

**Folk and Minor Art in India**  
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**Lecture - 30**  
**Case study-3: Madhubani Paintings**

Hello and welcome to the third and last case study of our course Folk and minor Art in India. So, this case study we will be talking about the folk art form of which belongs to Mithila region and North Bihar, Mithalar paintings which is more popularly known as Madhubani paintings. So, at the start I will just discuss some history of the tradition.

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The origin of this art form some historians say can be traced back to the time of Ramayan when King Janak of Nepal ordered his kingdom to be decorated during the time of the wedding of his daughter Seetha to Lord Ram and the ancient tradition of elaborate wall paintings or Bhatti Chithra in Nepal and Bihar played a major role in the emergence of this art form,

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Interestingly this tradition of Madhubani paintings has historically been a feminine preserved and they were originally done on mud walls coated with a cow dung or Earth, but this folk art form it was traditionally created by the women of Brahman, Kayast and Dooshat communities and Madhubani which literally means forest of honey, madhu means honey and ban is forest or woods and it is a region in Mithila area of Nepal and the northern part of Bihar. A region that has a distinct, regional and cultural identity as well as language that spans nearly 25-100 years.

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So, the original inspiration for Madhubani art emerged from village women craven for religiousness and an intense desire to be one with god and with the belief that painting something divine and that would achieve that desire. Women of the region they began to paint pictures of gods and goddesses with a divine interpretation that communicates to all of us and that too since centuries. So, this art form is a form of wall art that was practiced widely throughout the region, the more recent developments of painting on paper or canvas or cloth and it originated among the villagers around Madhubani and it is these later developments that are correctly referred to as Madhubani art and traditionally this painting was done on freshly painted mud walls and flows of hut and huts as mentioned before, but now they have also done on cloth, handmade paper, canvas, boards and still on walls of the region.

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Now, Madhubani painting has remained confined to the compact geographical area and the skills have passed on through centuries from mothers to their daughters, interestingly the content and the style has largely remained the same. This folk art format uses two dimensional imagery and the colors used as similar with other folk art form is derived from plants and vegetables and for instance oker and lamblack we use for reddish brown and black.

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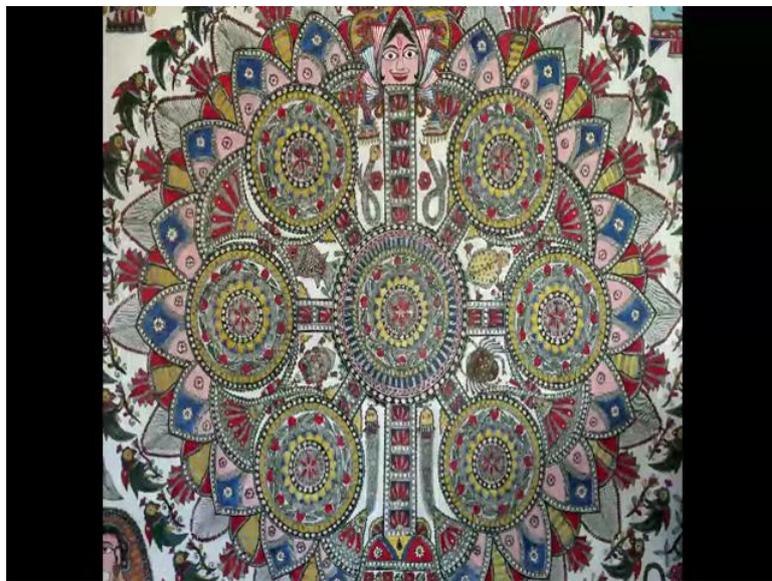
So, these paintings they mostly depict the men and their association with nature and the scenes and stories and deities from ancient epics and also seen on natural objects like the sun, the moon, trees and religious plants like tulsi or kadam and these are also widely painted along with scenes from the royal courts and social events like weddings and other festival celebrations.

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Gently on a canvas, no space is left empty, the gaps are filled by depictions of flowers, animals, birds and even geometrical designs and traditionally, painting was one of the skills that was passed on from generation to generation and all the families of Mithila region, mainly were women as mentioned before and it is still practiced in kept alive by the efforts of a number of institutions and organizations and associations that are working in the region spread across Mithila.

