th module. In the previous lecture, we discussed about the different class system, caste wise sections and segmentations that cost definite change in the augmentation of the images as well as their art practice were concerned in Madhubani. In this lecture, I am going to focus on a different aspect which is connected; at the same time slightly separated from that context. The reason is that while we spoke about the class wise divisions that gave birth to many different distinctive and prominent styles and their tradition, this is also true that those barriers are removed to a large extent in today's context and there are painters, who are practicing the style of Madhubani painting freely with lots of creative freedom and that is one reason why they are not restricted to a particular community. There are painters who do not even belong to the family of the Madhubani painters, but they have taken up this art form as the regular mode of expressions.

So, this is a change in the quality of leaving and the quality of creation and that is also quite significant in that context. This is also true that when it got shifted from its traditional cultural happening like earlier it was a tradition that only the women of the families would paint the pictures and the male members, specially young male they used to help them out to some extent, but they were mostly engaged into agricultural practices, but when the male members of the community they took up art as a tradition, the things have changed and now when we visit the galleries and art exhibitions we see that there is a free flow of creative interests regardless of the identities of those people whether which community they belong to, which cast they belong to and which is very positive whether the male or female, so it has got a very different image altogether.

So, I will show a few images to you; just to give you some idea of how it is and also speak about it.

(Refer Slide Time: 03:13)



So, where the introduction of the people as a medium a small but growing number of men from the community have taken up painting as their profession. Some male artist from the family of thantric priests paint avatars of Vishnu, Shiva and Shakti, they paint yantras; the transcendent tantric pattern corresponding to those figures. The paint images from Ramayana, Mahabharata, Harishchandra, Shakunthala alongside the current topics like the chronical of a (Refer Time: 03:50) village that indicates its responsiveness to the social issues which is more urban.

(Refer Slide Time: 03:59)



Seen in the picture is a gallery space where the artists of Madhubani are displaying their pictures together in a flow. Krishnanand Jha, a tantric kalakar of 1980s (Refer Time: 04:16) on the complex geometrical formations of yantra, he continues to work on the mythological episodes also and alongside the mythological subject matters he is concentrated on the most current topics as a reaction to what is happening around him, which is very secular, contemporary and modern as expression. At the same time he is straightly a daring to some of the traditional style of execution that is very typical of Madhubani, so it is very easy to identify his work as Madhubani painting and there is no other scope that you can call it any other thing but a mabhubani painting, though the subject matters are radical and very very living and timely.

Gopal Saha; worked on the local scenes in a perplexed humorous style. He used lot of sarcastic images, humorous, caricatures but he followed the style of Madhubani very authentically (Refer Time: 05:43) artist Swaroop Lal Pasvan, began painting images from the adventures of their cultural hero Raja Salhesh. Raja Salhesh is a local hero from the border of Nepal and he is the one who had forbidden garden that he own. Raja Salhesh was blessed with his beloved brother Motiram and both these characters, they owed on a horse and an elephant respectively and they are the owner of a beautiful enchanted garden, where they have the maalins or the gardeners throughout and there are parrots called Heera Sugavan, who sings beautiful songs.

So, it gives us the picture of a perfect utopian condition where everything is perfect and beautiful and prosperous. So, these are the factors that is seen in their creations and of course, the art work, where King Salhesh and the related characters are involved, they are far beyond the normal academic representation styles that when parallel to it. So, there are also other painters which are like male painters who are very, they are worth mentioning like Santhosh Kumar Das a (Refer Time: 07:19) of Ranti village; which is there are two main villages in Madhubani calls Jadvadpur and Rati.

So, he belongs to the place call rati in Madhubani and in the Mithila region and north Bihar and he studied painting at the M S University Baroda. So, he went under the mainstream academic education, but then he explored Madhubani painting to express a wide range of subjects of his choice. This efforts; stand quite significant adding a new dimension to move the tradition further more. He was appointed as the director and primary instructor at the Mithila Art Institute Madhubani in 2004.