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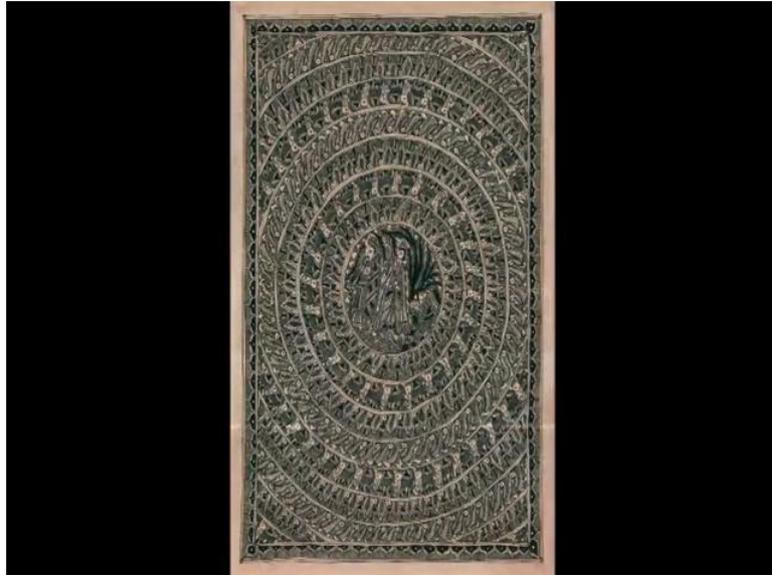
One interesting design to be mentioned here is the Kohbar ghar or the neutral chamber. It was the room in which the paintings were traditionally done and originally the art form showed an assembly of symbolic images like that of lotus plant or a bamboo grow, fishes, birds and snakes in union and other elements from pond life which were peculiar to the place. Now, these images represent fertility and proliferation of life and there used to be a tradition that the newly married bride and bride groom would spend three nights in the Kohbar ghar without cohabitant and on the fourth night they would consummate the marriage surrounded and blessed by the auspicious colorful paintings. Now, this art form according to communities and regions has five distinctive styles namely BHARNI, KACHNI, TANTRIC, GODNA and GOBAR wash.

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In the 1960's, Bharni and Kachni style were mainly done by Brahmin and Kayasth women who belong to upper cast in India and Nepal and the things were mainly religious and they depicted gods and goddesses flora and fauna in that art forms. Now, tantric style, the third one it was done by artist belonging to a community of tantrics of the region which often use tantric symbolisms along with images of gods and other religious significance.

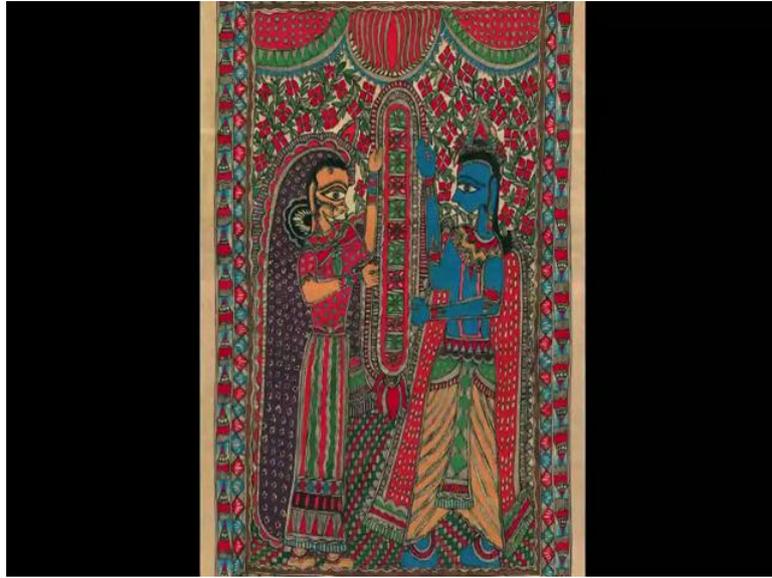
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People of low casts include aspects of their life and symbols and they also like to depict stories of Raja Salhesh and much more in their paintings. They develop their own style which goes by the name of Godna which is derived from the bodily tattoo art and which is prevalent in the region and the last one Gobar it was characterized by the whole painting having a brown cow dung wash, but nowadays things have changed a lot and Madhubani art has become a globalize art form.

So, there is no difference in the work of contemporary artist on the region on the basis of cast system and they are working in all five styles. The discovery of these paintings which I will talk about next is very interesting and in some ways tragic story, Mithila painting as a domestic ritual activity, it was unknown to the outside world until the Indo-Nepal border earthquake of 1934 and when the houses and houses of walls came tumbling down then British officer, colonel officer in Madhubani district WILLIAM G ARCHER while inspecting the damage, he discovered the paintings in the newly exposed interior walls of Mithila households.