In the newer generation artists, a very talented and creative person who is still very young his name is Rambharos Jha, who has also involved himself with lots of illustration projects for the eminent publishers. He is illustrating pictures in those books along with his self-expression where he is coming up with highly creative and original expression following the style of painting from Madhubani. So, his experimentation and free thinking made some mark in the tradition, to observe the men practicing Madhubani style of painting have a fear of choice of subject matters as compared to the painters who are women. For the women painters they are still continuing with some religious subject matters and many of them who are slightly younger; they are still practicing some images, which are highly radical and there are feminist themes that also coming to the pictures and we are going to see and discuss all those things in the following lectures in greater detail.

So, the male members of the community joined the profession only after the introduction of paper as we mentioned. The males stay away from painting, the walls and indulging in floor paintings and other rituals, so for them that is not a compulsion and they never did it traditionally and (Refer Time: 10:00) or the cosmological icons or the (Refer Time: 10:05), so those are the traditional decorative forms that was very popular in Madhubani. They no longer stick to those things, but of course the women member they are still continuing with that, but many of the male members are experimenting with the traditional (Refer Time: 10:24) motive by picking up the essential decoration of it and renting it in a different direction.

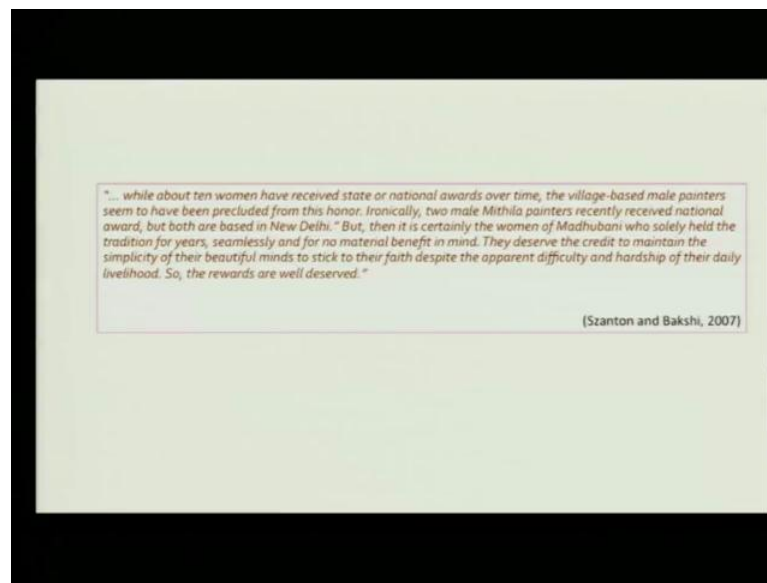
So, the (Refer Time: 10:35) cosmological icons and (Refer Time: 10:38), so the floor and wall decorations, they are also in the same with a different rendition, male work on secular subjects and also the political issues. They respond and express their reactions to the current happenings to a large extent, so they also have a folk tales, modern stories and other literary resources to include and in their subject matters, never-the-less their paintings have strictly added to the traditional style and identity and blamed suitably in the general continuum of Mithila painting tradition being initially a feminist preserve.

Although the new generation women painters are also showing (Refer Time: 11:33) towards a similar choice of subject to the men. The men were innovative since the beginning and have contributed commonly to the rapid growth to uplift the tradition and bring it to a different direction. This one factor that we cannot completely deny that

when the men painters, they realized the monetary factor that this particular painting tradition is able to generate more monetary sources, they got drawn into it; in the beginning they felt that this is a great source of income and this is much more profitable than the agricultural practices.

So, many of them they have completely moved from the radiant professions and they are into making paintings and they are training themselves in that style just, keeping the prospects in mind.

(Refer Slide Time: 12:45)



While about ten women have received state or national awards over time, the village based male painters seem to have been precluded from this honor. Ironically, two male mithila painters recently received national award, but both are based in New Delhi. But then it is certainly the women of Madhubani who solely held with the tradition for years, seamlessly and for no material benefit in mind. They deserve the credit to maintain the simplicity of their beautiful minds to stick to their faith, despite the apparent difficulty and hardship of their daily livelihood, so the rewards are well deserved.