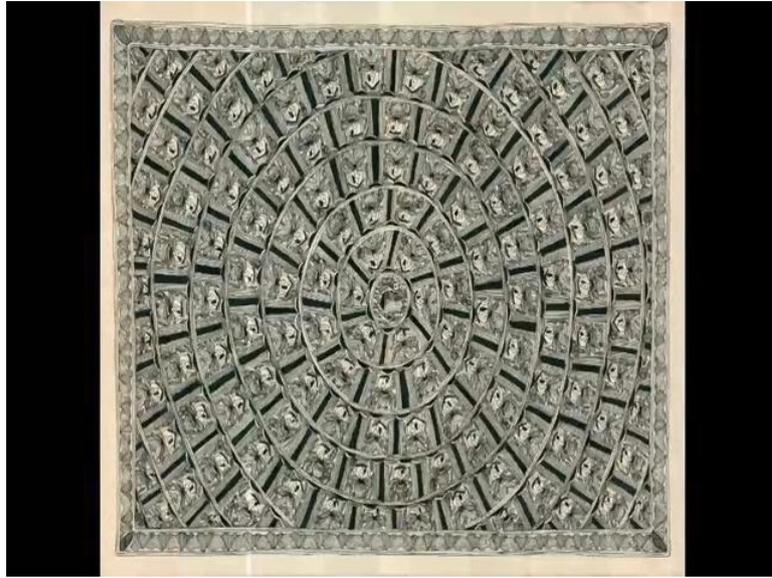
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He was struck by the reportedly simple complexity and similarity to the work of modern western artist like say Picasso and Miro. So, during the 1930s, he took some black and white pictures of some of these paintings which are today the earliest known images of the art form and he also wrote about the paintings in a 1949 article in Marg which was an Indo-Nepal art general and later during the period 1962-68, there was a drought which crippled the local economy of the region and as a part of government initiative to bring economic relief to the region Ms. PUPUL JAYKAR then director of all Indo-Nepal handicrafts board sent the Bombay based artist Mr. BHASKAR KULKARNI to Mithila to encourage women there to replicate the mural paintings to paper.

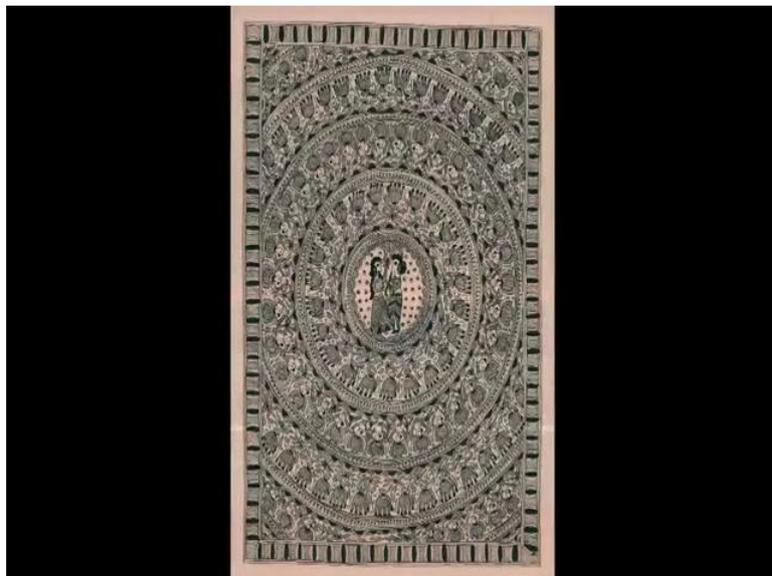
To facilitate sales as a source of income to ensure survival and the contribution of various foreign scholars is in promoting the art form internationally has also been immense. YVES VEQUAD, a French novelist and generalist in the early 1970s wrote a book on the basis of his research on this art form and produced a film the title of which was the women painters of Mithila. A German Anthropologist and Social activist ERIKA MOSER, she was the one who persuaded the impoverished Doosath community to paint as well.

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Her efforts led to Doosaths capturing their oral histories such as the adventures of Raja Salhesh and his brothers and depiction of their primary Diety which means Rahu.

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So, they captured their oral history and their cultural folk tales particular to that community and they captured it and typified it by bold compositions and figures which

were based on traditional tattoo patterns called Godnas as mentioned before and this added another distinctive new style to the regions already flourishing art scene and after that with finance from financial support from Mosser and Raymond Li Owens, another important figure who was a full bright scholar. So, they choose a piece of land in Jitwarpur and they along with Karika Mosser doctor Gouri Mishra aspirated the setting up of master craftsmen association of Mithila in 1977. So, this association was very active during the time life time of Raymond Owens and they worked in Tandem with Ethnic arts foundation.

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These groups initially and now in current times they are a number of other associations and even NGOs who are endeavoring to uphold similar mission of providing the artists of the region and training as well as regular source of income through exhibitions and sales to collectors in art galleries and a fort foundation as well has a long history of association with Madhubani paintings.

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And since the 1990s, Japan has also showed a keen interest in Madhubani paintings mainly because of the initiatives of Tokyo Hasegawa who set up the Mithila museum in Tokamachi which is city in Megata prefecture in Japan where around 850 Madhubani paintings are exhibited on a regular basis.

So, this concludes our case studies for the course Folk and Minor Art in India, needless to say each of the folk art addition covered in these video lectures are too diverse and too deep to go into and cover properly in 15 minutes presentations. If you need to know when learn more about these traditions I should mention that as rural life style has undergone and is undergoing in massive changes and contemporary folk arts scenario is very different then originally these folk arts forms were evolving over the centuries and in so many regions of India. There is a lot of room and need for studies and proper research in our new level folk art traditions beat, music, song, dance or other cultural phenomena and one hope that courses like these will help in spreading the world and then involving more and more people in such studies.