(Refer Slide Time: 13:35)



According to David Santl, Rambharos is very creative; Rambharos Jha is one of the most talented male painter in Madhubani in today's time, who is constantly into experiments, recently he worked on kolajes by cutting his own paintings into different areas to create a surrealistic image. The painting that is shown at the background has images which are very new and the researchers are extremely excited about the innovative initiatives by the traditional painters of new generation, who is providing the practice with a new profile.

(Refer Slide Time: 14:41)



And this painting by Rambharos Jha what we see is that he painted two pictures and then by combining two different pictures he has created a dream like space which is a under waters scene, but has a surrealistic approach towards it.

So, it is a difficult and complexed (Refer Time: 15:09) position of different forms that are traditionally found in Madhubani painting, but the arrangement is unique and free and it is also very encouraging to see how the pictorial elements are being experimented by this painters. The entire picture has thin and interrogate lineal pattern into it; that has an extremely decorative possibility, at the same time the painting is so expressionistic and surrealistic in its character that it hardly looks decorative in our eyes. Rambharos Jha with his contemporary paintings in an exhibition space, there are a few very important things that need to be realized by us when we look at Indian folk and minor painting into the academic limelight. We see that if we take a thing in that perspective, it gives us a notion that it is in a constant mode of change and it is our duty again to assess whether the change has to be taken in the right spirit or should be prevented.

The reason I am making all those points are that there are cases where there are comments like when the like, it has been a feminine preserve for so many years. So, what is a need to include the male painters into the practice who is contaminating the practice to some extent, they are bringing new subject matters; which is killing the traditional aesthetics and it is putting us away from the pleasure of the painting. So, these are some comments made by people who are not well informed and they are also ignorant about the basic ideologies of a cultural growth that is like that should be appreciated by the community when there is a change that is taking place and this is perhaps the mode of survival or that is enjoyed by a traditional culture.

So, the culture sustains and survives with the change that takes place here and when we feel that it is not changing over a long period of time then it is indicative of it is physical death and it also kills at soul to a complete extent. So, this is also true for the traditional culture for example, when we look at Egyptian painting that remain unchanged for years because of the straight norms, because of the rules, the canals that were imposed on the community, they could not change it just happened for a short duration we make a comparative study with the traditional culture, the traditional culture that enjoyed royal patronage as we see a complete different scene, that they are highly stylized, they also did not stick to the representational norms that it is also true that they have been a small

period when a king like (Refer Time: 18:43) who takes over and was slightly liberal for (Refer Time: 18:48) happens influence caused some change to take place and their tradition and immediately after (Refer Time: 18:57) took over and with (Refer Time: 18:59), it was also very evident that he wanted to go back to the earlier tradition and he just felt that everything is almost over.

So, it is time to revive the old tradition they again went back and the tradition remained very rigid all though it is very rich, but it is very rigid and conservative in that form and in a way when we look at the painting tradition in our country and for example, where we used Madhubani as the feminine preserve and then it moved towards another practice that is dominated by the male painters in today's time, it is very interesting to see that it never enjoyed a patronage of any sought, they are just surviving on their own and this is also a great matter of pride that with such minimum patronage, it could survive and come along very long way because of its initial virtue of its rich aesthetics, the cultural connection that they made whether from the schematic aspect of those paintings and also because of a rich tradition that was responsible for it.

So, the new face the, new profile of Madhubani painting must be very different, but it is also a great matter of concern that we should also see that the huge popularity for such a tradition should not make it repetitive. So if people are over conscious about what should be the flow of history that can also make it highly stagnant, to make it very simple we know that when we look at the commercial viability of a particular image making; it no longer remains a artistic creation, it becomes a product and then it may also lead to a stage where it is treated as a commodity.

So, making anything in visual style that is folk or minor in their visual characteristic; does not make it successful piece of folk art. It should have the right soul and expression in it to convey the idea and that way the tradition cannot go along with (Refer Time: 21:29) strength and dignity and that is our aim. So, we need to also develop a finer eye and we should be well informed to realize that and then you get it from a right prospective.